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STRAWBERRY BREEDING PROGRAM DELIGHTS TASTEBUDS

The winter strawberry season is in full swing.

Do you know exactly what goes into that juicy strawberry you see at the supermarkets?

Every strawberry season, researchers from the Australian Strawberry Breeding Program trial, taste and assess thousands of new varieties of strawberry developed through natural breeding to identify the best tasting and yielding fruit for Australia. Funded by Hort Innovation in partnership with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, the program supports the Australian strawberry industry by giving them access to improved, locally adapted superior varieties.

The current program began in 2018 and continues the work of previous research which saw the commercialisation of 12 new varieties in recent years.

Hort Innovation Research and Development Manager, Dr Vino Rajandran said “The strawberry breeding program strives to develop elite varieties for both Australian consumers and growers by combining the best of both natural breeding techniques and cutting-edge science to improve fruit quality and flavour.”

“The program, in collaboration with Australian strawberry growers, breeds for the best tasting and yielding varieties that are suitable for sub-tropical, temperate and Mediterranean climates, covering most of the strawberry production area of Australia.

“Last year more than 80% of strawberry plants grown commercially in Queensland were varieties developed by the program, so if you bought a punnet of Australian-grown strawberries from the supermarket tomorrow, you are buying an Australian product that has been perfected for both our climate and taste-buds.”

Strawberry breeder Dr Jodi Neal said, “We’ve started screening our strawberries for the presence of aromatic compounds that contribute to that sweet peach flavour in strawberries and the presence of genes that contribute to this.

“We are also producing white and pale strawberries – like strawberries and cream. We will soon be looking for a commercialisation partner for these varieties. The varieties are pure white on the inside and taste a bit like pineapples.

“We are also working on a new darker variety that’s the colour of red wine.”

Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries Mark Furner said, “The highly-successful breeding program continues the Queensland Government’s proud support for strawberry growers.

“Queensland is Australia’s largest strawberry producer with an average industry value of \$171 million over the past five years and the breeding program can be credited with a large part of this success.

“The program’s strawberry varieties had an estimated national farm gate value of \$201 million in 2018-19 and now make up 80 per cent of strawberries planted in Queensland, supporting jobs and enhancing Queensland’s well-earned reputation for producing the world’s finest produce.”

Not only do strawberries taste good, they are good for your health too.

Hort Innovation Accredited Dietitian Jemma O’Hanlon said, “Strawberries are nutritional powerhouses. They contain a whopping 170% of our daily intake of vitamin C, which supports our immunity as well as enriching our skin from within. Strawberries also contain folate, potassium and powerful antioxidants to fight off free radical damage. They are very low in kilojoules, so they make the perfect snack for those managing their weight and they are also perfect straight from the punnet, just as nature intended, and the gut-loving fibre will keep you fuller for longer.”

Hort Innovation is currently undertaking an Expression of Interest process to identify partners to commercialise two new temperate strawberry varieties. More information can be found on the Hort Innovation website: <https://www.horticulture.com.au/delivery-partners/partnership-opportunities/commercial-licence-for-new-temperate-strawberry-varieties/>

Media contact:

Hort Innovation Media and Public Affairs Manager

Maria Stathis

maria.stathis@horticulture.com.au

0447 304 255