

MEDIA RELEASE  
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## **Tassie strawberry growers unite to stamp out pests**

Three years ago, Tasmanian strawberry growers raised the alarm to their Research and Development Corporation after several tonnes of fruit was damaged by an unknown pest.

Horticulture Innovation Australia Chief Executive John Lloyd said the growth of strawberry production under protected cropping in new areas in Tasmania led to bugs taking on a new significance in strawberry crops.

“The dilemma that was faced by strawberry growers was there was little information available to help them differentiate between good bugs and bad bugs, so they had difficulty identifying how to manage the pests,” he said.

Today, local growers are armed with a better understanding of pest management and the industry has never been in better shape. Tasmania’s strawberry output has more than doubled since 2013, from 840 tonnes per annum to 1700 tonnes.\*

Working with Hort Innovation and Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture researcher Michele Buntain, growers participated in a crop monitoring project, which helped identify bugs and best-practice management activities.

Held across farms in Turners Beach, Richmond, Langford, Devonport and Christmas Hills, growers were supplied with bug monitoring kits, including sample tubes and provided advice on how to monitor, record, collect and transport samples.

Mirid and Lygaeid bugs were the two dominant species of bugs infesting strawberry crops. While the Lygaeid bug is a known pesky contaminant, the strawberry damage was attributed to the Mirid bug. Fortunately both bugs are similar to those that infest Victorian crops, meaning practices developed in one region are applicable to the other.

Mr Lloyd said the findings were a collaborative effort: “Each grower contributed to developing best-practice management solutions and identifying quite innovative techniques for pest management”.

The results and management approaches were presented at workshops, and in industry information packs that were developed by the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture with growers.

Fruit Growers Tasmania helped distribute the material to the local strawberry industry, seeing the value from the results.

“Tasmania’s strawberry industry is expanding at a significant rate as demand grows, processing efficiencies are made and new varieties come online,” Business Development Manager Phil Pyke said.

“Increasing growers’ ability to identify and manage pests has only strengthened the industry’s capacity to meet future demand. The future for Tassie strawberries is definitely bright.”

*Horticulture Innovation Australia delivers more than \$100 million in research, development and marketing activities across the horticulture industry each year with funding from the Australian Government, grower levies and other sources.\* Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – Agricultural Commodity Statistics 2014-15* **Contact:** Kelly Vorst-Parkes, Communications Manager – Media 0447 304 255 or [kelly.vorst-parkes@horticulture.com.au](mailto:kelly.vorst-parkes@horticulture.com.au)