

Bright red



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A growing demand for fresh fruit in China and across the region is supporting the long-term sustainability of Australian farming. This Australian farmer has been welcoming Asian buyers to his farm in northern Victoria since he was a child – and looks forward to the next generation of Australia’s agricultural sector doing the same.

What has been your career pathway?

I grew up in Swan Hill on this farm and worked here most of my childhood. I then went away to university and studied commerce and law. After that, I decided to work in Melbourne as a lawyer for five years. About six years ago, I decided to come back to the farm. At that point in time our business was about 120 acres and in the last six years we have grown our business to be about 450 acres under production, which makes it one of the largest stone-fruit farms in the country. We have a couple of businesses, one is our stone-fruit growing business called Cutri Fruit and the other is our exporting arm called Certified Fresh. We sell most of our fruits to Asia and the majority of those go to Hong Kong or China.

We have also in the last three years developed our export brand and our export business, which we believe is probably one of the largest export businesses for stone fruits in Australia.

How important are Asian markets to the Swan Hill region?

The Swan Hill region produces about 70% of Australia’s white flesh nectarines. The domestic market might only be able to consume 30% of those, so without the Asian markets it would be very difficult in the short term for Australian farmers to survive, let alone prosper.

Our farm focuses mostly on growing white flesh fruits because they are probably in greatest demand around the world. In particular they are very important to the Chinese and all Asian countries for Chinese New Year. So we try to grow fruits that are bright red in colour, which is a lucky colour for China. Hopefully the fruits are also quite circular in shape which is what is required for Chinese New Year – there needs to be eight circular items on a table at any given time. So we’re pretty fortunate that stone fruit happens to be circular, red and taste good.

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What sparked your interest in the Asian region?

As a young child I was fortunate that my father always involved me in the business. Supplying to Taiwan was always a large part of our business, so we always had Asian buyers come to farm, probably once every month or so. One of my jobs as a little kid was to entertain them. I ran the packing shed from about 12 years old so I'd give the tours of the packing shed and the rest of the farm.

I made my first trip to Hong Kong when I was 14 to meet all of the buyers and I've been just about every year since then. I'm now 34 so I've probably been to Hong Kong 20 times. I've been fortunate enough to travel to most Asian countries as we sell fruit to a lot of them now.

Do you enjoy working in this role?

I find it very easy to get up in the morning and go to work because I seriously love fruit, as strange as that sounds. I love dealing with buyers from all around the world and I just love our industry. I think there are so many opportunities in it.

What tips do you have for young people starting out?

One of the best things I see about agriculture is that the opportunities are endless. Whether you want to be a grower, packer, exporter, produce by-products of the fruit – anything you want to do you can do. We're very fortunate because the biggest populations in the world, India, China, Indonesia, are all in our backyard. And while it's not the norm to exploit those markets as a farmer, there is definitely the ability to do it and that's one of the things I find really exciting about our industry.