QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 593
Asked on 29 April 2008

MRS LAVARCH asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (MR MULHERIN)-

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise how the Department of Primary Industries' Better Berries Program will assist both commercial and home strawberry growers to produce high yielding and sweet tasting fruit?

ANSWER:

The commercial strawberry industry in Queensland is based primarily on the Sunshine Coast, and produces a crop over the cooler months worth about $120 million. This industry has grown exponentially over the past decade.

The Better Berries team from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has developed new sweet tasting varieties with strong consumer appeal that are also well suited for commercial production. The current varieties being released, are a series of sweet 'French Belle' selections, including a 2004 line derived from the 'heritage' variety 'Phenomenal' which was bred in 1921. Phenomenal is still remembered for its flavour and so the 2004 line is sure to be a hit with consumers and home gardeners.

In other studies, research has shown that the best time to plant 'Festival', the main commercial variety in Queensland at present, is from late March to mid-April, with lower returns for earlier or later plantings. Commercial growers are now being advised to plant within this period to maximise returns.

Strategies have also been developed to limit the losses of new planting material due to the crown rot fungal disease, and the virus-like strawberry lethal yellows disease. These strategies include the use of fungicides and other environmentally friendly options to control the development and spread of the diseases in strawberry nurseries on the Granite Belt. Application of these strategies has reduced post-establishment losses for commercial growers from up to 50 percent in earlier years to less than 2 percent.