



HORTICULTURE SAFETY

Setting world standards in food safety

The Australian horticulture industry is diverse, both geographically and in the products it grows. Australia includes most climatic zones, from cool temperate to hot tropical. As a consequence, Australia grows a full range of horticultural food and amenity crops across the large continent. Because of its relative isolation, Australia is free of many pests and diseases of international biosecurity significance.

› REGULATIONS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Horticultural producers and packers have a range of options when it comes to choosing a quality assurance (QA) system for their businesses.

Businesses can choose a system that best suits their requirements. Acceptable systems include Codex HACCP, the SQF Code, Freshcare, GLOBALG.A.P. and Woolworths Quality Assurance Standard (WQA). Most of these systems are, or are in the process of being, recognised as equivalent to the Global Food Safety Initiative, the international best practice benchmark for food safety.

Core elements of food safety included in such schemes include product identification and traceability, food safety training, chemical management, water quality, equipment and materials, cleaning and pest control, and personal hygiene.

MANAGING CHEMICAL RESIDUES

A critical aspect of QA is the on-farm management of horticultural chemicals. Prescriptive QA systems require evidence of training of operators, calibration of application equipment, correct procedures for chemical storage and handling and appropriate disposal of empty containers, and accurate records of chemical applications. Growers and packers have samples of product tested for chemical residues every year. These test results are observed when the business receives its annual independent food safety audit.

Testing for microbial contaminants is also conducted, particularly for higher risk products.

Further residue testing is undertaken by the National Residue Survey. Five horticulture industries participate in the NRS residue monitoring program:

- pome fruit (apple/pears)
- macadamias
- almonds
- onions
- citrus.

All samples receive a multi-residue screen tailored to the specific product. Each screen has been developed in consultation with the relevant industry body to ensure the chemicals in the screen represent the chemicals being used on the crop, and to meet international market requirements.

In 2011-2012, 911 samples were tested. Compliance with Australian Standards was high, ranging from 98.3 per cent to 100 per cent.

All non-compliant samples are traced back to their source and corrective actions are implemented to prevent reoccurrence.

TRACEABILITY

Many Australian horticultural businesses use sophisticated electronic systems for traceability, usually based on the internationally accepted GS1 numbering and barcode standards. Where necessary, these standards are integrated into on-farm identification and traceability systems.

› FURTHER INFORMATION

The Australian Trade Commission – Austrade – is the Australian Government’s trade, investment and education promotion agency.

Contact your local Austrade representative about connecting and partnering with the Australian food industry. austrade.gov.au

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

The following are some of the government and industry bodies involved in the Australian horticulture industry.

Horticulture Australia Limited is a not-for-profit, industry-owned company. It works in partnership with Australia’s horticulture industries to invest in research, development and marketing programs that provide benefit to industry and the wider community. horticulture.com.au

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry develops and implements policies and programs that ensure Australia’s agricultural, fisheries, food and forestry industries remain competitive, profitable and sustainable. daff.gov.au

Australian Food and Grocery Council is the leading national organisation representing Australia’s packaged food, drink and grocery products manufacturers. afgc.org.au

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade works with other government agencies to ensure that Australia’s pursuit of its global, regional and bilateral interests is coordinated effectively. dfat.gov.au

Food Standards Australia New Zealand develops food standards to cover the food industry in Australia and New Zealand. FSANZ develops the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code which regulates the use of ingredients, processing aids, colourings, additives, vitamins and minerals. foodstandards.gov.au

Foreign Investment Review Board examines proposals by foreign interests to undertake direct investment in Australia and makes recommendations to the Government on whether those proposals are suitable for approval under the Government’s policy. firb.gov.au