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.
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.