# FOOD SAFETY

## Policy statement

### The issues

Consumers, suppliers, processors and regulators are placing greater expectations on the horticulture industry to prove the safety and consistency of fruit and vegetables produced and sold. This is the major driver for the implementation of food safety and quality assurance systems.

Food safety systems are usually based on a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) risk management approach designed to identify and manage risk. This in turn protects the interests and reputation of growers, wholesalers and retailers, whilst meeting the demands and, most importantly, assuring the health of consumers.

The industry needs to provide consumers with the assurance that its produce is both safe and of consistent quality. This is important for a number of reasons including:

Legislation - Whilst not directly impacted by the Food Standards Act, the requirements of the act are that food supplied is 'safe and fit for purpose'. All Australian food businesses (except primary producers) must comply with the requirements of the act and thus must ensure the integrity of their supplies.

- This legislative requirement drives 'customer requirements' – retailers insist their suppliers (wholesalers, packers, and growers) have 3$^{rd}$ party certified food safety systems in place to comply with all the requirements of the Food Standards Act. They also do this because they know what the damage to their own brand will be in the event of a food safety incident, no matter who is at fault.

- Business protection and professional liability - a food safety and quality assurance system that follows GAP / GMP and includes adequate records to support that implementation acts to minimize potential liability on producers. Industry has to be able to demonstrate due diligence, which is to do what is fair and reasonable to avoid food borne illness and injury and have the evidence to back it up.

- Competition - In an increasingly competitive market place, fresh produce competes for 'customer dollars' with a wide range of food alternatives. The ability for the industry to present a strong and united position on food safety and quality provides market advantage for all.

Our position

Locally grown, fresh fruit and vegetables are considered relatively low risk, with national food safety and environmental standards in the horticulture industry amongst the highest in the world. Existing systems include Freshcare which are based on a HACCP Plan, an internationally recognised preventative approach to manage food safety hazards.

Growcom supports streamlined, industry driven food safety accreditation programs such as Freshcare that assist in producing high quality, safe food at profitable prices and

- Avoid duplication.
- Are streamlined/integrated with options of combining all of their management considerations (e.g. production specifications and protocols, WH&S and environment) into one management system - preferably that can be audited as one system.
- Do not present an administrative burden to growers.
- Have transparent accreditation and compliance processes.
- Are cost-effective.
- Are nationally/internationally recognised.

Growcom supports the inclusion of these accreditation and safety systems within growers' risk management processes. These assurance programs should be recognised as a cost effective alternative to costly regulatory requirements.

**Our commitment**

Growcom is committed to food safety policies and programs that are credible, practical, national, industry owned, cost effective and suitable for all produce. We are committed to working with stakeholders to ensure that consumers are provided with the safest food possible and that they have the information required to see that growers are fulfilling this need and promoting better business practices through the implementation of food safety and quality systems to assist growers in guaranteeing the safety of their produce.

**Our expectations**

We expect that governments will work with industry to develop food safety policies that meet both consumer and industry needs. Systems need to ensure that when properly applied, food safety programs prevent problems arising with produce, while remaining as streamlined as possible to reduce compliance costs.

We expect that imported produce will need to adhere to the same food safety standards as Australian grown produce. There will also be shared food safety responsibility throughout the value chain from growers to consumers.

We also expect that industry groups, government and the value chain will work together to quickly act to defuse and reduce any negative effects of food safety claims, legitimate or otherwise and to provide consumers with accurate technical information on food safety issues.

**Our agenda items**

Issues to be considered under the food safety agenda include:

- Grower input into safety standards.
- Minimising the cost of compliance of food safety accreditation schemes.
- Labelling and traceability of produce through the value chain.
- Education and responsibility for food safety accepted and maintained through the chain.
- Maximum Residual Limits.
- Better government engagement with industry in relation to food safety issues.
- Food safety agenda of government, such as FSANZ and Safe Food Queensland.
- Quality assurance – education and training throughout the chain on post-harvest handling, storage and transport.
  Streamlining the value chain to get produce to consumers as quickly as possible