



# VEGE *notes*

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## Quality Assurance for Growers and Packers

The new National Food Safety Standards, enforceable since February 2001, apply to processors, wholesalers and retailers, while also implicating growers and packers. Currently growers and packers are exempt from meeting these standards, unless processing on-farm or selling direct to the public.

However, as businesses handling food are required to ensure they only accept uncontaminated produce, growers and packers will also need to implement Quality Assurance (QA) systems in the near future.

Retailers such as Woolworths/Safeway, Coles and Metcash/IGA have largely met the requirements with more than 90 percent of direct supplying packers and wholesalers certified to an acceptable system.

Apart from meeting legal and/or customer requirements, QA systems also reduce waste, downtime, rejects and repacking. The cost of implementing and maintaining the system can be easily justified if just one problem is avoided each year.

There are a range of options available when choosing a QA system, including:

### Approved Supplier Programs

Developed by wholesale, food service or processor customers to address specific food safety and quality hazards. Some of the lower end programs are becoming unsuitable for

fresh produce because they do not meet retailer requirements, even though they still meet processor requirements. A guide for developing a program is available from the author.

### Freshcare

An externally audited Code of Practice based on a generic HACCP Plan rather than requiring a HACCP Plan for each business. A prescriptive approach designed for growers who supply packers, wholesalers and processors. Freshcare is being sought by many wholesalers and is owned, managed and endorsed by most of the major peak industry associations. Further information can be found at [www.freshcare.com.au](http://www.freshcare.com.au).

### Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP)

An internationally recognised preventative approach to managing food safety hazards, it is auditable in its own right and forms the basis of a number of other codes. HACCP requires an analysis of all production processes (planting, pest management, harvest, storage, packing, etc) to identify food safety hazards (chemical, microbiological and physical contaminants). This is followed by identification of critical points in the processes to determine where and how hazards will be controlled. Further information can be found at [www.codexalimentarius.net](http://www.codexalimentarius.net).



QA ensures that the best produce reaches the consumer

### The Bottom line

- Growers and packers will have to implement systems in the near future, if they haven't already
- The system chosen must meet the needs of the business, as a direct or indirect supplier, while also being acceptable to customers
- Most QA systems articulate well, thus moving up a level (or down if necessary) can be done with relative ease