

Food safety and transitioning to HARPS



National Vegetable Extension Network

VICTORIA - NORTHERN, WESTERN & SOUTH EASTERN

The importance of food safety

Food safety is critical for any vegetable business in Australia. It is essential for public health and contributes towards customer satisfaction, business reputation and profitability. Even more important to the vegetable industry is the fact that many products are eaten raw, or with minimal processing, or are packaged in 'ready to eat' portions for improved convenience.

The food safety hazards associated with fresh produce are microbial, chemical and physical contamination.

- **Microbial** contamination can cause nausea, diarrhoea and vomiting in consumers
- **Chemical** contamination can come from pesticide residues, heavy metals, natural toxins, non-pesticide contaminants and allergens
- **Physical** contaminants are a regular cause of customer complaints due to the 'yuck factor', such as finding a frog or insects in a packet of salad.

Identifying potential hazards and assessing their risk is the first step in preventing contamination of fresh produce. These can occur at any stage during growing, harvesting, ripening, storing, packing and transporting fresh produce, from initial planting up to delivery to wholesale market, retail distribution centre or retail store.



This fact sheet provides an overview of the new Harmonised Australian Retailer Produce Scheme (HARPS) and answers commonly asked questions from growers.

Harmonised Australian Retailer Produce Scheme (HARPS)

What is HARPS?

HARPS is a retailer-led scheme designed to assist with compliance to food safety, legal and trade requirements for suppliers to the major grocery retailers in Australia. It aims to reduce stress associated with the adoption, maintenance and auditing of multiple food safety systems by individual direct suppliers to multiple retail customers in Australia, and has the potential to reduce costs. It has been funded by Hort Innovation using horticulture industry levies and Government funds, as well as retailer contributions, and is managed by a Project Team, including the Produce Marketing Association Australia-New Zealand (PMA A-NZ).

Key messages

- Food safety is critical for any vegetable business in Australia
- Harmonised Australian Retailer Produce Scheme (HARPS) is designed to reduce the cost and stress of food safety requirements adopted by the five major retailers in Australia
- HARPS must be adopted with a Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) approved base scheme*
- GFSI approved schemes are Freshcare (FSQ4) (in progress)*, SQF, BRC Global Standard and GLOBALG.A.P.
- There are important compliance dates to be aware of for different types of suppliers that are classified as Tier 1, 2 and 3

*Freshcare has not yet achieved equivalence to the GFSI benchmark standard.

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The five major retailers that have developed and recognise HARPS are ALDI, Coles, Costco, Metcash (IGA) and Woolworths.

HARPS must be adopted with a GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative) approved base scheme. These schemes are:

- Freshcare Food Safety & Quality Edition 4 (FSQ4) (in progress)
- SQF, BRC Global Standard for Food Safety
- GLOBALG.A.P. Integrated Farm Assurance.

You can use Table 1 to understand if your business needs to become HARPS approved. All growers and suppliers that are supplying finished product (i.e. shelf ready) in retail packaging (branded or generic) must be approved to the HARPS standard. This also applies to any agent, broker, distributor or vendor whom is supplying, growing and/or packaging whole produce for retail sale.

Table 1: Is HARPS required for my business?

(Source: harpsonline.com.au)

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Out of Scope
<p>Your business has a Vendor or Supplier Number for one of the HARPS Participating Retailers*.</p>	<p>Your business packs or re-packs: Loose product with PLU/DataBar stickers applied as specified by a HARPS Participating Retailer*; or Retail-branded pre-packs; or Retail Returnable Plastic Crates (RPC's); or Proprietary-branded pre-packs; or Loose product in final retail packaging, packed to a retail specification destined for a HARPS Participating Retailer*; or Your business is part of an Approved Supplier Program for your Tier 1 customer, who supplies to a HARPS Participating Retailer*; or Your business provides Ancillary Services*</p>	<p>Your business supplies bulk produce (not in final retail packaging) for further packing to a Tier 1 or Tier 2 supplier. You are a low volume producer supplying a total of 10 pallets or less per calendar year, per site. This is a collective total across all HARPS Participating Retailers*. (NB: Suppliers of retail-branded pre-packs are excluded from this rule as they qualify as a Tier 1 or Tier 2 supplier).</p>	<p>Your business processes fresh produce. (e.g. value-adding such as bagged salads, fresh cuts, sliced mushrooms/carrots, shelled nuts etc.) Virtual brokers that do not qualify as a Tier 1, 2 or 3 supplier.</p>
<p>Action Required</p>	<p>Action Required</p>	<p>Action Required</p>	<p>Action Required</p>
<p>If you have not yet achieved HARPS approval go to www.harpsonline.com.au to register your interest in achieving HARPS approval. Contact your respective retailer customer(s) for further information.</p>	<p>Your business may require HARPS approval (this includes certification to an Approved Base Scheme** and the HARPS requirements) by 1st January 2019. Notify HARPS of your interest in achieving approval by registering at www.harpsonline.com.au by 30th June 2018.</p>	<p>Your business may be required to be certified to an Approved Base Scheme** by 1st January 2019.</p>	<p>No action required for HARPS.</p>



I need to adopt HARPS, how do I arrange an audit?

The retailers have approved a list of certification bodies that are endorsed to audit against the HARPS scheme. If your business's current certification body is on the retailer's approved list, then you only need to notify your certification body of your requirement to audit the HARPS scheme. This includes:

- AsureQuality
- AUS-QUAL Pty Ltd
- BSI
- Mérieux NutriSciences
- SAI Global
- Sci Qual International
- SGS.

* HARPS Participating Retailers: ALDI, Coles, Costco, Metcash (IGA), Woolworths

** Approved Base Schemes: BRC, Freshcare, GLOBALG.A.P., SQF

* Ancillary Services: Supporting or additional services including ripening, brokerage activities, storage and cooling (where product handling and traceability are the responsibility of the Ancillary Service supplier).

If your current certification body is not on the approved list, you will need to make contact with any of the other retailer approved certification bodies. The audit should be timed to include the base scheme and the HARPS audits simultaneously.

See references for further information on certification body matrix and contact details.

What's involved in the HARPS audit?

A Pre-Assessment Checklist is available on the HARPS website and is located under the Growers/Suppliers tab in the Document Library (<http://harponline.com.au>). This checklist will enable you to decide if you are meeting the requirements outlined in the scheme. All businesses will need to review their systems and make any required changes to ensure they meet all of the HARPS elements in full. The checklist should be completed and sent to the approved certification body prior to the commencement of your audit. The VegNET team can provide assistance and guidance to growers in completing the Pre-Assessment Checklist.

I am certified under Freshcare FSQ3, can I complete a HARPS audit?

Businesses that are currently quality assurance (QA) certified under Freshcare Food Safety & Quality Edition 3 will need to upgrade their system to Freshcare FSQ4 or alternatively become certified against any of the other base schemes to ensure they are HARPS ready. This should be completed by all businesses (including Tier 2 suppliers) prior to 30 June 2018 to ensure compliance throughout the supply chain from grower to final point of sale.

Transitioning from Freshcare FSQ3 to FSQ4 can be done in a number of ways. The upgrade can be completed by the grower:

1. Without Freshcare approved training if a management representative has completed approved FSQ3 or FSQ4 training and evidence is kept. This involves having completed all of the elements in the new edition. All of the forms and resources can be sourced on the Freshcare Growers Online Portal.
2. Completing the training via Freshcare's new eLearning portal. This is an online system that allows growers to complete Freshcare FSQ4 training at their own pace.
3. Completing the Freshcare FSQ4 training course with a

Freshcare approved trainer. Completion of this course will enable growers to be audit-ready.

Tier 3 suppliers: Codex HACCP no longer applies

Those supplier businesses that are currently maintaining a Codex HACCP certification may need to change to a GFSI approved base program before 1 January 2019.

Suppliers that are currently certified with one of the following GFSI approved base schemes need to continue to maintain their current system to ensure they are HARPS approved: Freshcare FSQ4, SQF, BRC or GLOBALG.A.P.

What do I need to do to remain HARPS certified?

You will need to ensure that you complete all of the requirements of the GFSI approved base schemes as well as meeting all of the HARPS requirements outlined in the Pre-Assessment Checklist annually, or where defined by the base scheme. Recertification will be subject to approval following the successful completion of a base scheme plus the HARPS audit completed by a retailer approved certification body. Certificates will be issued by your certification body on successful completion of the HARPS and base scheme audits.



Further resources

- HARPS Online Document Library, including Pre-Assessment Checklist <http://harpsonline.com.au/document-library/>
- HARPS Helpline, T: 1300 852 219
- Agents of foodborne illness 2nd ed. 2013. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), Canberra
- Evaluation of vegetable washing chemicals. 2013. R Premier Global FS Pty Ltd. Horticulture Australia Final Report VG09086
- Food regulation in Australia and New Zealand, Food Regulation Secretariat <http://foodregulation.gov.au/internet/fr/publishing.nsf/content/home>
- Freshcare Code of Practice – Food Safety & Quality (4th Edition). 2016. Freshcare
- A Certification for Every Link in the Food Chain - SQF standards. <https://www.sqfi.com/standards/>
- BRC Global Standard for Food Safety. <https://www.brcglobalstandards.com/brc-global-standards/food-safety/>
- The Worldwide Standard for Good Agricultural Practices - GLOBALG.A.P. https://www.globalgap.org/uk_en/
- Make it safe. A guide to food safety. 2010. CSIRO Food and Nutritional Sciences. CSIRO Publishing 296pp
- OzFoodNet - Enhancing surveillance for foodborne disease in Australia, Department of Health <http://health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-ozfoodnet.htm>
- Reducing listeria contamination from salad vegetable farms. 2010. R Premier Global FS Pty Ltd. Horticulture Australia Final Report VG07079
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- Fresh Produce Safety Centre Australia and New Zealand (2015) Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety, [online] https://producesafetycentreanz.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/guidelines_081015_screen.pdf
- HARPS Online (2018) Harmonised Australian Retailer Produce Scheme, [online] <http://harpsonline.com.au>
- Certification Body Matrix and Contact Details for HARPS Approved Certification Bodies <https://harpsonline.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Scheme-Rules-Appendix-2-Version-2.0-1.pdf>