New Mandatory Food Safety Standards for Berries come into effect in February

Rachel Mackenzie, Executive Director, Berries Australia

- The new standards apply to ALL berry growers in every state and territory
- The standards apply even if you ONLY sell your berries from the farm gate, at local markets or in a PYO format
- After an initial period of transition, there will be compliance checks made by State authorities with penalties for non-compliance

Whilst most horticulture producers in Australia operate under a food safety system many are surprised that these systems are not actually a government requirement. This is about to change for berry, melon and leafy greens growers who will be brought into a mandatory standard on 12 February 2025.

> All berry growers will need to register with their state government authority although the specifics of how that will occur are still being developed.

The food safety regulatory arrangements in Australia are a little complex due to our federated system of government but in a nutshell Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) makes the rules and the states implement them. Unfortunately for growers this means the requirements and costs are slightly different in each state and despite the imminent implementation date, most states have not finalised exactly how growers will register or what the costs will be. The Industry Development Officers (IDOs) will be the best source of information, and we will ensure that all growers are informed as soon as we have the details.

Who needs to meet the requirements?

The requirements will apply to all primary producers and primary processors of berries (blueberries, Rubus and strawberries):

- A primary producer is a business that grows and/or harvests berries
- A primary processor is a business that does any of the following: washing, trimming, sanitising, sorting, storing, combining and packing berries, and transporting berries between pack houses

What are the requirements?

The requirements of Standard 4.2.7 include:

- notifying authorities of the business's name, contact details and activities with berries
- traceability: being able to track where berries have come from (and back to growing site) and who they have gone to
- managing inputs: including soil, fertiliser and water, so they do not make berries unsafe to eat
- hygiene: good personal hygiene and health practices of people that handle berries, as well as good hygiene of the premises and equipment they use

If you do not already follow us on our social media channels, now is a good time to sign up as this is the media where we can share time sensitive information outside of our normal email communication.

FOLLOW US: www.facebook.com/berriesaus www.linkedin.com/company/berries-australia

> If you are currently operating under a Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) accredited scheme such as Freshcare it will be considered that you already meet the general requirements, but you still need to register!

If you do not operate under an existing scheme, then each state is proposing a slightly different approach to ensuring that you can demonstrate you meet these requirements. All of the jurisdictions want to work with growers to help them demonstrate their compliance. Whilst there are penalties set for being non-compliant, there is no intent to take a punitive approach in the first instance. All states have committed to working with Berries Australia to help growers understand their obligations.

Where can I get help?

The Fresh Produce Safety Centre has been funded by Hort Innovation using Hort Frontier Funds to support melons, leafy greens and berry growers. FPSC-ANZ is an industry-led, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to advancing fresh produce safety in Australia and New Zealand through research, outreach and education.

FPSC-ANZ offers **FREE** resources to help growers implement effective food safety practices, stay compliant and manage risks across operations.

- ***Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety*:** Comprehensive best practice guidance for minimising food safety risks in fresh produce supply chains
- ***Food Safety Grower Guides*:** Visual and simple guides to help growers implement the basic requirements for pre- and post-harvest management. Available in six languages
- ***Factsheets*:** Easy to understand downloadable fact sheets. Quick reference information on key food safety topics
- ***Online Helpdesk*:** Access to personalised support and expert advice on food safety issues
- ***Multi-lingual Website*:** The Centre's website features Google Translate for easy access in multiple languages

To access the free resources, visit www.fpsc-anz.com or scan the QR code, try the new Helpdesk function, sign up to the newsletter, provide feedback for the guidelines and more!

What is Berries Australia doing?

Berries Australia has been working closely with regulators to try and minimise the cost and bureaucracy burden on growers. As a result of our advocacy, berry growers (unlike leafy greens and melon growers) are not required to do a management statement and will be subject to lower costs to participate.

Along with our colleagues at Melons Australia, the Fresh Markets Association and Ausveg, we have worked very hard to ensure that existing schemes are recognised as being compliant.

> We would particularly like to thank the team at Freshcare for their support and willingness to work with industry and government.

We understand that this feels like another bureaucratic and cost imposition as most growers are already compliant. That said, it will be a legal requirement that all growers do register, and it will level the playing field. In addition, if we were to have a food safety incident, the additional traceability will enable it to be contained more quickly and not spin out of control like previous incidents in the past.

FRESH PRODUCE SAFETY CENTRE
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

Hort Innovation Frontiers

Freshcare