Unpacking ESG for Berry Growers

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If you've been hearing more about ESG lately, you're not alone. The term is showing up in conversations with retailers, exporters, banks, and supply chain partners, and for many growers, it can feel like just another piece of industry jargon. ESG isn't just a buzzword. It's becoming an important part of how your business is assessed, supported, and ultimately how your fruit is sold both domestically and in export markets.

The good news is that much of what ESG requires is already happening on your farm. The challenge is capturing it, documenting it, and communicating it clearly to the people who need to know.

What is ESG?

ESG stands for:

Environmental – how your farm interacts with the environment

Social – how you manage people, workers, and your community

Governance – how your business is run and how decisions are made

In simple terms, ESG is about showing that your business is responsible, sustainable, and well-managed.

For berry growers, that might include:

- Water use efficiency and irrigation practices
- Chemical use and integrated pest management
- Worker welfare and accommodation standards
- Food safety systems
- Business transparency and record keeping

None of this is new. What is new is the expectation that this information is documented and shared with customers in a consistent way.

Why should ESG matter to Australian berry growers?

The simplistic answer is that the market now expects growers to be able to supply a report of their ESG performance.

Customers are asking for it: Retailers and export markets are under pressure to demonstrate sustainability. That pressure flows down the supply chain directly to growers. Increasingly, buyers want to know where their produce comes from, how it was grown and if it meets environmental and social standards.

It supports market access: For some markets, ESG-style reporting is becoming a requirement, not just a preference. Being able to provide clear information can help you to secure contracts, maintain supply relationships and even enter new export markets.

It can influence finance and insurance: Both banks and insurers are starting to look at ESG as a core part of their risk assessment. A well-documented ESG profile can support loan applications, insurance coverage and access to investment opportunities.

It strengthens your reputation: Consumers are increasingly interested in the story behind their food. ESG helps tell that story backed by evidence and could even become a cornerstone of your marketing activities.

What is HortESG?

The HortESG platform has been developed and funded by Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers (QFVG) specifically for Australian horticulture to make ESG reporting practical and relevant for growers. Rather than expecting growers to navigate complex global frameworks, HortESG:

- Translates ESG into farm-level questions and actions
- Aligns with existing industry standards (like Freshcare)
- Provides a structured way to capture and report information

One of the biggest misconceptions is that HortESG requires major change. Instead, think of it as a toolkit that turns what you're already doing into a format customers understand. Most berry growers already monitor inputs, follow protocols and invest in sustainability. What's often missing is consistent recording and a simple way to present it.

That's exactly the gap HortESG is designed to fill.

Getting Started

Producing an ESG report might sound complex, but it can be broken down into a few practical steps.

Step 1: Gather what you already have

Start with existing records:

- Freshcare or other certification documents
- Spray records and IPM strategies
- Water use and irrigation data
- Staff policies and training records
- Energy use (if available)

You don't need to start from scratch as this step is about pulling together existing information.

Step 2: Identify your key risks and strengths

Every farm is different. ESG reporting works best when it reflects your actual operation. Ask yourself:

- What environmental risks affect my farm? (e.g. water availability, heat, runoff)
- What systems do I already have in place?
- Where are we performing well?
- Where could we improve?

This helps ensure your report is relevant and not generic.

Step 3: Use the HortESG framework

HortESG guides you through structured categories across Environmental, Social, and Governance areas. It prompts you to:

- Answer key questions
- Reference supporting evidence
- Identify areas for improvement

The benefit is consistency with your information is presented in a format that customers recognise, supply chains can compare and buyers can trust.

Step 4: Fill gaps (if needed)

Once you've gone through the process, you may identify gaps, such as:

- Missing documentation
- Informal practices not written down
- Areas where data isn't currently recorded

You don't need to fix everything immediately. ESG is a continuous improvement process. You need to start with simple documentation, basic tracking and clear policies, all of which represent good business practice anyway.

Step 5: Generate and share your report

Generate a customisable report enabling you to share what you need to share and to who i.e., retailers, export partners, industry programs, financial institutions and insurance companies. Increasingly financial institutions and insurance companies are seeking sustainability reports rather than business plans.

What does 'Good' ESG look like for berry growers?

There's no single benchmark, but strong ESG reporting typically shows:

ESG Reporting	
E	**Environmental** • Efficient water use • Responsible chemical management • Soil and biodiversity considerations • Waste reduction practices
S	**Social** • Fair treatment of workers • Safe working conditions • Training and development • Community engagement
G	**Governance** • Clear business processes • Compliance with regulations • Record keeping and traceability • Risk management

Again, most growers are already doing these things, and ESG reporting simply makes them visible.

ESG is not a short-term trend. It is becoming part of how food is marketed, supply chains are managed, and businesses are evaluated.

Engaging early with ESG and getting ahead of market demands can be a competitive advantage, helping you build stronger relationships with buyers and enhance your business's reputation. ESG is about telling the story of how you farm, backed by evidence. If you're already running a good farm, ESG helps you prove it.

HortESG is a tool designed by Australian horticulture to make the whole process easier, more consistent, and more relevant to Australian growers. Best of all, it is currently free to use, available to all Australian growers regardless of where they are based, and no compulsory certification or audit is required.

Get started today at www.hortesg.com.au

For more information, please contact:

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