

A guide to

Food safety and quality assurance



ATGA
Australian
Table Grape
Association Inc.

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Introduction

Quality assurance plays an integral role in the operation of the fresh produce supply chain. Each link in the supply chain must adhere to quality assurance (QA) programs – whether that's producer, packer, exporter, transport & logistics.

QA programs provide a framework and a set of actions supply chain members must take – depending on the scope of their business – to ensure fruit is not only safe to eat, but that it is grown with *good agricultural practice*.

The umbrella term QA covers several categories: food safety, trade and legislative, environmental and ethical, and can include a multitude of requirements which differ between domestic and export markets. Much is determined by how you operate your business, who your customers are and where they're located.

Understanding why these programs are needed can be a bit overwhelming at times, and sometimes, it might even feel like there's an audit for *everything*.

Some businesses, depending on their scope of their operations, might implement one or more of these quality management systems.

This information guide provides an overview of the most commonly used QA programs in Australia.

This is a guide only. Industry members should conduct their own research and work with their customers and certification bodies to determine which program/s suit their business operations.



Food safety standards

Food safety standards place obligations on Australian food businesses to produce food that is safe and suitable to eat. A food business is any business or activity that involves the handling of any type of food for sale, or the sale of food in Australia.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is a government agency which develops standards in the Food Standards Code with advice from other government agencies and input from stakeholders.

These standards regulate the use of ingredients, processing aids, colourings, additives, vitamins and minerals. They also cover the composition of some foods, such as dairy, meat and beverages as well as new technologies such as novel foods. FSANZ is also responsible for labelling for both packaged and unpackaged food, including specific mandatory warnings or advisory labels.

In Australia, the Food Standards Code is enforced and interpreted by state and territory governments, while the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry enforces the code for imported produce.

Click for more information on FSANZ and the Food Safety Code:



Horticulture Code of Conduct

The Horticulture Code of Conduct (the Code) is a mandatory code applying to the sale of unprocessed horticulture produce, such as fruit, vegetables, edible fungi and nuts.

The Code was established in 2007 to provide clarity and transparency of transactions between growers and traders of fresh fruit and vegetables. An updated Code was introduced in 2017 after detailed engagement with industry.

The updated Code offers more protections and increased flexibility in trading arrangements. It now applies to all trading arrangements between a grower and a merchant or agent.

The Horticulture Code of Conduct covers certain horticulture trade between growers and traders.

A written horticulture produce agreement (HPA) must be in place before a grower and trader can start trading. The agreement must comply with the horticulture code. If you trade without an agreement, you will be in breach of the code and a civil penalty or an infringement notice may apply.

The HPA includes specific requirements and details the terms of the agreement, including:

- length of the agreement
- how to vary or end the agreement
- the quality and quantity of the produce, which can include their own quality requirements (such as appearance, major defects, minor defects, consignment criteria)
- rejections
- pooling of produce
- pricing, payment & fees

The Horticulture Code is enforced by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).



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Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) & Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP)

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) is an initiative driven by retailers and manufacturers to oversee the standard of quality management programs.

The GFSI is a widely accepted benchmark system based on a strong food safety culture. A large number of international markets use GFSI as a benchmark for quality assurance, which grants those certified a passport to the global market.

The GFSI was developed to streamline the certification process for food organisations. Previous systems required repetitive audit processes for vendors, manufacturers and suppliers to retail, while the GFSI's goal is to be accepted globally, reduce duplication of audits, provide safe foods to consumers and help businesses give assurances to their customers with one audit scheme.

GFSI approved certification reduces the risk of doing business for food and beverage suppliers, builds buyer confidence in the safety and quality of the product. It reduces "audit exhaustion", creates business opportunities and improves competitiveness.

Many GFSI approved schemes include HACCP principles and plans, with additional requirements for GFSI benchmark requirements. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) is a set of food safety and risk assessment principles adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex). Codex is the international food standards setting body established by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

HACCP plans, which businesses must implement, strive to proactively identify food safety risks and devise strategies to decrease or eliminate them from the point of food production to the point of consumption. Compliance with HACCP is also a legal requirement in some countries.

In Australia, several GFSI-certified programs are available to businesses, including Freshcare, GLOBALG.A.P., Safe Quality Food (SQF), British Retail Consortium Global Standards (BRCGS) and the Freshcare Supply Chain Standard.





GLOBALG.A.P.

GLOBALG.A.P. is a set of standards for good agricultural practice to benefit farmers, retailers and consumers throughout the world. Certification opens valuable new markets to large and small producers alike, and helps satisfy the basic food safety and sustainability specifications of retailers and major buyers worldwide. GLOBALG.A.P. is internationally recognised in more than 100 countries.

GLOBALG.A.P.'s Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) is the flagship standard. Developed in consultation with stakeholders across the entire global supply chain, it takes an holistic approach to responsible farming and audited annually by accredited, independent third-party certification bodies.

The GLOBALG.A.P. IFA standard covers:

- Food safety
- Environmental sustainability and biodiversity
- Workers' health, safety, and welfare
- Animal health and welfare
- Legal, management, and traceability
- Production processes
- Integrated crop management (ICM) and integrated pest control (IPC)
- Quality management system (QMS) and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP)

For **producers**, IFA helps to improve farm management, raise the efficiency of farm operations, protect environmental resources, and enable access to international markets through compliance with a globally recognized standard.

For **supply chain** stakeholders, sourcing from IFA certified production helps to ensure food safety, mitigate reputational risks, protect product integrity, demonstrate commitment to responsible farming practices, and enable reliable and trusted supply that addresses all major consumer demands.

For producers farming crops, the GLOBALG.A.P. producer registration fee is calculated based on the area (hectares) used for production. GLOBALG.A.P. distinguishes between covered (greenhouse) and non-covered production.



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GLOBALG.A.P.
certification suits:
Producers, packers,
processors



Freshcare

On farm management

Freshcare is the fresh produce industry's own on-farm assurance program, meeting the needs of Australian growers in fulfilling both domestic and international market requirements.

Freshcare's Food Safety and Quality Standard (FSQ4.2) identifies a standard of good agricultural practice to:

- identify and assess the risk of food safety hazards that may occur during land preparation, growing, harvesting and packing of fresh produce prevent or minimise the risk of food safety hazards occurring
- prepare produce to customer specifications
- identify, trace and withdraw/recall produce
- manage staff and documentation
- review compliance.

Growers who directly supply retailers might be Freshcare accredited. Others might use GlobalG.A.P.

Growers may also be able to access some non-protocol export markets with solely Freshcare certification.

Supply chain

The Freshcare Supply Chain Standard (FSCS) is designed for businesses in the fresh produce supply chain, including standalone packing operations, storage and ripening facilities, and wholesale and brokerage operations. It is an approved base scheme under HARPS, enabling supply chain businesses to seek certification to the updated standard.



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The Safe Quality Food (SQF) Program is a Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) recognised food safety certification. SQF uses Codex HACCP methodology to identify and control food safety and quality hazards. It covers all stages of the food supply chain through industry-specific codes ranging from primary production through to food manufacturing, distribution, food packaging and retail.

First developed in Australia in 1994, the SQF Program and was first recognised in 2004 by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) as a standard that meets its benchmark requirements.

Achieving SQF Certification can seem like a daunting task. However, the Safe Quality Food Institute (SQFI) has provided resources to help at every step of the way. With step-by-step certification instructions, training, customer service team, and more, SQFI has made food safety and quality certification easier to acquire.

SQF certification is a 10-step process, which includes: registration on the SQFI assessment database, identifying an SQF practitioner, ensuring proper training is conducted for team members, establishing HACCP plans and pre-requisite programs, identifying gaps and assigning a certification body to help implement a program and coordinate an audit only when the business is ready.



**SQF certification suits:
Producers, processors,
packers**



The British Retail Consortium Global Standard (BRCGS) is an international food safety management systems standard, and is one of the GFSI-recognised certification schemes.

It contains requirements for food processors to follow to build an effective food safety management system. There are also editions of the standard for food packaging manufacturers, storage and distribution and now agent and brokers.

Certifying to BRCGS food standards not only helps with customer requirements and legal obligations, the resulting systems, practices and procedures also improve your resilience against risk; safeguarding your business, your brand, your customers and consumers.

Over 16,000 facilities worldwide are certified to the BRC Global Standard for Food Safety.

To be BRCGS certified, your business would need to build a management system that addresses all of the requirements of the standard, contract with a certification body to perform a certification audit, and pass the audit to become certified.

Your business will then need to have regular audits by the certification body to maintain registration. The current issue is BRCGS Issue 9. Issue 9 was released in August 2022.

BRCGS Storage and Distribution Standard was developed to cover all activities which may affect the safety, quality and legality of the products stored and distributed, and of additional contracted services provided by storage and distribution companies. The standard is based on HACCP principles supported by management system elements and requirements for site and transport standards.




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The Harmonised Australian Retailer Produce Scheme (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 the stress associated with the adoption, maintenance and auditing of multiple food safety systems to multiple retail customers and has the potential to reduce costs.

HARPS is a bolt on to a GFSI base scheme. It is a voluntary program which gives access to participating retailers and foodservice providers – such as ALDI, Coles Supermarkets, Costco, Hello Fresh, Metcash (IGA) and Woolworths.







Producers who supply fruit in bulk, from wholesaler to wholesaler (i.e. not in its final retail packaging) generally do not require HARPS accreditation. Businesses which pack or repack or have a participating vendor or supplier number to a HARPS retailer will need HARPS accreditation.



Decision Graphic: Is HARPS required for my business?

v4.0 May 2022

HARPS is a retailer-led scheme designed to assist with compliance to food safety, legal and trade legislation for suppliers to the major grocery retailers in Australia

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Out of Scope
<p>Your business has a Vendor or Supplier Number to a HARPS Participating Retailer*.</p>	<p>Your business packs or re-packs any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loose product with PLU/ DataBar stickers applied as specified by a HARPS Participating Retailer*; Retail-branded pre-packs; Retail Returnable Plastic Crates (RPC's); Proprietary-branded pre-packs; Loose product in final retail packaging, packed to a retail specification destined for a HARPS Participating Retailer*; <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Your business is an Approved Supplier to a Tier 1 business, who supplies to a HARPS Participating Retailer* (in final retail packaging);</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Your business is a supplier of 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;</p> <p>When a sales transaction (i.e. you do not handle the product) is made from one wholesaler to another wholesaler, the seller does not require HARPS approval, only certification to the approved GFSI Scheme.</p>	<p>Your business processes fresh produce (e.g. value-adding such as bagged salads, fresh cuts, sliced mushrooms/carrots, shelled nuts etc.). Your business requires food safety certification to a scheme as required by your retailer customer.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Your business is a virtual broker (agent or merchant) that does not qualify as a Tier 1, 2 or 3 supplier (i.e. you do not physically handle the product).</p>
Action Required	Action Required	Action Required	Action Required
<p>Your business requires HARPS approval, this includes certification to an approved GFSI Scheme** and the HARPS requirements.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">  GFSI Scheme AND  HARPS </div>	<p>Your business requires HARPS approval, this includes certification to an approved GFSI Scheme** and the HARPS requirements.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">  GFSI Scheme AND  HARPS </div>	<p>Your business is required to be certified to an approved GFSI Scheme**.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">  GFSI Scheme </div>	<p>No action required for HARPS.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;">  NO ACTION </div>

* HARPS Participating Retailer(s): ALDI, Coles, Costco, Hellofresh, Metcash (IGA), Woolworths

** Approved GFSI Schemes: BRCGS, Freshcare, GLOBALG.A.P., SQF. Refer to <https://harpsonline.com.au/growers-and-suppliers/> for further information.

[^] Ancillary Services: Services including ripening, brokerage activities (agent or merchant), storage and cooling (where product handling and traceability are the responsibility of the Ancillary Service supplier).

Do you have a query?
Call the HARPS Helpline
1300 852 219
or email harps@harpsonline.com.au



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Additional programs

Many customers are now holding businesses accountable for additional considerations, such as socially and ethically responsible employment practices, and a commitment to sustainable and environmentally friendly stewardship of their land.

Ethical programs

Sedex is an ethical trade membership organisation, working with businesses to improve working conditions in global supply chains.

Sedex provides an online platform, tools and services to help businesses operate responsibly and sustainably, protect workers and source ethically. *Sedex* uses the *Sedex* Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA) methodology to assess against its four pillars – labour standards, health & safety, environment and business ethics.

GLOBALG.A.P.'s *GRASP* program (*GLOBALG.A.P.* Risk Assessment on Social Practice) is a voluntary, farm-level social/labour management tool for global supply chains, to be used in combination with the Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) standard. The assessment is carried out simultaneously with an IFA audit in order to minimise the audit burden (time and costs) for producers.

Evidence methods are determined by the country risk classification in order to balance efficiency and flexibility.

Fair Farms

Fair Farms is an Australian training and certification program for fair and ethical employment practices on farms. Fair Farms is an industry-led initiative aimed at fostering fair and responsible employment practices in Australian horticulture.

Environmental

Freshcare offers an environmental program designed for Australian growing conditions and environments.

Freshcare Environmental Code of Practice is a comprehensive, easy-to-follow, and outcomes-based environmental assurance program.

Biodiversity

GLOBALG.A.P.'s BioDiversity add-on lays out a set of rules, principles, and criteria, which help producers to demonstrate their biodiversity management practices. Retailers and traders can ask suppliers to undergo a BioDiversity add-on audit in order to fulfill their corporate social responsibility pledges.

The wide range of audit criteria in the BioDiversity add-on includes:

- The farm's biodiversity action plan
- Access to training, knowledge sharing, and farm-specific biodiversity advice
- Off-farm synergies
- Areas dedicated to biodiversity
- Protection and restoration measures
- Integrated pest management
- Soil and nutrient management plan
- Wastewater management and protection of water sources



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