

MEDIA RELEASE

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Global-first agreement with Australian retailers to benefit horticulture growers

In a world-first, major grocery retailers and the horticultural industry have agreed to streamline fresh produce safety requirements lowering the cost of doing business and improving food safety across the fresh produce supply chain in Australia.

Announced today by Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Senator Anne Ruston, and funded by the nation's horticulture Research and Development Corporation, Horticulture Innovation Australia (Hort Innovation), the move will see produce safety audit requirements harmonised across key supermarket retailers.

Hort Innovation Chief Executive Officer John Lloyd said this model is being collaboratively driven by the horticulture sector using cross-industry levy funds, with support from the nation's leading retailers – ALDI, Coles, Costco, Metcash (IGA) and Woolworths.

“Currently, Australia's leading grocery retailers all have varying food safety requirements that whole fruit and vegetable growers adhere to as part of the supermarket supply process,” he said.

Mr Lloyd said this new measure will bring down the number of audit elements required to supply the nation's major grocery retailers from more than 200 combined, to around 60, while strengthening food quality standards through the acceptance of internationally benchmarked auditing programs.

“This new streamlined food safety audit initiative is a win for an estimated 14,000 growers across Australia who currently supply the nation's leading fresh produce retailers,” he said.

“It will lower the cost of doing business for the industry, which is estimated to save growers and producers around \$40 million per year through more efficient auditing processes,” he said.

Mr Lloyd thanked the ALDI, Coles, Costco, Metcash (IGA) and Woolworths for their commitment to the standardisation of fresh produce food safety measures and supporting the nation's horticultural industry through the new initiative.

“The grocery retailers have responded to industry feedback, and reviewed the current arrangements, and have combined the best food safety standards that are available,” he said.

“By working together and achieving this result, everyone in the industry is looking forward to the roll-out and the substantial reduction in auditing costs.”

An ALDI spokesperson said the initiative has far-reaching benefits for the retailers involved.

“A harmonised food safety auditing process will ensure our customers will continue to enjoy produce that is of the highest quality and the safest possible by world standards.”

Coles spokesperson said Coles was pleased to have reduced complexity for suppliers while ensuring great quality produce for customers.

“This is a big win for suppliers who will find the job of providing great fresh produce a little bit easier, and for our customers who can be assured they are getting the best quality possible,” the spokesperson said.

Costco had similar sentiments, congratulating growers, suppliers, Hort Innovation and fellow retailers on working together to get this positive outcome.

“Costco is a membership warehouse club, dedicated to bringing our members the best possible prices on quality brand-name merchandise. We also strive for the most stringent safety standards and we are delighted to be part of this harmonisation initiative,” a spokesperson said.

Metcash CEO Supermarkets (IGA) Steven Cain said Metcash, and its 1400 independent retailers in the IGA national network, have always been strong supporters of Australian growers and together we are pleased to be associated with the harmonisation initiative.

“Each IGA store across Australia tailors their range to suit the local community they serve. Food health and safety and the well-being of our customers is a key priority within our stores. This initiative is another step in building onto our existing process to ensure our customers that the produce we stock meets the new harmonised standards,” Mr Cain said.

Woolworths said it looked forward to working with Australia’s horticulture producers to continue to deliver the best possible product to consumers.

“As The Fresh Food People nothing is more important to us than delivering safe, quality produce to our customers. In supporting harmonisation we believe that complexity will be removed from the current auditing processes without compromising safety. A great initiative for all,” a spokesperson said.

A pilot launch of the new program will take place in the coming months, with the full standardised food safety initiative expected to begin by the end of the year.

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