



Freshcare

The fresh produce industry is recognised as being proactive in implementing effective food safety programs throughout the supply chain. From primary production to retail shelf, the fresh produce industry is ahead of many other Australian agribusiness sectors.

Freshcare has been developed as a national, industry-owned food safety program suitable for all growers of fresh produce, including organic growers. Freshcare Limited was formed in 2000, as a not-for-profit company, to manage the Freshcare Program on behalf of the horticultural industry.

The program aims to:

- provide a simple, cost effective option for fresh produce producers to implement their own on-farm food safety systems
- support the industry as a whole with a program that, through independent third party assessments, provides confidence in the food safety status of fresh produce
- support retailers, wholesalers, packers and processors with an upstream (on-farm) program, focused on food safety, that integrates effectively with their own quality and food safety systems

On-farm, Freshcare has become the industry's most widely adopted food safety program, with membership exceeding 3000 growers nationally.

Freshcare components

The Freshcare Program is based on Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles (refer to 'Quality Assurance' VEGEnote).

In developing the HACCP plan that underpins Freshcare, potential on-farm food safety risks for the fresh produce sector were identified and assessed.

This information was used to establish farm practices and requirements to control potential problems. The Freshcare Code of Practice was then developed from this plan. The Code requires risk assessments to be completed for inputs such as water, chemicals, fertilisers and soil.

The Code of Practice describes the on-farm practices growers need in place to ensure they are meeting the food safety and quality requirements of both customers and consumers.



Freshcare is just one of the many Quality Assurance systems available to help ensure the quality of fresh produce in Australia.

The bottom line

- Freshcare is industry owned
- Implementing the Freshcare Program costs approximately \$1000-\$1200* in year one. The cost of maintaining the program is about \$550-\$650 per year
- Most growers take 3-6 months to undertake training, implement changes and achieve certification

* (Farmbi\$ or alternate funding may be available to assist with costs)

While the basic Freshcare Program addresses food safety issues, optional modules are being developed for the management of environmental practices as well as on-farm safety and welfare issues. This will ultimately lead to providing an option for EurepGAP equivalence for those members for whom EurepGAP compliance is an export market requirement.

How is Freshcare managed?

The Program was developed with the support of key industry associations and with initial funding from Horticulture Australia Ltd, under the AUSHORT Program.

Freshcare Limited's ownership is made up of national and state industry associations, including AUSVEG. A Board of Directors is selected from the owner associations. The Freshcare office, located in the Sydney Fresh Produce Markets, undertakes the day-to-day management of the program.

How to get involved in Freshcare

Training is key to the effective implementation of the Freshcare program on-farm. The aim is to ensure there is a clear understanding of the

issues impacting on food safety and the practices required to manage them.

Access to the Freshcare Program is designed to be as simple as possible, from initial registration to full certification.

The trainers are responsible for Freshcare enrolment and program administration (Farmbi\$ funding if/when available), leaving participants to focus on training and the implementation and adoption of Freshcare.

Training is designed to best meet the needs of the individual grower and can be scheduled as one-on-one, group sessions or distance education. Prior learning will be acknowledged when growers have participated in other recognised food safety programs or training.

On completion of training, an Initial On-Farm Assessment is scheduled to ensure the delivery of the training has been effective and the program has been successfully implemented on-farm. In subsequent years an Annual Third Party Audit is conducted by a Freshcare approved auditor.

Having successfully become Freshcare Certified, growers are issued with a Freshcare Certificate with their own unique number. The Freshcare Certification Number and logo can be used for marketing products and to demonstrate to customers that the grower is effectively managing food safety.

Further Information:

For Freshcare Trainers and upcoming training courses in your area, visit www.freshcare.com.au or contact:

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Grower Andrew Braham (cucumbers, capsicums and tomatoes), from Virginia in South Australia, became a certified Freshcare member in July 2004.

"I decided to become Freshcare certified because it gives you that little bit more recognition within the industry. Some of my wholesalers supply Woolworths and Coles (who require Freshcare or another approved QA system). As for my other wholesalers, if they can say that their grower is Freshcare certified then this would obviously benefit them, and me, in the long run. Being certified also makes you feel like you are taking more of a part in the industry. I had no problems implementing the Freshcare system. The team were very helpful and have provided on-going assistance. I will definitely be renewing my membership in the future. It might mean more paper work, but this also gives you accurate records to look back on in the future."

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