

Understanding Food Safety Compliance

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In 2012 Horticulture Australia Ltd (now Hort Innovation) initiated a project to harmonise the food safety certification requirements for the major retailers in Australia. The result of this project is the Harmonised Australian Retailer Produce Scheme (HARPS).

The initial HARPS project was funded by Hort Innovation using across-industry levies and funds from the Australian Government.

The scheme is voluntary and application for certification is open to all fresh produce businesses that supply the major grocery retailers.

To determine whether your business needs to be certified to HARPS use the Decision Graphic in Figure 1.

The following major grocery retailers and foodservice providers are members of the HARPS Retailer Committee: ALDI, Coles Supermarkets, Costco, Hello Fresh, Metcash (IGA) and Woolworths.

HARPS has resulted in the alignment of major grocery retailers and foodservice providers in Australia accepting a suite of GFSI benchmarked programs so that suppliers to these businesses are able to complete a single audit that will satisfy their customers rather than multiple audits against multiple programs.

What is an approved GFSI scheme?

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) has developed a benchmark standard for food safety certification that reflects global best practice in food safety management. Businesses are not certified against this standard.

Existing food safety standards can be benchmarked against the GFSI standard. If a standard meets the GFSI benchmark it is regarded as being 'GFSI equivalent'.

This work is accomplished through collaboration between the world's leading food safety experts from production, retail, manufacturing, and food service companies, as well as international organisations, governments, academia and service providers to the global food industry.

GFSI is facilitated by The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF), a global food industry network.

What approved GFSI schemes are available for Australian growers?

There are **THREE** schemes that are available for growers to choose from:

1. Freshcare Food Safety & Quality FSQ4.2
www.freshcare.com.au
2. GLOBALG.A.P Integrated Farm Assurance
www.globalgap.org
3. SQF Food Safety Code Edition 8
www.sqfi.com

Is HARPS required for my business?

To help you to understand whether you are required to comply with HARPS, use the Decision Graphic in Figure 1.

What are the fees associated with HARPS?

HARPS is self-financing, owned by Hort Innovation and managed by One Direction ANZ Pty Ltd.

HARPS charges a Royalty fee of \$295.00 + GST for each site that is audited to HARPS, which is collected by the Certification Body on behalf of HARPS.

HARPS aims to maximise operating efficiencies to help keep the fees charged to participating businesses to a minimum.

The auditing is carried out by third party approved certification bodies (CB) who set their own audit fees.

To determine which CB are approved to conduct your audit, please refer to <https://harpsonline.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Scheme-Rules-Appendix-2-Version-17-June-2022.pdf>

Overview of launch date & transition timelines for Tier 1 and Tier 2 businesses



What has changed in Version 2.0?

The Version 2.0 Standard will assist suppliers in meeting retailer requirements, and relevant Australian Laws.

The revised standard is accompanied by additional support tools for growers and suppliers, including guidance for each element and how to achieve compliance. The standard also incorporates guidance developed by the Fresh Produce Safety Centre.

The HARPS Retailer Committee said, “Version 2.0 of the HARPS Standard has been in development since early 2019 and reflects the foundational nature of the GFSI benchmarked standards, whilst building upon these requirements to ensure safety, quality, compliant products that customers expect when purchasing their fruit, vegetables and nuts in-shell.”

Each element within the Standard has been reviewed, discussed and debated by the HARPS Technical Advisory Group (H-TAG), a group comprised of Tier 1 and Tier 2 suppliers, as well as a diverse group of industry representatives, including auditors, trainers and peak industry body representatives.

The H-TAG have provided recommendations for improvements to the Retailer Committee.

Notably, feedback received following a public consultation period closing in early 2021 and recent pilot audits to test the standard, have been important components of the development process.

This has helped to ensure elements are practical and realistic and identify the most appropriate support tools to assist implementation by suppliers, and particularly Tier 2 growers.

Throughout the process, specific attention has been given to the requirements for Tier 2 growers, who are often less well-resourced than Tier 1 suppliers. This includes detailing which elements are relevant to Tier 2s, guidance for growers currently using Freshcare as their GFSI benchmarked standard and providing a 12-month transition period (instead of the six-month timeline for Tier 1s).

Following the 17 October 2022 launch, Tier 1 suppliers were given six months to transition to Version 2.0, with a mandatory transition date of 17 April 2023. Tier 2 suppliers are permitted 12 months to transition, with a mandatory transition date of 16 October 2023.

Any new suppliers to HARPS from 18 October 2022 will require an audit against the Version 2.0 Standard. The graphic below provides an overview of the launch date and transition timelines for Tier 1 and Tier 2 businesses.

In addition, short and easy-to-follow training guides have been developed to help businesses update their existing QA processes and systems to the Version 2.0 Standard. Transition training will be available on the HARPS website.

If you require more comprehensive training, you can visit the training page on the HARPS website to find a trainer in your state or capital city.

HARPS Decision Graphic: Is HARPS required for my business?

v3.0 May 2020

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
Your business has a Vendor or Supplier Number to a HARPS Participating Retailer*.	Your business packs or re-packs any of the following: • 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*; OR Your business is an Approved Supplier to a Tier 1 business, who supplies to a HARPS Participating Retailer* (in final retail packaging); OR Your business provides Support Services^
Action Required	Action Required
Your business requires HARPS approval, this includes certification to an approved GFSI Scheme** and the HARPS requirements.  GFSI Scheme AND  HARPS	Your business requires HARPS approval, this includes certification to an approved GFSI Scheme** and the HARPS requirements.  GFSI Scheme AND  HARPS

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

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

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

Figure 1: HARPS Decision: is HARPS required for my business? Photo credit: HARPS

Tristan Kitchener, from One Direction ANZ, the entity responsible for the ongoing management of HARPS said, "We're delighted that the HARPS Retailers continue to support the process of working collaboratively to accept a single common standard, rather than their own specific standards, given the non-competitive nature of food safety and the need to meet legislative requirements. There are significant efficiencies gained by having one audit that satisfies multiple retailers' requirements and having a business model established whereby producers and industry can engage directly with retailers as a collective group."

Tier 3

Your business supplies bulk produce (not in final retail packaging) for further packing to a Tier 1 or Tier 2 supplier;

OR

Your business is a low volume producer supplying a total of 10 pallets or less per calendar year, per site. This is a collective total across all HARPS Participating Retailers*.

(NB: Suppliers of retail-branded pre-packs are excluded from this rule as they qualify as a Tier 1 or Tier 2 supplier).

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.

Action Required

Your business is required to be certified to an approved GFSI Scheme**.



GFSI Scheme

Out of Scope

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.

OR

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).

Action Required

No action required for HARPS.



NO ACTION



HARPS
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The Version 2.0 Standard, updated Scheme Rules and other Technical Documents, including easy-to-use templates, are available in the Document Library on the HARPS website.



HARPS
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RETAILER PRODUCE SCHEME

For further program info or to raise an enquiry contact:

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