



AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE

Submission on the FSANZ Proposal P1052 – PPP Requirements for Horticulture (Berries, Leafy Vegetables and Melons)

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Prepared by

Tammi Jonas

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

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About the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA)

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is a farmer-led civil society organisation of people working towards socially-just and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems. The democratic participation of First Peoples, smallholders and local communities in decision-making processes is integral to these efforts.

AFSA provides a balanced voice to represent smallholders' and local communities' interests at all levels of government. We connect smallholders for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, assist government in instituting scale-appropriate and consistent regulations and standards, and advocate for fair access for smallholders to local markets.

We are part of a robust global network of civil society organisations involved in food sovereignty and food security policy development and advocacy. We are members of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), La Via Campesina (the global movement of peasant farmers), and Urgenci (the International Network for Community-Supported Agriculture). We also support the Australasian representative on the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM), which relates to the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Our vision is to enable regenerative and agroecological farms to thrive. This has taken on an added salience in the face of the increasing impacts of the climate crisis and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Australians care more than ever about the way their food is produced and how and where they can access it, with a growing awareness of its social, environmental, and economic impacts. Nutritious food produced locally in ethical and ecologically-sound ways is increasingly in demand, and governments must facilitate and encourage the emergence and viability of agroecology and regenerative agriculture embedded in localised food systems with short and often direct supply chains, thereby protecting the environment and human and animal health. Inextricable to this vision is the need to honestly and truthfully account for the land's needs. As such, AFSA works to increase understanding of and appreciation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples connection to and care for Country, the imposed coloniality on Country, and decolonising efforts therefore are areas of our concern. We aim to put First Peoples knowledge first in best practice of healing Country and sustaining life.

We work extensively with primary food producers and eaters across every state and territory in Australia. Our committee has consisted of published academics and lecturers from the University of Melbourne, RMIT, Deakin University, University of Tasmania, University of Sydney, QUT, and UWA. We have also had representation from farmers from every state, and local advocates and campaigners such as Open Food Network, Food Connect, Friends of the Earth, Regrarians, Fair Food Brisbane, and the Permaculture Network.

Our vision is to enable regenerative farming businesses and local communities to thrive.

As a key stakeholder and representative body of small- and medium-scale producers Australia-wide, AFSA is appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the third round of public consultation and looks forward to participating in further discussions on the issues raised.

Context

On 3 May 2019, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (**FSANZ**) released an information paper (the **Information Paper**) on its proposed approach to a review of food safety standards in the Food Standards Code (the **Review**).

On 14 June 2019 AFSA provided a submission to FSANZ on the above. On 5 February 2020 FSANZ issued a request for submissions on Proposal P1052 – Primary Production and Processing Requirements for high-risk horticulture. AFSA provided a submission to this second round of consultations on 18 March 2020.

FSANZ is now proposing three new standards for producers and processors of berries, leafy vegetables, and melons, the latter two which would require licensing and audits at what would be a great expense to very small producers.

AFSA submits this response to the proposed standards for berries, leafy vegetables, and melons to assist in ensuring the needs and interests of small-scale producers are included in the further consideration of Proposal P1052.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1	That a fee-free threshold is set for any farm that sells its produce direct to the consumer.
Recommendation 2	That no licence nor audits be required for producers of leafy vegetables or melons who sell directly to consumers.
Recommendation 3	That standards to prohibit inclusion of animals in production areas be revised to provide guidance on the safe management and withholding periods when animals are integrated into farming systems.

Key issues

Risk: scale and direct supply chains

The outbreaks that prompted FSANZ's investigations into risk in berries, leafy veg, and melons were from commodities produced in intensive monocultures that subsequently traveled through long supply chains. The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) represents small-scale farmers across Australia with average landholdings of around 50ha. Our market garden members typically produce vegetables and fruit on very small lots - between a quarter acre and one hectare is most common.

Most of our members distribute their produce directly to the consumer, often on the day of a morning harvest, or the day after an evening harvest, such as through farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) membership models. Some use a transport company for

direct deliveries from the farm, but the harvest and distribution channels look the same in regards to time and cold chain use. Some also sell directly to restaurants with whom they have developed working relationships - typically the chefs will have visited the farm. The very short supply chain reduces food safety risks as it minimises the time for growth of any pathogenic microorganisms that may be present, and also reduces risks in longer cold supply chain management. FSANZ's own risk assessment asserts that these are risk mitigation measures - which are inherent in our members' systems:

Section 10 [draft Standards 4.2.8 (leafy vegetables) and 4.2.9 (melons)]: These provisions would require a primary horticulture producer and a primary horticulture processor to keep harvested leafy vegetables / melons at a temperature that would not make the produce unacceptable. **The intent of these provisions is that harvested product is cooled, if necessary, and kept cool during post-harvest handling, transport and storage to prevent or minimise growth of any pathogenic microorganisms that may be present on harvested leafy vegetables or melons. Primary producers and primary processors must consider the location and timing of relevant activities (for example, the time taken to harvest product and transport it to a primary processing facility), to ensure the harvested product does not remain at temperatures for a time that would enable microbial growth to levels that would make the product unacceptable.**

FSANZ uses a flow chart in its 2018 Strategy document to show the 'food chain for each commodity', which fails to capture the model of most small-scale farms. The many risk points represented in the conventional industrial supply chain are vastly reduced in small-scale farming models with direct sales channels - these farmers are not commodity farmers.

Conventional Supply Chain for Commodities



Small-Scale Farm Supply Chain for Food



Risk: Traceability

AFSA submits that small-scale producers selling through short or direct distribution channels have a fundamentally high level of traceability in models where produce is sold directly from the farmer to consumers.

Risk: Animals in agroecosystems

FSANZ has proposed standard for leafy vegetables (4.2.8-12) and melons (4.2.9-12) that:

A primary horticulture producer and a primary horticulture processor must take all reasonable measures to minimise the presence of animals, vermin and pests in growing sites, and in premises and equipment, to ensure that leafy vegetables are not made unacceptable.

Agricultural biodiversity - which occurs at genetic, species, and ecosystem levels – includes components of biological diversity that are essential for feeding human populations and improving the quality of life. Recognition that the capacity of food and agricultural systems to meet the needs of a growing population is vulnerable to various kinds of shocks – and that production systems need to adapt to the effects of (often accelerating) environmental, economic and social trends and drivers of change – has led to increasing interest in the concept of *resilience*.

Darnhofer (2014) proposes that resilience in agricultural systems can be understood in terms of three capabilities:

- **buffer capability** – the ability of the system to cope with shocks and continue functioning more or less as before;
- **adaptive capability** – the ability of the system to adjust to external and internal drivers of change; and
- **transformative capability** – the ability to undergo radical changes, for example to transition successfully to a completely different agricultural enterprise or livelihood strategy.

This last point - transformative capability - cannot be ignored as we face the increasing impacts of climate change, loss of biodiversity, rise of zoonotic diseases, and decreasing soil and water health across agro-ecosystems. Farms now more than ever need this capability - brought by growing diverse crops and livestock in healthy integrated systems.

The FAO has defined resilience as follows: “the ability to prevent and mitigate disasters and crises as well as to anticipate, absorb, accommodate or recover and adapt from them in a timely, efficient and sustainable manner. This includes protecting, restoring and improving livelihoods systems in the face of threats that impact agriculture, nutrition, food security and food safety” (FAO, 2018d).

Diversity at every level from genetic to ecosystem contributes to the capacity of production systems to cope with shocks and to adapt to change (FAO, 2019). So while AFSA accepts the need to manage risks of integrating animals and crops due to potential pathogenic loads from animal manures in particular, we reject the outdated paradigm that simplifies ecosystems into risky monocultures. There are notable successful examples from all over the world of integrating animals into crop

production, such as in duck-rice-fish systems in Asia, using geese to manage weed and pest loads in orchards and vineyards, or using pigs to dig and fertilise new garden beds. Guidance on withholding periods after a livestock spell and before harvest of certain crops such as lettuce or melons would be a more ecologically-sound and safe way to manage food safety risks, just as there are withholding periods before slaughter after antibiotic use in livestock.

The cost of regulation should be commensurate with risk

In FSANZ's 2nd Call for submissions – Proposal P1052, it acknowledges its response to feedback from the first two rounds of consultation:

Impacts on small businesses in-particular were considered. Advice to FSANZ is that, if new regulations were found to be warranted and approved, food regulators would support businesses, particularly small ones, to become compliant with that new regulation, easing uptake through guidance documents and templates. In relation to fees, regulators already have the ability to alter the fee structure for small businesses, which can include reduced fees or a fee-free threshold. Fees are charged per hour (rather than at a flat rate), and therefore can scale up or down depending on business size.

AFSA recommends that a fee-free threshold is set for any farm that sells its produce direct to the consumer. We further recommend that no licence or audits be required for producers of leafy vegetables or melons who sell directly to consumers.

Case Study & Testimonial: Tumpinyeri Growers

Tumpinyeri Growers is an Indigenous led small-scale market garden in the central highlands of Victoria. Three young farmers work collaboratively in a sharefarming agreement with landholders at Captain's Creek Organic Farm, and supply CSA boxes to 30 local households, and a couple of local restaurants. They have written the following to provide more context to help the committee understand the scale and simplicity of our members' systems.

Tumpinyeri Growers supports AFSA's submission on the FSANZ Proposal P1052 – PPP Requirements for Horticulture (Berries, Leafy Vegetables and Melons).

This proposal should clearly be aimed towards large scale producers as it is the extended supply chain that is at fault and risk with regards to the health and safety of consumers. The harvesting, handling, storing, transporting, restoring and finally selling to consumers is the issue. This process is lengthy in comparison to our model which is direct to the household.

We, as many other small scale regenerative farmers harvest our leafy greens early in the morning, we then wash and store the produce in a large walk-in coolroom all before midday. After a few hours of chilling we pack our 20 heads of lettuce into our veggie boxes with our other cooled produce which is directly delivered to the community.

To ask small scale produce to fall under the same regulation as large scale, often monocrop produce is wrong and this needs to be addressed.

We thank AFSA for representing us and sharing our concerns on such matters as legislation like this is time consuming for small scale producers to address and is unjustified.

Conclusion

Many small farms start in horticulture because of the low barriers to entry. Increasing regulatory barriers into horticulture production would prohibit the much-needed growing movement of young people returning to farm in small-scale agroecological systems, and in turn inhibit communities' access to fresh, local food produced in socially-just and ecologically-sound systems.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas asserts that: 'States shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that their rural development, agricultural, environmental, trade and investment policies and programmes contribute effectively to protecting and strengthening local livelihood options and to the transition to sustainable modes of agricultural production.' It further asserts that 'States shall stimulate sustainable production, including agroecological production, whenever possible, **and facilitate direct farmer-to-consumer sales.**' (UNDROP, Article 16.4)

AFSA welcomes any opportunity to provide further evidence to support our recommendations, and would be happy to meet with FSANZ.

About Food Sovereignty

"Food sovereignty asserts the right of peoples to nourishing and culturally-appropriate food produced and distributed in ecologically-sound and ethical ways, and their right to collectively determine their own food and agriculture systems."¹

The core of food sovereignty lies in the following principles:

- Food is a human need and a basic right, rather than a commodity.
- Food systems should be democratically constructed, responding to diverse social, cultural and environmental conditions.
- Food systems should be based on a strong commitment to social justice: for farmers, food system workers, and the most vulnerable members of our society who experience food insecurity.
- Resilient food systems require long-term environmental sustainability, transitioning away from dependence on fossil fuels and chemical inputs.
- Resilient and sustainable food systems will be more localised and regionalised.
- Trade in food and agricultural products can enhance economic and social well-being but should be conducted on the basis of international solidarity, respecting and not undermining the food sovereignty ambitions of other peoples and countries.²

¹ The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, <<https://afsa.org.au/?s=food+sovereignty>>.

² Patel, R. (2009). What does food sovereignty look like? *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(3), 663-671.