

Media Release

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Isolation rules creating shortages in Australia's food supply chains

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is calling on state and territory governments to make immediate changes to the isolation requirements for food, transport and distribution workers that are close contacts, to ensure that the entire supply chain can provide food to Australians.

The fresh produce industry is facing a critically low workforce due to COVID cases and isolation requirements for close contacts. While this issue is throughout the food supply chain, it is most critical in transport and distribution. Industry is anticipating that the situation will become increasingly worse over the next two weeks.

“Some businesses are seeing a halving in their workforce in one day. People aren't turning up because they have COVID, are close contacts or are concerned about COVID. This is affecting the harvesting, packing, transport and distribution of fruit and vegetables” said Michael Rogers, CEO, AFPA.

The challenges faced by retailers in their distribution centres and store delivery is cascading back into the supply chain, placing increasing pressure on already strained farming businesses.

“The distribution centres of major retailers are a key hub for the entire food supply chain. We support the retailer calls for immediate changes to isolation requirements for close contacts, this is critical for retail distribution centres. More broadly, we need these changes for food, transport and distribution workers, to make sure that we can get food into stores for Australian families” said Mr Rogers.

Indications from Australia's largest food retailers are that there will be less availability of products over the coming weeks due to workforce shortages created by the rise in COVID cases and associated isolation requirements.

“While there is obvious public health concern over the increase in COVID cases we cannot ignore the effect that this is having on the community's access to food. A shortage of food should not be added to the significant stress and anxiety many Australian families are already experiencing” said Mr Rogers.

Currently, all close contacts of a positive COVID case must remain isolated for 7 days, even with a negative rapid antigen or PCR test.

“Without changes, it will become increasingly difficult to supply food over the next fortnight. We need all state and territory governments to look at measures to allow essential food, transport and distribution workers who do not have COVID to return to work as quickly as possible” said Mr Rogers.

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***About the AFPA** - The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is made up of Australia's key fresh produce growers and suppliers. The AFPA represents half the industry turnover of the Australian fresh produce sector - \$4.5 billion of the \$9.1 billion total; 1,000 plus growers through commercial arrangements and more than 15,000 direct employees through peak harvest, and up to 25,000 in the grower network.*