

Media Release

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Government ‘calculating’ if fruit and vegetables are healthy

A review of the current Health Star Rating system for Australian food products has led the Commonwealth Department of Health to propose using a ‘calculator’ to determine if fresh fruit and vegetables are healthy. Current dietary guidelines from the same Department encourage Australians to ‘enjoy plenty of vegetables, including different types and colours... and enjoy fruit’.

The Government website¹ states ‘The Health Star Rating system uses stars to show the nutritional profile of packaged foods and is on over 10,300 packaged foods’. The website suggests ‘to make healthier choices on packaged foods look for the highest star rating when comparing similar packaged products’. Under changes to these guidelines, these calculations could be applied to raw, unprocessed, fresh fruits and vegetables.

“The Health Star Rating system was developed to better inform consumers of the nutrition of processed and packaged food products. This is a commendable objective but surely extending the Health Star Rating system to natural, whole foods like fruit and vegetables is the clearest example of policy overreach and unintended consequences. Should we also apply the Health Star Rating to water to make sure it is healthy?” said AFPA CEO, Michael Rogers.

Advice from health professionals tells us we need to maintain our good health during the global COVID pandemic and one of the key elements of health is our diet. Currently, only 5.4 per cent of Australians are eating the recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables as part of a healthy diet.

“One of the trends in 2020 has been the increase of in home cooking due to COVID restrictions. We need industry and government working together to encourage Australians to eat more fruit and vegetables, and consistently meet the recommended daily dietary intake. Applying the Health Star Rating system to fruit and vegetables will simply confuse Australian families in the supermarket and decrease consumption” said Mr Rogers.

Government intervention in the lives of Australians must be for clear reasons that are supported by evidence and to achieve a clear objective. The Health Star Rating system must remain focussed on processed foods to assist consumers decision making.

“We call on the Commonwealth Department of Health to exempt fresh fruit and vegetables from the Health Star Rating system. If the Government insists on including all food products in the system, then fresh fruit and vegetables must receive the available ‘policy override’ of an automatic 5 star ranking. Industry and government must be working together to support the health of all Australians, not creating confusion” said Mr Rogers.

Media Contact: Michael Rogers - CEO, AFPA: 0409 648 911

¹ <http://www.healthstarrating.gov.au/internet/healthstarrating/publishing.nsf/content/home>

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.