



Federal Election 2022: The fresh produce industry is structuring for growth

The Australian fresh produce industry is poised for a decade of growth underpinned by global consumer trends focussing on health and wellbeing. In Australia and across our key export markets, consumers are looking for high quality and nutritious fruit and vegetables to support busy lifestyles. To grow to a \$20 billion industry by 2030, industry and government need to work together to grow exports, invest in sustainable agriculture, and develop a productive returning workforce.

1. Growth through export

With the persistently low level of fruit and vegetable consumption in Australia, more than 85% of industry growth must come from exports to reach the target of a \$20 billion sector. Industry needs government investment in:

- A reinvigorated whole of Government approach to negotiating horticulture market access
- Research and development to improve and develop treatment protocols to improve market access
- Building scientific capacity within the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment to address technical market access now and into the future
- The National Fruit Fly and Market Access R&D Centre to improve domestic and international trade opportunities through management and suppression of fruit fly, and the ongoing development of market access data packages for industry.

2. Invest today in sustainable agriculture

Demonstrate the sustainability credentials of the fresh produce industry and invest in key enablers. Industry needs government investment in:

- A strategy to address fresh produce emissions in electricity, transport, and fertiliser; and identify opportunities to utilise soil carbon resources from harvestable crops
- New and revitalised water infrastructure including new dams, utilisation of recycled water, and continued improvement in water use efficiency
- National recycling for fresh produce packaging materials to reduce waste and create a circular economy

3. Develop a productive, returning workforce

The fresh produce workforce is undergoing a structural transformation with an increased reliance on returning visa holder from the Pacific (under PALM programs) and South East Asia (under the Agriculture Visa). Industry needs government investment in:

- Implementing the ongoing expansion of the Pacific (PALM) Programs
- Operationalising the Agriculture Visa in 2022 with a significant expansion in late 2022
- Implementing a robust National Labour Hire Licensing Scheme
- Developing employer capabilities, with a focus on SMEs within the sector, in workforce planning, recruitment, and business development

Background

The Australian fresh produce sector is a major economic presence in regional Australia, sustaining many communities through capital investment in farms and new production techniques, employment growth and attracting government support for key infrastructure, including roads, transport hubs, telecommunications and irrigation schemes. The Australian fresh produce industry can grow to \$20 billion by 2030 by increasing our access to consumers in growing markets, addressing key farm gate challenges and investing in industry fundamentals.

Industry's immediate priority is continuing to **expand exports**

- Industry needs technical protocols to support our fruit and vegetable exports. This can only be achieved with investment and focus on scientific capability and research and development in creating a sound scientific case for technical access
- Examples of success are the table grape and citrus industries, which both export more than 60 per cent of their produce – this needs to be replicated across other products
- Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, China and other South East Asian markets remain a key priority for Australian exporters

More broadly, industry is focussed on increasing the **sustainability of our sector**

- Our sector is a very small contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, with some reports that fresh produce production is only 1 per cent of overall agriculture emissions
- A priority is to demonstrate the sustainability credentials of the fresh produce industry and invest in key enablers, including:
 - Reducing food waste through ongoing use of appropriate packaging
 - National recycling for fresh produce packaging materials to reduce waste and create a circular economy
 - A strategy to address fresh produce emissions in electricity, transport, and fertiliser; and identify opportunities to utilise soil carbon resources from harvestable crops

To continue the supply fresh and nutritious fruit and vegetables to Australians and international consumers, the fresh produce industry needs to continue to develop a **productive and returning workforce**

- Over 80% of employing businesses in horticulture employ fewer than 20 employees. These SME businesses need to be supported with National Labour Hire Licensing and capacity building resources to support improved workforce planning, recruitment, and business development
- Industry needs support at all workforce levels; harvest, technical and managerial. The strategies to address workforce challenges at each of these levels is different, and requires nuance.
- Greater access to regulated migration programs (PALM and Agriculture Visa) will ensure workers are able to return to work on farms year on year, assisting to address harvest workforce challenges