

Feast or famine:

A call to action to avoid future food insecurity



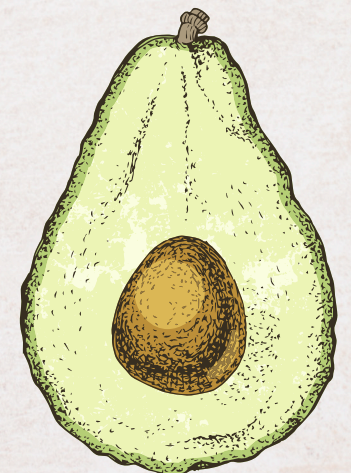
National
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Message from the Chair

If we have learnt nothing else from COVID-19, it is that we are, despite our vast country and its natural advantages, perilously close to being caught without enough food to feed ourselves.

During a cost-of-living crisis, the Federal Government must revisit all those policies that are having the effect of driving up the cost of production without delivering enough public good in return.

In a time of heightened geopolitical tension, we have to throw off our laissez faire approach to food security and the provision of green space, and instead engage in careful, strategic stewardship.

Everyone in Australia, and many people overseas, rely on the horticulture industry for fresh fruits, vegetables and nuts as a crucial, and delicious, part of healthy diets.

We depend on the horticulture industry for plant and turf products that enable our uniquely Australian lifestyle and create beautiful beneficial green spaces vital for physical health and mental well-being.

For many regional communities across Australia, horticulture is a significant contributor in their economies, creating local jobs and demand for goods and services.

Few other industries, within or beyond agriculture, are able to transform raw inputs of water, soil, energy and labour into wealth as efficiently and at the same scale as horticulture.

Given its central part in providing those inputs essential for human flourishing, and our national security, there is more to be done by the next Federal Government to secure the supply of Australian grown produce and a sustainable future for horticulture industries.

Jolyon Burnett

**Chair
NFF Horticulture Council**



Creating a unifying vision for our food system

The Australian horticulture industry stands at the heart of our nation's food security, environmental sustainability, and economic prosperity. With nearly 70,000 workers and thousands of small-to-medium enterprises, the sector contributes over \$17 billion to our economy each year.

Despite its significance, the industry faces unprecedented challenges. Increasingly complex regulation, labour supply insecurity, threats of new pests and diseases, retailers with enormous bargaining power extracting an unfair and greater share of profit along the supply chain, constricting access to safe, effective chemistry, and the rising costs and availability of inputs all threaten to undermine the resilience of horticultural producers. Coupled with global economic and political uncertainties and evolving consumer demands, the need for strategic leadership has never been greater.

The challenges and opportunities facing horticulture are interconnected with broader food system issues, including transport and logistics resilience, food and national security considerations, waste minimisation, climate change, and nutrition and public health.

The Council calls on the next Federal Government to:

1. Develop a comprehensive National Food Plan providing for the food security, including nutritional security, of the nation and its people. The National Food Plan must have clear objectives and measurable targets set out in regular updates and action plans, and subject to regular review.
 2. Appoint a new Minister for Food or establish a special subcommittee of Cabinet to oversee the implementation of the Plan.
- a. The Plan must create coherence between other related national plans and strategies already in place or under development, including:
- i. A Future Made in Australia
 - ii. Defence Strategic Review and National Defence Strategy
 - iii. Migration Strategy
 - iv. Agriculture and Land Sectoral Plan
 - v. National Biosecurity Strategy
 - vi. National Preventive Health Strategy
 - vii. Murray Darling Basin Plan

The Council notes this call to action reflects recommendations already made to the Federal Government as part of a Parliamentary Inquiry into Food Security in Australia in late 2023.

Safe, skilled and productive workplaces

Labour makes up the largest single component of the cost of production across most of horticulture, so ensuring the industry has access to a secure, reliable, productive and appropriately skilled workforce is of critical importance.

Finding enough workers at the right time is a perennial challenge for the horticulture industry. Harvest windows are often short and unpredictable, the product is perishable, and attracting workers to roles that can be physically demanding can be difficult.

The nation is reliant on migrants to fill both skilled and specialist roles in horticulture and also low skilled seasonal roles during peak labour demand periods around harvest, planting and pruning.

The Council calls on the next Federal Government to:

1. Keep backpackers as part of the mix of seasonal labour supply by retaining the option for younger travellers to extend by one or two years their visas by taking up roles in horticulture as part of the Working Holiday Maker program.
2. Improve the accessibility of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, especially for smaller employers, by streamlining and simplifying requirements for participation.
3. Invest in interventions to curb rates of absconding and disengagement by workers from the PALM scheme.
4. Require clear, measurable productivity gains as a prerequisite for introducing workplace relations reforms, ensuring that any changes to employment law or modern awards deliver tangible economic benefits without undermining business sustainability or competitiveness.
5. Appropriately resource the Fair Work Ombudsman to monitor and enforce existing workplace laws, rather than create more laws and regulations that only hurts honest employers.
6. Commit to an Australian Agriculture Visa, dedicated to meeting the seasonal harvest, packing and pruning needs of the national horticulture industry.
7. Accelerate the implementation of national labour hire licencing.
8. Invest through training in the development of core skills and human capital, essential if horticulture is to continue to adapt, innovate and improve its productivity.



Fair, affordable food

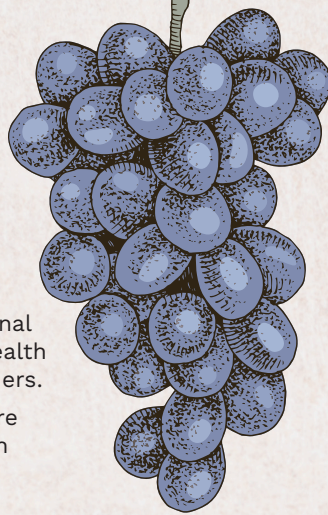
Australian retailers of horticultural products, including major supermarkets and big box retailers, have accumulated significant market share and far too much bargaining power, which they use to suppress prices paid to farmers and inflate those they charge consumers.

The price setting and others practices of these retailers impact regional communities disproportionately, having the effect of transferring wealth from these regional communities directly to supermarket shareholders.

In a cost-of-living crisis, where parts of the Australian population are experiencing food insecurity, the Federal Government should step in where the drive within public companies toward greater profits is compromising access to safe, fresh, affordable food.

The Council calls on the next Federal Government to:

1. Ensure the ACCC is resourced to properly monitor and enforce compliance with competition law, the Food and Grocery Code of Conduct and the Horticulture Code of Conduct.
2. Give the ACCC powers to more closely monitor the trading practices of retailers, including authority to undertake audits of compliance with the Food and Grocery Code of Conduct.
3. Introduce divestiture powers to act as ultimate sanction for gross and malicious breaches of market power by supermarkets.
4. Amend competition law concerning collective bargaining class exemptions specifically for horticulture businesses to make this more accessible and introduce legislation to compel buyers to engage with groups of growers.
5. Provide to greenlife growers the same protections enjoyed by fruit and greenlife growers by extending the Food & Grocery Code to big box retailers of plants or by establishing a new Greenlife Code of Conduct.
6. Ensure Ministers for Trade and Agriculture are working collaboratively in securing current and pursuing, prioritizing and expediting new market access or market development opportunities overseas for Australian horticultural products to provide growers more options for selling their produce.



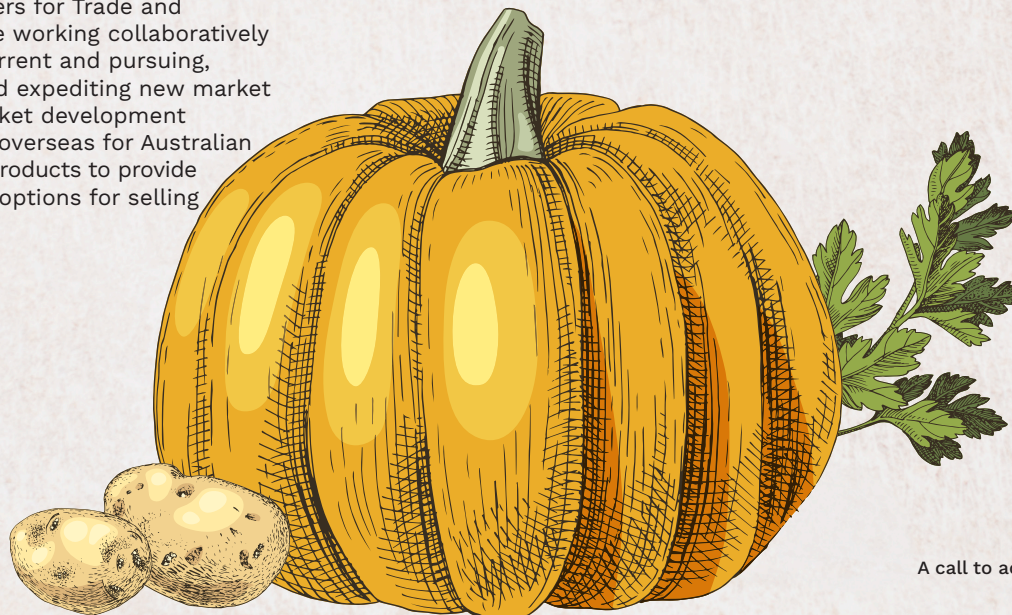
Stopping pests and diseases at the border

Biosecurity is everyone's business, but our farmers overwhelmingly bear the cost of invasive pests and diseases, despite having no control over border security.

We need to shift this burden onto both importers who are the primary risk creators of biosecurity incursions and the public, who derive the greatest benefit from access to imported products and an environment free from pest and disease.

The Council calls on the next Federal Government to:

1. Fund a stocktake of industry investments across the national biosecurity system and make the results public, as recommended by the Craik Review.
2. Commit to an additional permanent annual allocation in funding from general revenue to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for the specific purpose of undertaking biosecurity services at the border, to reduce their reliance on cost recovery and in recognition of the enormous public benefit arising from this activity.
3. Raise more revenue for biosecurity operations from those importing into Australia, to cover the costs of Federal Government activities at the border preventing the introduction of devastating invasive pests and diseases into Australia.
4. Commit to permanently scrap policy or plans for a Biosecurity Protection Levy.



Regulation driving up cost of production

Farmers are drowning in compliance requirements and red tape. New regulations and processes are introduced without proper, holistic consideration of the farmer's and wider industry's ability to manage or implement them.

Decisions of the Federal Government are having the effect of driving up the cost of production and supply chain without delivering enough public good in return.

We need a simpler, more effective regulatory system or else we risk making Australian grown produce unaffordable, and losing family farms, essential to the fabric of rural communities.

The Council calls on the next Federal Government to:

1. Recommit to modelling regulatory best practices, as outlined in the Regulatory Policy, Practice & Performance Framework, including regulating only where necessary, when there is a clear problem that cannot be addressed by other means, such as market mechanisms, voluntary standards, or self-regulation.
2. Commission research to understand the full, cumulative burden of Commonwealth, state and territory government regulation on the national horticulture industry, to inform future regulatory impact assessments and the design of fair, reasonable regulation that doesn't unduly impact the cost of food or our competitive position in export markets.
3. Simplify Australia's industrial relations laws to reduce complexity, enhance compliance, and support small businesses in creating jobs and driving economic growth.
4. Task the Food Ministers Meeting with reviewing:
 - a. The June 2018 decision to request FSANZ reassess food safety risk management across berries, leafy greens and melons, including the evidence base and consultation with industry that informed this decision.
 - b. The consistency and efficiency of state and territory government approaches to implementing the resulting primary production and processing standards for these three horticultural sectors.
5. Fund an industry-led data management initiative that enables a "tell us once" approach, empowering the grower with ability to permission data sharing, minimising the need for businesses to submit the same information multiple times, reducing regulatory burdens and promoting consistent supply chain procedures.

Eating our way to a healthier future

Many Australians are not meeting their recommended daily intake of fruits, vegetables, and nuts, which are essential components of a healthy diet.

One in five Australian adults experience a mental illness every year.

Many Australians lack sufficient access to natural green spaces that promote physical activity, reduce stress, and improve their overall health and well-being. These spaces enhance mental health, encourage physical activity, and contribute to liveable cities and thriving regional communities.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommends for adults at least 2 serves per day of fruit, at least 5 serves of vegetables and 30 grams of nuts. In 2022, less than half of adults in Australia met these recommendations. The proportion of adults who don't usually eat fruit daily has increased over the last decade.

Dietary risks contribute just over



7%
of Australia's
disease burden



62%
of coronary
heart disease



41%
of type 2
diabetes



34%
of stroke



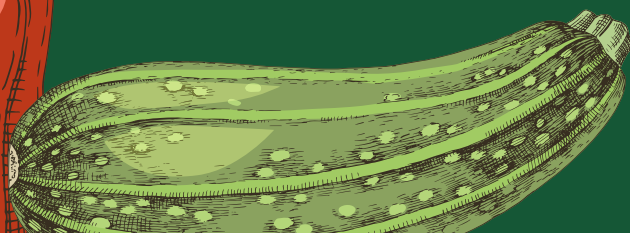
22%
of bowel
cancer

Meanwhile, the cost of diet-related diseases to the Australian healthcare system and wider economy is huge and growing. Each year obesity and obesity related disease claims an estimated 7,200 Australian lives and costs the health system and wider economy over \$37 billion.

Investing in horticulture and greenspaces can address these interrelated issues. More green and less screen time must be encouraged to complement the consumption of fresh, nutritious foods by creating environments that encourage outdoor activity and healthy lifestyles.

The Council calls on the next Federal Government to:

1. Initiate a national program of behavioural change to increase consumption of fresh Australian-grown fruits, vegetables and nuts.
2. Consider policy and programs that will deliver, through improved planning and design, more natural greenspaces in urban areas.
3. Initiate a national program of education to raise awareness of how active engagement with plants by gardening, growing food and seeking out nature has proven health and well-being benefits.







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