

Food Safety & Critical Incidents: A Unified Approach for Safer Produce

Cyclone Gabrielle Research Symposium



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FPSC
FRESH PRODUCE
SAFETY CENTRE

Overview

- About FPSC
- Food safety in horticulture
- Response to food safety risk post-cyclone
- Challenges
- Strengthening the food safety system
- New resources and enhanced critical incident management
- Feedback on proposed approach

About us

- Independent, not-for-profit, trans-Tasman organisation with a focus on food safety in fruit, vegetables, herbs and mushrooms
- Established in 2014 by International Fresh Produce Association (formally Produce Marketing Association-ANZ) in partnership with University of Sydney
- Primarily funded by retailers, industry, regulators and co-funded projects (e.g. Horticulture Food Safety Initiative)

Safe Produce and a
Thriving Industry



Role of FPSC

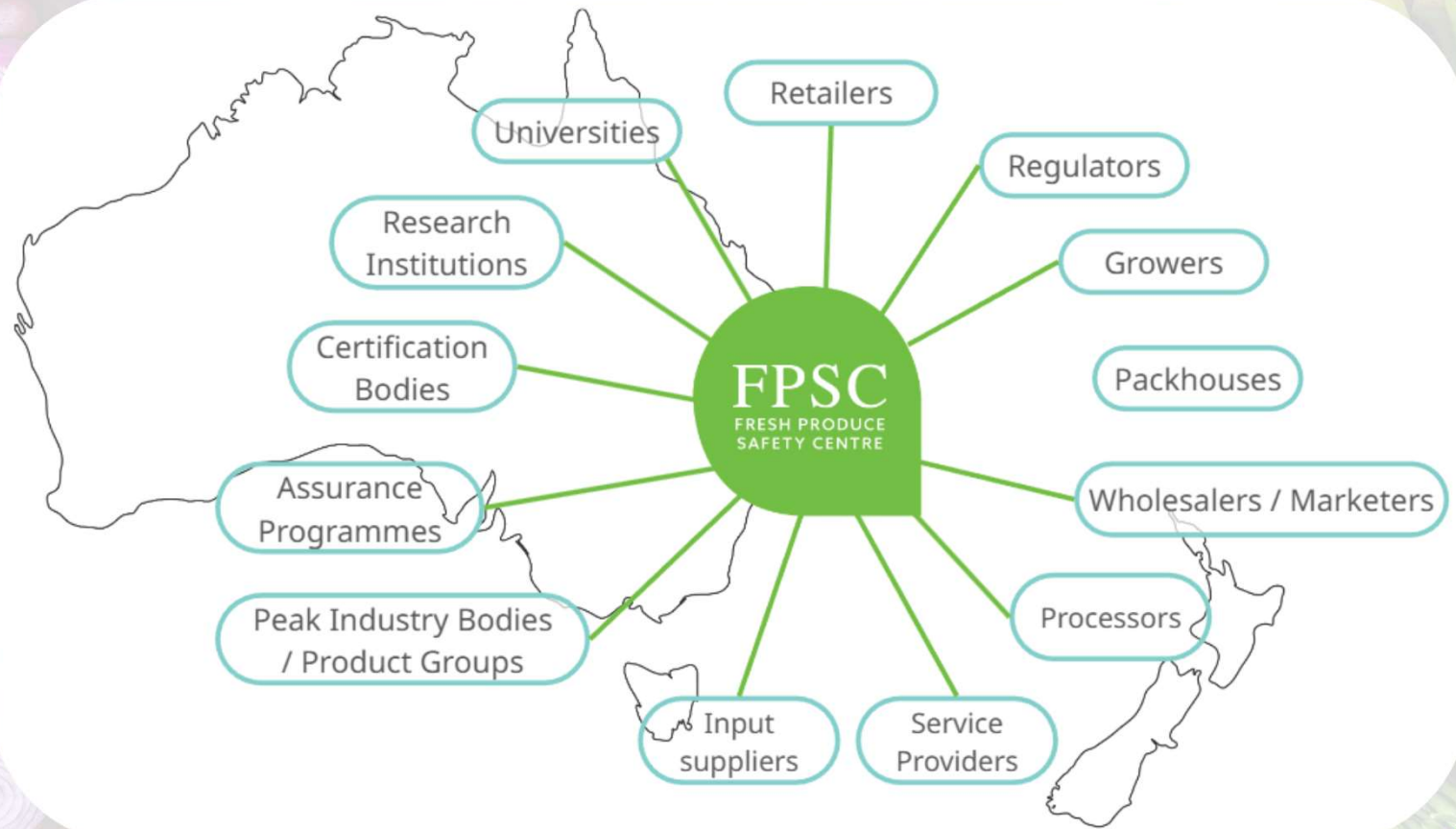
- Purpose is to create independent, science-driven food safety guidance for a safe, resilient and thriving fresh produce industry
- Lead or facilitate projects and initiatives that support food safety guidelines, research, innovation, awareness, collaboration, extension, and continuous improvement
- Host food safety events like the International Fresh Produce Safety Symposium
- Provide **FREE** guidelines, webinars, podcast and resources
- Custodians of the Fundamental Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety, Quick Guides and other food safety resources

Safe Produce and a
Thriving Industry



The image shows the FPSC logo in the bottom right corner, which consists of a white circle with the text 'FPSC' and 'FRESH PRODUCE SAFETY CENTRE' below it. The background of the slide is a collage of various fresh fruits and vegetables, including grapes, bananas, lemons, kiwis, avocados, bell peppers, onions, and leafy greens.

Our Stakeholders



Why food safety is important in fresh produce

- Lack of kill step in the fresh produce supply chain
- Food safety risks need to be well managed on-farm to prevent initial contamination
 - “Keep it Clean” – Jim Monaghan
- Floodwaters can introduce food safety hazards



Food safety trends and risks

- WHO Estimates 600 million people (1 in 10 people) fall ill after eating contaminated food and 420,000 die per year
- Fruits, vegetables and herbs were the 3rd most recalled food product category 2020-2024 (FSANZ Report)
- Increase in frequency and intensity of weather events (e.g. floods, droughts)
- Climate change driving resource depletion (e.g. potable water)
- Increasing spread of animal and plant pathogens
- Increasing the risk of mycotoxins, agrichemical residues, and antimicrobial-resistant pathogens contaminating foods

Initial response post-cyclone

- Existing flood guidance (e.g. FPSC) shared with growers and industry
- Growers directed not to harvest any produce that had potentially touched floodwater
- Growers & packhouses directed to segregate high-risk produce (e.g. from impacted blocks/paddocks)
- Apple & kiwifruit growers provided with additional guidance on managing equipment, people, segregation, environmental monitoring, cleaning, & testing
- Increased product inspections for evidence of contamination (e.g. silt)
- NZFS developed guidance for harvesting produce affected by flood waters
- Public advised not to eat 'free food' that they found in the street



How did we do with managing food safety risks?

- No outbreak of food borne illness attributed to fresh produce in the aftermath of the cyclone



Initial Lessons learned

- Horticulture industry had fragmented approach to response and communications
- Numerous gaps in guidance to ensure food safety and security
- Well-established food safety culture is best insurance against a food safety incident
- A thorough risk assessment is needed to inform the best course of action to ensure food safety
- Appropriately trained personnel are required for sampling and testing

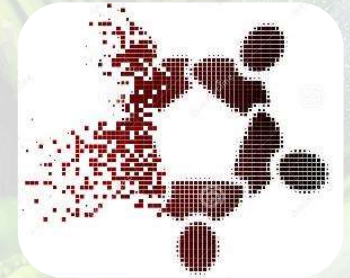
Information gaps

- Risk assessment for produce not ready for harvest
- Support for decision on when flooded soils can be re-planted
- Risk-based and crop specific guidance
- What treatments can and should be applied post-harvest
- Harvest buffer zones from flood water
- Risk associated with floodwater splashing
- Options for produce that is not suitable for consumption



Other Challenges

- Fragmented and inconsistent response to adverse events (e.g. major recall or severe weather event), with lack of agreed readiness and response plans, communications, guidelines and protocols
- Imbalanced approach to resourcing food safety across the sector, often linked to scale rather than food safety risk both at a business and sector level
- Insufficient knowledge hub of trusted food safety information and guidelines
- Lacking awareness of roles and responsibilities in the food safety system, or approach to managing duplication of roles



Can we do better?



New Zealand Food Safety
Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



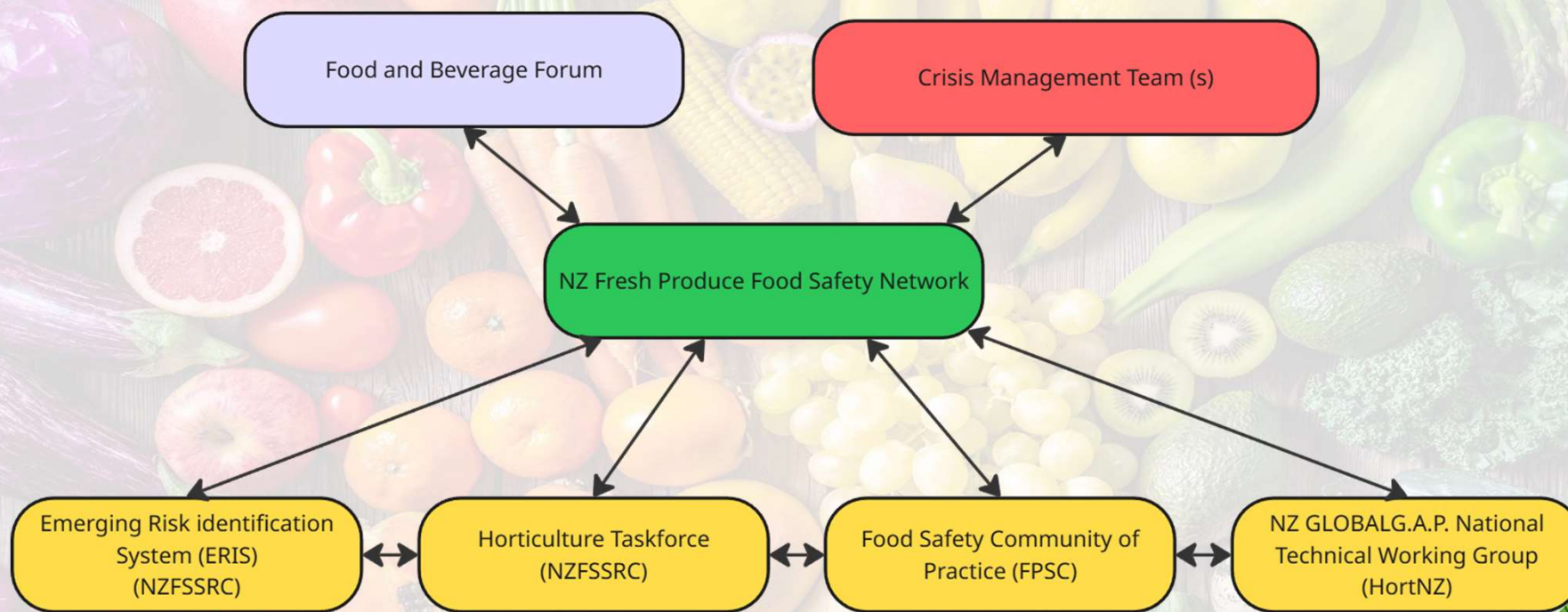
Strengthening the food safety system



Objectives of the Network

- Facilitate efficient and effective communication on food safety
- Partner to collectively prepare for future crises
- Mitigate the risks of a large-scale food safety incident linked to fresh produce
- Enhance access to food safety resources and information
- Harmonise the approach to making progress on food safety risks, opportunities, research, guidelines and tools
- Improve strategic, workplan and operational alignment across the food safety system
- Mitigate against emerging risks

Draft Model for Improved Collaboration



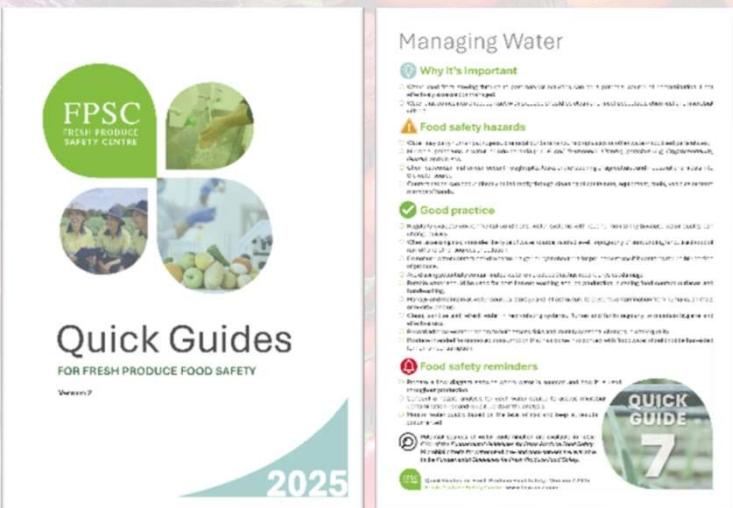
New Resources: Fundamental Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety

Version 5, 2025



Quick Guides:

Download
now:



Managing Water

Why it's important

Water is essential for growing fresh produce. It is a key component of the production process and is used in many ways, including irrigation, washing, and processing.

Food safety hazards

Contaminated water can be a source of food safety hazards, including bacteria, viruses, and parasites. These hazards can cause foodborne illness and other health problems.

Good practice

Use clean water for all food safety purposes. Test water regularly for contamination. Use appropriate water treatment methods, such as filtration and chlorination. Store water in clean, covered containers. Use water sparingly and avoid cross-contamination.

Food safety reminders

Always use clean water for all food safety purposes. Test water regularly for contamination. Use appropriate water treatment methods, such as filtration and chlorination. Store water in clean, covered containers. Use water sparingly and avoid cross-contamination.



Grower Incident Management Plan

Contained

The incident has clearly defined circumstances. No additional support is required beyond standard internal business procedures.

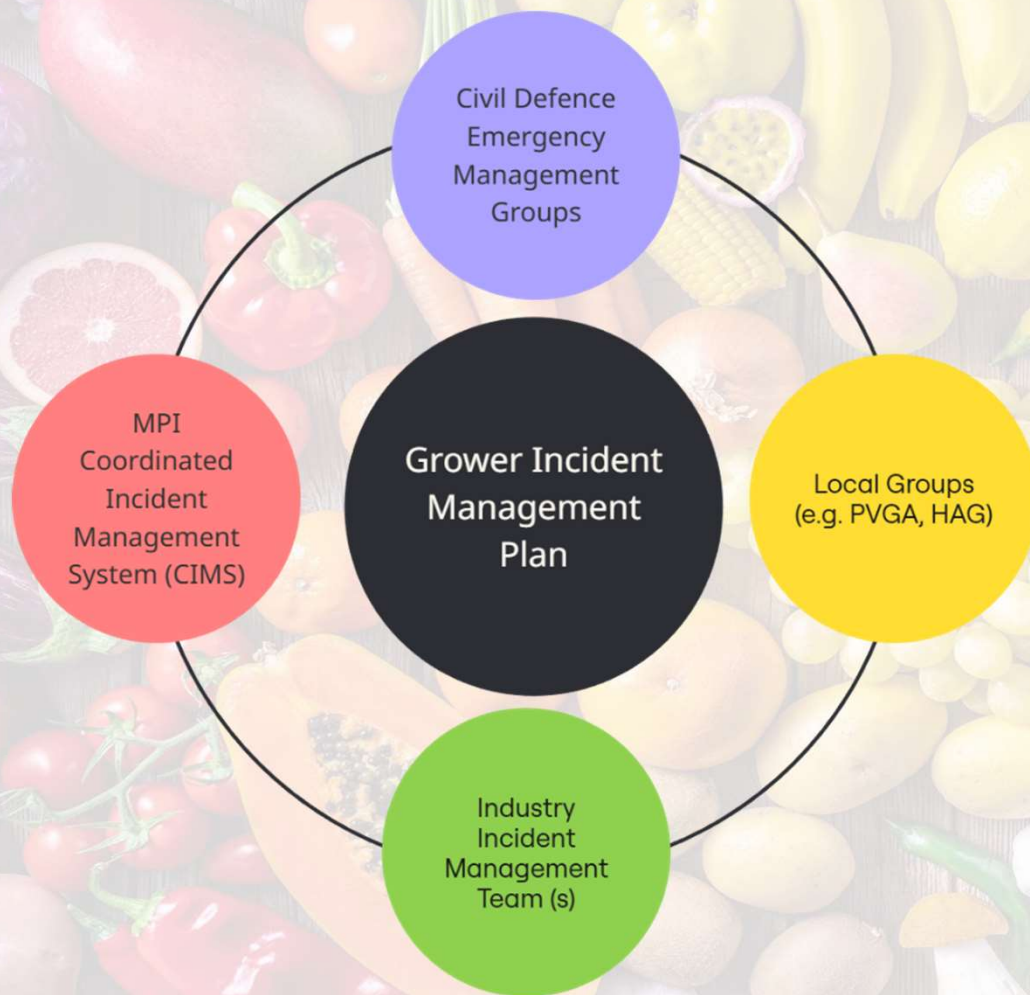
Uncontained

The incident is emerging and lacks clearly defined circumstances, with little likelihood of a resolution without external coordination

Critical

The incident is likely to pose a significant risk of reputational damage and attract media scrutiny. It may affect a single company, an entire industry or span multiple sectors. Additional external support may be required

Enhanced Critical Incident Management



Improve food safety awareness and comms:



It's believed broccoli should be okay in the water as long as it was getting plenty of sunlight. Photo: SUPPLIED / Waikato Times

- *Reported by Stuff (June 2022)*

Next steps

- Socialisation of proposal for NZ Fresh Produce Food Safety Network
- Collating and incorporating feedback
- Establish NZ Fresh Produce Food Safety Network
- Incorporate food safety into industry Incident Management Plans
- Share Fundamental Guidelines for Fresh Produce Food Safety with growers
- Fill research gaps and develop improved guidance
- Collaborate more effectively to achieve objectives!

Acknowledgements



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Horticulture Food Safety Initiative Acknowledgements

The Horticulture Food Safety Initiative is funded through Hort Innovation (Hort Frontiers), with co-investment from FPSC; University of Sydney; NSW Department of Primary Industries; Agriculture Victoria; South Australia Health; Coles; Zespri International; New Zealand Food Safety Science & Research Centre; Vegetable Research and Innovation Board; Hort NZ, Woolworths and in-kind contributions from University of Sydney; Food Standards Australia & New Zealand (FSANZ); Centre for Produce Safety (USA); New Zealand Food Safety Science & Research Centre (NZFSSRC); Agriculture Victoria; NZ Food Safety (MPI (Ministry for Primary Industries)); Zespri International; NZ Vegetable Industry Research Board; AUSVEG; Berries Australia, and contributions from the Australian Government.

hort **frontiers**

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Thank you
Any Questions?

