



Submission

Convenience vs Conservation: *Tackling the prominence of single use plastics in the age of modern, convenience driven economics*

February 2020

About

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is made up of Australia's key fresh produce growers and suppliers. The members include:

- Costa Group,
- Perfection Fresh,
- Montague,
- One Harvest,
- Pinata Farms,
- Fresh Select,
- Mackay's Banana Marketing,
- Driscoll's,
- 2PH Farms,
- LaManna Premier,
- Rugby Farming,
- Freshmax, and
- Fresh Produce Group.

These businesses represent:

- half the industry turnover of the Australian fresh produce (fruit and vegetables) sector - \$4.5 billion of the \$9.1 billion total,
- a quarter of the volume of fresh produce grown in Australia - 1 million of the 3.9 million tonne total,
- more than a third of fresh produce exports - \$410 million of the \$1.2 billion export total,
- more than 1,000 growers through commercial arrangements, and
- more than 15,000 direct employees through peak harvest, and
- up to 25,000 employees in the grower network.

The key issues the AFPA is focusing on include:

- packaging and the role it plays in product shelf life and reducing food waste landfill,
- labour and the need for both a permanent and temporary supply of workers,
- market access to key export markets for Australian produce,
- product integrity both within and outside of the supply chain,
- pollination and research into alternative sources, and
- water security, including clear direction as to the allocation and trading of water rights.

The AFPA's aim therefore is to become the first-choice fresh produce group that retailers and government go to for discussion and outcomes on issues involving the growing and supply of fresh produce.

Products grown by AFPA Member companies include:

Apples	Broccoli	Fioretto	Oranges	Strawberries
Apricots	Broccolini	Green Beans	Peaches	Sweet Corn
Asparagus	Brussel	Herbs	Pears	Table grapes
Avocado	Sprouts	Lemons	Pineapples	Tomatoes
Baby Broccoli	Butternut	Lettuce	Plums	Water Cress
Baby Corn	Pumpkin	Mandarins	Potatoes	Wombok
Bananas	Cabbage	Mango	Cucumber	
Beetroot	Cauliflower	Mushrooms	Raspberries	
Blackberries	Celery	Nectarines	Salad leaf	
Blueberries	Cherries	Onions	Spinach	



Summary

Australian consumers are concerned about the impact of plastics, from all sources, on the environment and the relative impact of their different purchasing decisions. For fresh produce, packaging plays an important role in the integrity and protection of food as it travels through supply chains from farm to plate. Critically, product protection should be the primary goal of packaging as food waste generally accounts for a larger proportion of the life-cycle environmental impacts of the food-packaging system.

In order to meet the public policy objectives of supporting Australians and increasing our overall sustainability, governments can work with industry on:

- developing environmentally friendly packaging solutions,
- encouraging the reduction of non-essential packaging, and
- supporting the collection, processing, recycling and reuse of packaging materials.

The AFPA asks all parties to ensure that any action to 'improve' current practices fully considers the complexity of current arrangements and ensures that the proposed action is of overall environmental benefit over the long term.

With regard to the proposed collection and recycling initiative in Far North Queensland, trials of new approaches to implementing circular economy principles are key to developing long term solutions. The proposed trial has the opportunity to consider consumer behaviour, social impacts and employment, and overall environmental impacts of consumption and recycling. Ideally, the trial would kickstart a circular economy approach which is financially self-sustaining, supported by consumers and adopted by business as part of normal business operations over the medium term.

Introduction

Australians have a strong track record in addressing litter through initiatives such as *'Keep Australia Beautiful'*. Australian consumers are concerned about the impact of plastics, from all sources, on the environment and the relative impact of their different purchasing decisions. Fresh produce packaging has been a focus in the public discourse however unlike many other products, fresh produce has a relatively short shelf life and product packaging helps to maintain shelf life and reduce food waste.

For fresh produce, packaging plays an important role in the integrity and protection of food as it travels through supply chains from farm to plate. Critically, product protection should be the primary goal of packaging as food waste generally accounts for a larger proportion of the life-cycle environmental impacts of the food-packaging system.

Industry Approach

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) recognises there is concern about the level and type of packaging that is used for fresh produce and has prioritised packaging as one of the six key issues to address for the future of the fresh produce industry. Individual member companies have been working through their packaging options for more than 3 years to increase recyclability and reduce non-essential packaging.

In 2019, the AFPA commissioned and released research undertaken by RMIT on the role that packaging plays in the fresh produce supply chain. This report outlines that packaging assists in reducing food waste as it protects product through the supply chain and increases the shelf life of fresh produce¹.

¹ "The role of packaging for Australian fresh produce": [http://freshproduce.org.au/static/c2df9ce4b622ec059149827dbd08ffa6/afpa-report-2019-digital-book-\(7\).pdf?dl=1](http://freshproduce.org.au/static/c2df9ce4b622ec059149827dbd08ffa6/afpa-report-2019-digital-book-(7).pdf?dl=1)



This research is important when considering that an estimated 7.3 million tonnes of food valued at \$20 billion is lost or wasted in Australia every year. This is at a time of growing rates of obesity in our adult and child population due to poor dietary intake of fresh fruit and vegetables, leading to the development of preventative and chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes.

This research is also vital when considering regional communities, such as those in North Queensland where much of the fresh produce that is not grown locally needs to be transported an extensive distance to reach consumers. Packaging plays a vital role in ensuring that families in regional communities have access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

Members of the AFPA recognise that they must work to reduce packaging where possible and most importantly must work with stakeholders, including packaging suppliers, to identify and develop forms of packaging which provide a greater opportunity for recycling or more effective end of life management. To that end, the AFPA have also funded the development of a Materials Selector² tool to assist the fresh produce industry in selecting the most appropriate packaging formats for their products.

The AFPA promotes sustainable packaging design within the fresh produce industry to maximise the benefits of packaging (product protection, transport, extension of shelf life and reduction of food waste), while attempting to minimise the environmental impacts through appropriate materials selection.

Food Waste

The unintended consequence of removing or restricting required packaging in the fresh produce industry is a significant increase in food waste; which actually has a greater environmental impact than packaging. When considering recycling and waste management, the disposal of organic waste must also be included. With reference to The Waste Hierarchy, ideally waste generation should be avoided in the first instance; in order to understand how to reduce the generation of food waste the AFPA commissioned a consumer research report to identify strategies to reduce food waste.

*The relationship between fresh produce packaging, food waste and recycling in the home*³ report identifies three key findings that can assist in helping Australian families reduce food waste:

- Planning: opportunities to increase meal planning to reduce food waste
- Convenience: further opportunity to understand portion size and product format
- Storage & Use: better communicate to consumers ideal product storage conditions to manage product quality

This research outlines practical strategies that the fresh produce supply chain can implement to work with Australian consumers to reduce the financial and environmental burden of food waste, while importantly ensuring Australian's are able to access healthy, fresh food.

Health and Nutrition

Despite the known benefits, consumers do not take in sufficient quantities of fruit and vegetables. The latest National Health Survey found that just over half (51.3%) of Australian adults met the guidelines for the recommended minimum 2 daily serves of fruit (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Over recent

² AFPA Materials Selector: http://freshproduce.org.au/_static/d40361506a3455327dcb914536619860/afpa-materials-matrix.pdf?dl=1

³ The relationship between fresh produce packaging, food waste and recycling in the home:
http://freshproduce.org.au/_static/20c25269719b6982f387d678de41739c/afpa-consumer-research-report-2019-online.pdf?dl=1



decades the rates of chronic disease, including type 2 diabetes, have been increasing both in adults and children (Obesity Policy Coalition, 2018).

It is predicted that, by 2023, health expenditure for type 2 diabetes will have risen \$1.4 billion to \$7 billion per year, due mostly to increasing weight gain (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013). If current Australian trends continue, an estimated 83% of men and 75% of women aged over 20 years will be overweight or obese by 2025 (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013). Therefore, it is important to utilise strategies which ensure access to food that is nutritious, both for the individual and in addressing broader public health issues.

A primary objective of food production is to ensure a safe and acceptable product to be delivered to market. Packaging may serve to transport nutritious produce, such as fruit and vegetables, safely to consumers all over Australia with minimal waste. If people are to consume more fruit and vegetables and in turn reduce their risk of contracting chronic diseases, it is therefore important to provide consumers with a product which is of a high quality and maximises its shelf life.

A way forward

If we are aiming to '*reduce the environmental impacts of Consumer Packaging*'⁴ and increase the overall sustainability of our economy, then we need to consider the overall impact of our decisions rather than individual issues in isolation.

For example, in fresh produce there are conversations about changing material types to address consumer concern but the replacement material may have a more significant environmental impact. The AFPA encourages all supply chain participants and governments to consider consumer behaviour in the development of new regulation, policy proposals and requirements for consumers.

The AFPA has released two research reports on packaging, food waste and recycling as well as distributed resources to help industry better select materials. Through our work it has become clear that further work is required to understand consumer behaviour, particularly in the home, to better provide consumers with products and services that meet their needs in the most sustainable manner.

In order to meet the public policy objectives of supporting Australians and increasing our overall sustainability, governments can work with industry on:

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⁴ Australian Packaging Covenant 2017 <https://www.packagingcovenant.org.au/documents/item/1037>

