

The background of the slide is a photograph of several black plastic crates filled with ripe, red cherry tomatoes. Some tomatoes are still attached to their green vine stems. The crates are arranged in rows, and the lighting is bright, highlighting the vibrant red color of the fruit.

FPSC 2025 Innovation Agenda

Review of the Audit Process

August 2020



How can we make the audit process more efficient and effective?

The Fresh Produce Safety Centre (FPSC), an industry-led, not-for-profit company established to enhance fresh produce safety across Australia and New Zealand, has identified the audit and food compliance process as an area which has the potential to be improved and made both more efficient and cost-effective for all sectors of the industry, while delivering safe food for the consumer.

Why did we undertake this study?

We wanted to answer the question: “What does fresh produce food safety compliance look like by 2025?” The current food safety compliance system (effectively an annual audit) is working reasonably well. However, the system does have its weaknesses and the purpose of this study was to uncover work that is being done locally and globally to deliver a more robust, efficient and cost-effective food safety compliance system that underpins consumer expectations, today and into the future.

What did we do?

The FPSC, with the assistance of industry professionals and their networks, conducted a study of thirteen food safety schemes and certification bodies in Oceania, the Americas, United Kingdom and Europe to determine what innovations are being applied in our region and elsewhere in the world to improve the current audit process.

What did we find?

- While the audit process is generally working, and is valued by food businesses and regulators alike, there are challenges and opportunities for improvement.
- The **cost, frequency and overlap of multiple audits** remains an issue, particularly for growers and can be an impediment to smaller growers undergoing compliance.

- There is a challenge of moving from a perceived 'one-day-per-year' mentality and seeing the audit only as a compliance and market access mechanism – '**a necessary evil**' – to an **improved food safety culture** across the business at any point in time.
- The **ageing auditor workforce**, professional development issues and barriers-to-entry combine to create a limited auditor pool. Some countries are attempting to deal with these issues through **training and incentive** programs.
- **Old technology**, the use of pen-and-paper systems, and a failure to integrate information across the supply chain, is another challenge.
- In the US, in a bid to increase food safety and meet stringent regulatory requirements, there is a move towards **more testing and increasing the frequency of audits** in fresh produce.
- In Europe, recognising the cost of multiple audits, **risk-based assessments** are being investigated, primarily increasing audit frequency for poor performers or products and processes with higher-risk.
- **Unannounced audits** and spot-check audits can play a role in improving compliance.
- **Technology** is generating much activity around streamlining the audit process, but for GFSI-benchmarked schemes this option has been limited, as until very recently, the **annual audit must be completed on-site**.
- However, the Global Food Safety Initiative has recently published an extension to their 2020 benchmarking document which now allows, under particular circumstances, for **blended audits** (on-site and remote), using information and communications technologies, for part of the audit process where the CB and the site agree to do so.
- A suite of **new technologies** based on blockchain, the Internet of Things (sensors, beacons, etc) and potentially wearables such smartglasses, are promising companies along the supply chain greater control over supply chain management and food safety/quality issues.
- The **COVID-19** pandemic is likely to have a significant impact on the way food safety audits

are conducted in the future as companies seek to protect themselves from the reduced ability to travel and the need to apply technology to the way they conduct business.

What will FPSC do next?

- Consult and seek responses from industry to identify the top five areas that we can collectively work on to improve the audit process.
- Encourage industry to consider all findings from this report that can improve the existing situation, for example the work being done overseas on food safety culture and recruitment and training of auditors.
- Work with key organisations (such as GFSI) to ensure that global changes can be communicated back to the Australian and New Zealand industries.
- Work closely with the Australian and New Zealand retailers to act on priorities that may be identified from this report.
- Liaise with grower organisations to identify areas that growers consider need improvement and the impediments to the adoption of new technologies.
- Build a network of like-minded organisations and individuals, such as a community of food safety practice, to influence change in the audit process and other areas for transformational change in produce safety in Australia and New Zealand.
- Hold events and fora to build industry discussion on how to improve the audit process.

How can you get involved?

- Read the full report **here**.
- Contribute to the industry consultation on the top priorities via our website **here**.
- Join the FPSC mailing list **here** to be kept up to date on further events and updates.
- Email FPSC on info@fpsc-anz.com with your views on how the audit process can be improved.

About the FPSC

The Fresh Produce Safety Centre Australia & New Zealand brokers connections and collaborations with global leaders in fresh produce to build industry capacity and capability that delivers safer fresh produce to consumers. We do this through innovation, knowledge and leadership. More [here](#).

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