

## **COVID-19 (Coronavirus) update #3**

Wednesday, 25 March 2020

Citrus Australia has created a specific COVID-19 (Coronavirus) page on our website. [You can access it here.](#)

The page has updated information relevant to:

- Business
- Workplace health and safety
- Workforce
- Marketing
- Exports

We encourage you to visit this page regularly as it will continue to be updated with useful and timely information relevant to your business.

### **Grower feedback**

Citrus Australia continues to advocate on behalf of our growers and is in daily consultation with Federal and state Government Ministers and departments, and other horticulture industry groups. We encourage you to contact us with issues specific to your business to enable us to seek answers.

If you have any feedback on how COVID-19 is affecting your business, or want answers to questions specific to your business, please email Kerry Thompson [here](#) or call on 0448 213 330 so we can continue to escalate these in our meetings with government, and collaboration with industry.

### **AQIS KCT audits**

AQIS has advised that due to COVID-19, some scheduled audits for weeks commencing 23 and 30 March 2020 will be delayed.

From AQIS:

- Businesses will be notified if they were to be audited pre-season shortly
- Audits will be conducted by a local state auditor
- AQIS is preparing alternative audit regimes where access is not possible (such as via video conference)

### **Harvest**

- It is not yet official, but bridging visas for Pacific Islanders currently residing in Australia are expected to be announced later this week. This includes people here on the Seasonal Worker Programme, and the Pacific Labour Scheme. There are

currently more than 7000 Pacific Island workers in Australia, that at present can no longer return home due to flights being grounded.

- Citrus Australia has been lobbying for this to occur. Government requested the number workers required for the national citrus harvest. We provided information that over the coming 6-month period approximately 32,000 workers will be required nationally (all regions).
- Feedback is that some growers are recruiting backpackers, but the quality of the work is low, turnover is expected to be high and extra management is required to maintain quality (button pulls, snipping marks). As we move into the winter months when it is less appealing to work outdoors, backpackers may not be interested in pursuing these roles, as opposed to Seasonal Workers whose primary aim is to work in Australia to earn money.
- We have reached out to Citrus Australia grower members to assist with promoting their labour needs on our website. If you are a member of Citrus Australia, and a grower or packer that would like to take advantage of this, please email [kerry.thompson@citrusaustralia.com.au](mailto:kerry.thompson@citrusaustralia.com.au)
- Citrus Australia continues to lobby Government to allow workers that have already been approved under the SWP to travel to Australia. We feel we have support from key Federal Ministers and will continue to advocate.
- Citrus Australia has asked Government to prioritise promoting horticulture to unemployed casual workers.
- Citrus Australia has joined the NFF Horticulture Council to leverage its work with Government.
- In Western Australia, DPIRD is working with Studium Global, a WA-based student employment platform. It is looking to attract WA University and TAFE student workers with appropriate skills or a background in farming to apply for low or semi-skilled work. WA growers that need labour can contact Melissa Dennin, WA Vegetable Growers Association, on 0477 477 044 or at [melissa.denning@vegetableswa.com.au](mailto:melissa.denning@vegetableswa.com.au) for assistance with registering for labour.
- The Victorian Government has announced a \$5 million dollar package to assist with businesses needing labour. More details to be shared soon.

### **Border control**

- The primary aim of border controls is to reduce discretionary travel, i.e. holiday makers, travellers. This is to reduce the likelihood of infection spreading.
- All essential services are able to cross the borders, some states will have specific documentation that is required. We suggest as a minimum carrying your license, business cards and other forms of identification that show your place of residence and purpose for travel.



- The Queensland government will require businesses that have staff entering on a fly in fly out or semi-regular basis to have a protocol in place. We will provide links to the template as soon as it is published.
  - This may apply to technicians (packing equipment), mechanics, transport, harvest crews (relocating from one state to another) and other groups or individual staff.
  - The template will ask for evidence that you have a health screening protocol and a hygiene protocol
- South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory have all closed their borders. Each state has a different approach to quarantine and isolation, information is available on their Department of Health websites ([listed on our website here](#)). If you have recently returned from overseas you must self-isolate for 14 days.
- Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud has today declared food production and supply an 'essential service'. [See media release posted on Twitter here](#). He said "State-imposed border shutdowns will not affect agricultural supply chains".
- Citrus Australia has been told that working holiday makers crossing a 'closed' border will be waived through if carrying letter of employment from an employer in that state. The letter should be on company letterhead and include the name of the worker, their start date, estimated length of time of the job, their role, and perhaps a paragraph about your business and where it is located.
- You can access information for business, and information for health, relevant to each state and territory at our COVID-19 information page on the Citrus Australia website [here](#).

## Exports

- We have been informed that shipping lines are working as well as can be expected and that containers will be available when export season is on in earnest.
- **Importantly, packing sheds and exporters have been strongly encouraged to liaise with shipping companies to keep them aware of expected volumes to be shipped, and to try and stay as accurate to that estimate as possible.**
- Shipping companies will require the best intelligence possible to meet export requirements.
- To date, product seems to be moving through ports, with congestion lifting in China in particular. Shipping charges have reduced as congestion lifts.

## Residue Sample Analysis

- Symbio Laboratories and all Symbio Laboratories sites Australia-wide will continue to operate as per usual. Symbio Laboratories continues to monitor the situation closely



and has additional risk management strategies in place. It has multiple laboratory locations throughout Australia which are serving as backup to each other.

### **Employee health**

- Citrus Australia has begun compiling an information booklet for businesses to provide advice on best practice in protecting existing and new staff from coronavirus. This will be distributed next week.
- Some changes made by businesses in other horticulture industries include:
  - Giving staff staggered breaks so they are not all in the same place at one time. Break rooms must be cleaned between crews using appropriate disinfectant.
  - Dividing teams up so if one gets sick, only have to isolate that team.
  - Running 3-4 buses of workers to orchards, rather than having them all on one bus.
  - Prioritising lunchroom cleanliness as this is likely to be the most contaminated room in the workplace.
  - Checking staff temperatures with a thermometer each morning to ensure they are not presenting with a fever. Some are suggesting random checks during the day. To cover yourself from a legal perspective prepare an employment protocol and have all staff sign it to agree to have temperatures taken during this outbreak or words to that effect.

### **Retail sales**

- Several sources have revealed there has been strong demand for fresh produce, as consumers recognise that fresh produce is good for their health.
- The announcements about border closures and heavier restrictions on non-essential services did have an impact on demand but it is expected to self-correct as the message gets out that food stores can remain open.

### **Government support measures**

- The Federal Government has announced measures to support businesses affected by the coronavirus. [You can access it here.](#)

### **Communication and marketing**

- Citrus Australia has been posting messages through social media to remind consumers of the importance of citrus in boosting the immune system. Growers are encouraged to download these social media tiles and use them through their social media. [You can access them here.](#)

- The communication campaign, including traditional media, will continue throughout the year.
- The orange marketing levy will continue to be used in key export markets to communicate health benefits of citrus and the safe production of our citrus.

### **Freshcare**

- Freshcare has developed resources to highlight additional measures that may need to be considered in the changing environment. [You can access them here.](#)

### **Advocacy**

Citrus Australia continues to meet with government and industry to share information and combine forces in advocacy. Your feedback is inputted directly into these meetings to put your needs on the agenda and to seek resolutions. This week:

- Teleconference with Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud.
- Met with Federal Department of Agriculture regarding auditing requirements.
- Wrote to Federal Ministers responsible for agriculture and immigration, as well as all relevant state and NT agriculture ministers, highlighting immediate changes required to the Seasonal Worker Programme to allow growers access to pre-approved workers.
- A separate media release from Citrus Australia was sent to highlight importance of this issue and apply further pressure.
- Met with the office of the Hon Adam Marshall, NSW Minister for Agriculture, to discuss NSW plan to ensure grower access to labour, continuation of the supply chain, support to growers throughout the state, and reiterate that access to fresh produce is an essential service.
- Supporting Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC), which is seeking permission from the Federal Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to initiate on-shore migration opportunities, by reaching out to new migrants to Australia currently based in urban areas, and relocating them to regional areas to work in horticulture.
- Participated in the Agriculture Coordination Group Meeting hosted by Queensland Department of Agriculture – the only State Government with such a group in the country. Also participated in four working group meetings from this group:
  - Workforce Availability Group
  - Workplace Health and Safety Working Group
  - Business Continuity Working Group
  - Supply Chain and Logistics