

### **The push is on to improve cold chain skills**

by Mark Mitchell, Chairman of the Australian Food Cold Chain Council (AFCCC)

If the economic measures of food loss and waste in this country are any guide, our food culture needs to change – soon. The source of far too much of our food loss and waste is in the cold chain, the logistics network that moves our food around, from farm to fork. On its journey, food passes through any number of transports, loading docks, distribution centres and cold rooms and this is where temperature abuse happens, on a large scale.

This level of waste, costing the country at least \$3.8 billion annually, is now on the Australian agenda and can no longer be ignored by those involved in commercial, consumer, logistics and contractual arrangements.

It's not as if Australia does not possess the technology required for a fully compliant cold chain. In recent times, especially since Covid, we have been inundated with proposals from telematics companies offering solutions for the food cold chain sector. Many of these offerings are quite inadequate and others are very sophisticated and up to date with many of the systems being used by exiting cold chain operators.

The main challenge we face as an industry has everything to do with the implementation of process and the correct use and sharing of data.

It is a sad situation to see compliant cold chains mostly only exist within the minority closed loop systems or end to end supply chains without change of custody or ownership of product. There is a lack of appetite by cold chain competitors for sharing data which in essence breaks the cold chain. This is especially prevalent at critical control points where delivery and receipt temperatures require verification.

If this culture change is going to happen, surely it will require a revolution at the coalface, among the people we are calling the super heroes of the cold chain industry. Recognising the importance of those practitioners working at all levels of the cold chain, from the farms to the trucks and the loading docks, has driven the AFCCC to develop some necessary tools and training to help keep our food resource safe and minimise food loss and waste.

So starting with the largest horticulture event in the southern hemisphere, Hort Connections 2021, held in Brisbane recently, I have begun introducing our new Cold Chain Professional Development Series of training to the trade.

Developed in conjunction with other cold chain groups, the AFCCC has launched Part 1 of the training series, dealing with the basic principles of thermometers and how to use them.

We chose temperature devices to begin with because of the critical role temperature management plays in the cold chain.

So while there are plenty of cold chain practitioners walking around with thermometers in their hand, very few understand how to use them, calibrate them and are unable to make decisions that will identify broken links in the cold chain.

What we are hoping is that this low-cost training program, which should be adopted by every company moving chilled and frozen food around the country, will produce a new generation of skilled people. It will be a trained operator who will lead the culture change charge.

The five-module fully online training course, available now through the AFCCC and the Australian Institute of Packaging websites will take about three hours to complete, but can be self-paced. No previous experience in the cold chain is needed, but those who achieve their completion certificates from the training program will be on the path to highly sought after career opportunities in the cold chain, where expertise is sorely needed.

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