

**Every company and every truck carrying cold produce must change their ways**  
by Mark Mitchell, Chairman of the Australian Food Cold Chain Council (AFCCC)

Up till a couple of months ago, many organisations involved in moving chilled food from farm or manufacturing facility to consumers were happy in their isolation, giving lip service to calls for greater effort to limit this country's horrendous food wastage by applying quality management systems to their whole process.

It's only now, following significant intervention by the federal government and the release of the National Food Waste Strategy Feasibility Study, that many of our major enterprises have begun to change the long-established culture which has contributed to the high waste numbers.

In our many dealings with industry, the AFCCC has noted that most participants in the cold chain, hand on heart, will welcome any move to stop wastage, but don't believe they are actually part of the problem. This attitude is particularly prevalent in the food transport industry.

The AFCCC is no longer one of a small number of voices that understand the problem but battling inbred attitudes to get industry at large to institute the process changes necessary to stop truckloads of food being taken to landfill weekly.

The food waste study mentioned earlier sounds daunting, but it's really quite simple. With government backing, a feasible program has been released which has a very good chance of achieving a halving of Australia's food waste before the end of this decade.

The study should be read by everybody with a stake in the cold chain, because at the end of the day, they will be the ones who will benefit most from the changes this study is asking every participant to implement.

Certainly there is a cost involved up front, but the steps recommended will deliver significant benefits to those involved in the cold chain industry. For example, for every \$1 invested, \$7 will be delivered back to the economy. In other words, the financial benefits significantly outweigh the final cost.

The food sector, from farm to retail, is where the vast majority of actual changes will need to be made and that includes all the players in the cold chain – the producers, the transporters, the operators of refrigeration assets, the wholesalers and the supermarkets.

Echoing the AFCCC's plea for those in the cold chain to change their process culture, the study said that achieving the target will only be possible if

industries change the way they do business, for the long term – embedding new processes and practices ranging from new and innovative technologies to simple process and behavioural changes.

There's a lot more than money involved. The whole industry will ultimately benefit because the steps that companies will need to take will deliver a more efficient and collaborative industry, as well as a more just and equitable society. Those involved in cold chain transport will soon realise that there is another and bigger layer of responsibility on top of any number of refrigerated spaces, data acquisition technologies and intelligent refrigeration controls.

The transport sector is being targeted because a fair quantity of food waste can be avoided by better refrigeration practices. Food damage is also more likely to occur in the transport and handling of refrigerated product than at stationary points in the cold food chain. If food is poorly handled during transport and handling, the losses at the consumer end are compounded. Food already suffering temperature abuse will have a shorter shelf life in the domestic refrigerator.

As a reminder to cold chain transport participants, I repeat the findings of an AFCCC study of common observed failures – there were 26 of them. Some were obvious, such as overloading the trailer, incompatible mixed loads, incorrect or absence of pre-chilling, poor packing/stacking/wrapping, badly designed loading docks and weather/temperature exposure. But by far the biggest failures related to the product handling process itself and the need to ensure that those working in the cold chain understand the process. Having effective and consistent processes adopted throughout the supply chain was considered the biggest issue and that 'people' were an integral part of any process. Training and education were listed prominently as being the key to achieving real improvements in the cold food chain to limit food loss and wastage.

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