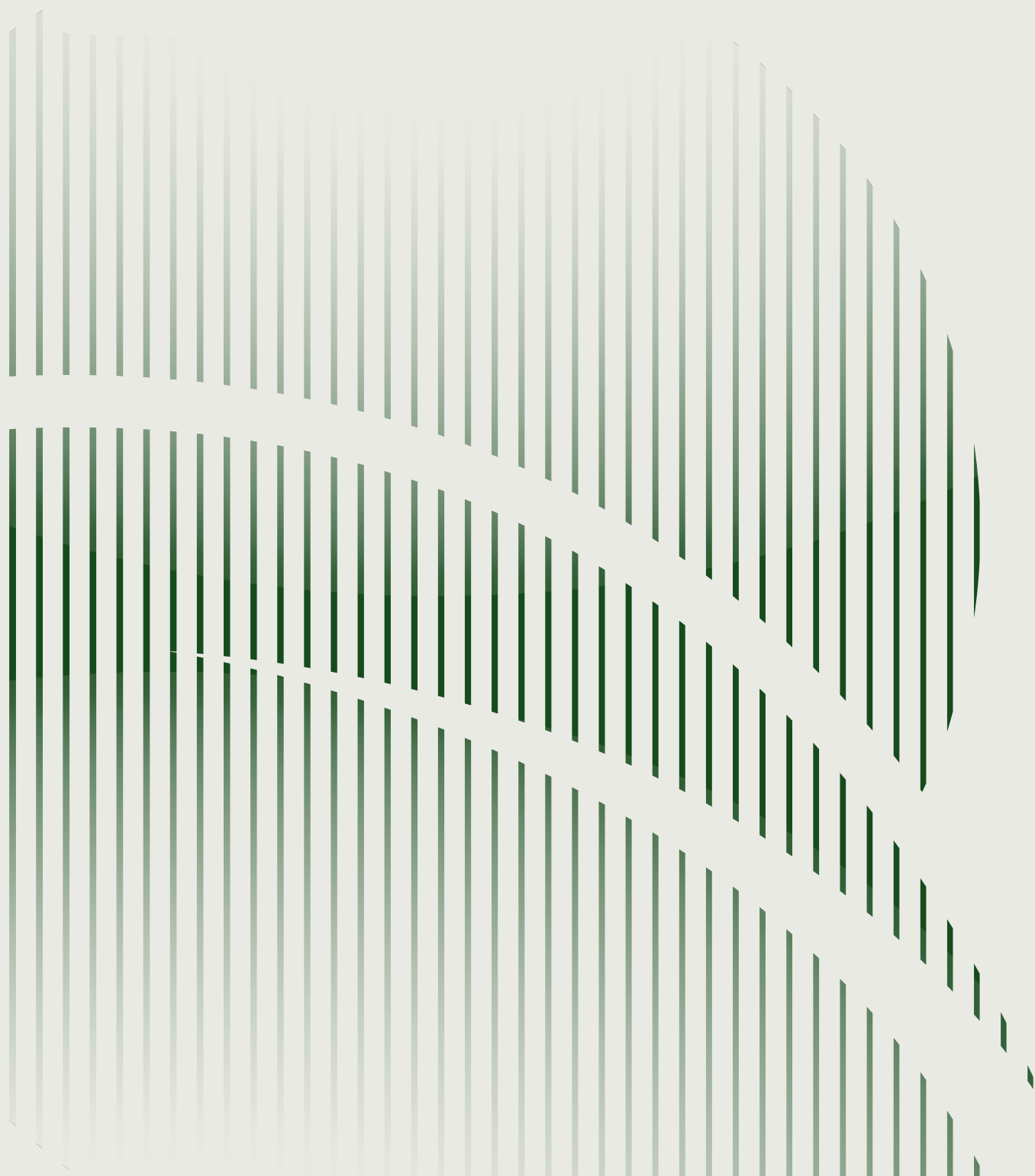




**Annual Review  
2023**

**Assuring Our Industry,  
Securing Your Future.**





# Acknowledgement of Country

Freshcare acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First people and Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where we meet, live, learn and work. We acknowledge and celebrate the rich and thriving diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, the oldest continuing living cultures in the world.

Freshcare pays respect to the Elders, knowledge holders and stewards of this land – past, present and emerging.

# Message from the Chairperson

As Australia’s largest provider of assurance programs for the fresh produce, wine grape and supply chain industries, Freshcare programs enable participating businesses to evolve to meet industry and market access requirements though certification and training.

The Freshcare Board drives Freshcare’s strategic focus towards initiatives which support participants, as the future of our industry becomes increasingly shaped by customer and consumer expectations. The Board’s strategic decisions ensure Freshcare is a fit for purpose organisation created by industry, for industry now and into the future.

Over the past year a review of Board structure has led to the inclusion of two new Director positions, which saw the appointment of Chief Technical and Sustainability Officer for Perfection Fresh Australia, Andrew Redman and supply chain optimisation consultant, Alison Buxton. In addition to Board expansion, a review of the Freshcare Constitution resulted in changes to the Board Director position renewal, with elected appointments to the Board running for a maximum of three consecutive terms.

These changes enable diverse representation across our broad industry and sectors to adequately assist Freshcare in meeting the needs and requirements of our stakeholders and participants.

As Freshcare progresses towards its strategic 2030 Vision and beyond, the Board is exploring initiatives which support participants, businesses and our industry to gain recognition for the incredible work they have been doing to grow and distribute safe and high-quality produce through implementing certification programs. Freshcare’s Data Lake initiative is a project in development that will consolidate over 20 years of existing and historically siloed datasets, to support collaborative and informed decision making for participants, industry and governments on the future of assurance and market access.

The Freshcare Board and team would like to thank and acknowledge outgoing Director Belinda Hazell for her excellence in leadership, governance and commitment to industry, throughout her 10-year tenure on the Freshcare Board. The Board announced a new award which will be given in her honour - The Hazell Award, for outstanding contribution to sustainability and food safety in Australia’s primary industries, of which Belinda was the first recipient. As Freshcare moves into an exciting new chapter, the Board will continue to develop strategies which reflect the evolving challenges and opportunities faced by the horticulture, supply chain and wine industries.

Allan Dall  
Chairperson



# The Board



Allan Dall  
Chairperson



Graham McAlpine  
Director



Alison Buxton  
Director



Gail Woods  
Deputy Chairperson



Jane Lovell  
Director



Dominique Doyle  
Director



Liz Riley  
Director



Andrew Redman  
Director





Freshcare is a registered charity with the Australian Charities & Not-For-Profit Commission. View a full financial overview.

## Message from the CEO

**Freshcare is the leading provider of certification programs in Australia and is in a unique position to bring together the broad-reaching sectors of our industries to collaborate on initiatives, projects and events, and this past year has been no exception.**

2023 has been a great opportunity to connect with industry, business and participants to collaborate on important challenges and opportunities, in an effort to continue the evolution of assurance and certification for our producers, businesses and supply chain.

### Freshcare’s Vision

Freshcare’s Vision 2030 strategic plan outlined a roadmap to delivering a sustainable future for Australian producers, expanding access to existing and emerging markets. The Freshcare Team, together with the Boards directive have largely achieved this goal through several initiatives, supported participants in recognition for the incredible work they already do in assuring our industry. Additionally, Freshcare projects provided opportunity for industry collaboration and supported growers and businesses to achieve certification.

### Supporting Our Participants

The inaugural Australian Assurance Summit, held at Warwick Farm in Sydney during November, encapsulated what Freshcare hopes to achieve in supporting our vast industry. The event created the opportunity to share ideas, collaborate and create solutions which enables Freshcare’s support of the fresh produce, supply chain and wine industry.

The implementation of Zendesk as part of Freshcare operational system has been a valuable asset to our team, allowing for continual improvement and improved efficiency in response times to our participants and our supported businesses.

Through extensive industry consultation, Freshcare listened to the feedback we had received on the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) Unannounced Audit rules and the potential impact it would

have on our growers. As a result, we were able to adapt the requirements to Australian grower’s unique needs, reducing the pressure of audit management, particularly on smaller businesses.

The release of our Supply Chain 2 standard and successfully achieving recognition against GFSI Benchmarking Requirements v2020. The recognition of this standard is an important accomplishment for Australia’s horticulture supply chain network.

The benchmarking of our Supply Chain standard highlights our domestic fresh produce industry already operates at a global standard. It was a great achievement for our domestic supply chain businesses, providing the opportunity to expand into export markets and international trade. Updating Freshcare’s Constitution has been an important review to reflect our current, best and contemporary corporate governance and business practices. Last updated in 2015, together with the Freshcare Board the new constitution was approved in July of this year.

### Future Focused

As Freshcare moves forward with strategic direction in 2024 we will continue to assist with challenges facing industry, by advocating for our participants to businesses, customers and government including the recognition for work they already do by bringing safe, sustainable and high-quality food to consumers.

Several upcoming projects aim to improve usability, accessibility to our programs and resources, in order to future proof assurance requirements for industry some of these include,

a full industry-wide Freshcare Standards review and update, modularisation of the Environmental Standard, creation of voluntary certification program with End Food Waste Australia, a collaborative research project with Hort Innovation focused on how Regulatory Technology can reduce duplication of compliance requirements for grower businesses, creation of a Recognised Consultants Register and planning for The Australian Assurance Summit 2025 is already underway.

I would like to acknowledge the incredible Freshcare team for their hard work and dedication this past year in supporting our participants and bringing our projects to life.

I would like to thank the Freshcare Board who bring a wealth of expertise, commitment and passion to our organisation and the businesses we support. The unwavering support of Allan Dall, Chair of the Board and Gail Woods, Deputy Chair of the Board is key to the many successes the team and I have achieved this year.

Additionally, my sincerest thank you to Belinda Hazell, who has stepped down from the Freshcare Board this year. Belinda completed three terms as Director and brought her invaluable knowledge and passion for the Australian fresh produce industry to this organisation, helping to guide Freshcare’s strategic direction, Act and vision.

**Chief Executive Officer  
Jane Siebum**



## Message from the FRAC

**The Freshcare Finance, Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC) performs a critical role in advising the Board, fortifying organisational responsibilities to safeguard revenue derived from Freshcare programs and services, enabling access for Australian producers and businesses to global markets.**

As a registered entity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), Freshcare channels its proceeds into the enhancement and upkeep of our standards, training and resources, underpinning the safety, sustainability and quality of domestic produce.

Freshcare FRAC has maintained its important advisory stance, consistently furnishing the Board with recommendations on financial governance, risk management systems, policies and transparency. This underscores our commitment to developing the organisation’s capacity to support industry, participants and stakeholders.

Over the past year, alongside our advisory duties, the FRAC, conducted a comprehensive review of the Freshcare constitution, last revised and published in 2015.

Given the organisational Governance shift, notably our registration as a Charity under the ACNC Act and strategic initiatives on the horizon, a modernised constitution had become imperative to ensure Freshcare’s continued relevance and effectiveness.

Through the rigorous review process, the FRAC, drawing on external advice from the Associations Forum, proposed amendments aimed at updating Director position renewal.

Noteably, our recommendation entails limiting elected appointments to the Board to a maximum of three consecutive terms, a measure aligned with contemporary governance practices.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my fellow committee members for their commitment to upholding the exemplary standards of Freshcare governance. Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge former Director and Chairperson, Belinda Hazell, whose dedication and contribution has left an indelible mark on FRAC and the broader Freshcare Board.

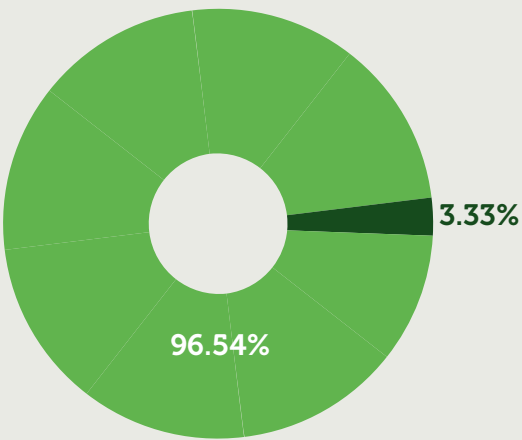
**Director and Chair  
Gail Woods**



### Financial information from the latest Annual Information Statement

#### Revenue

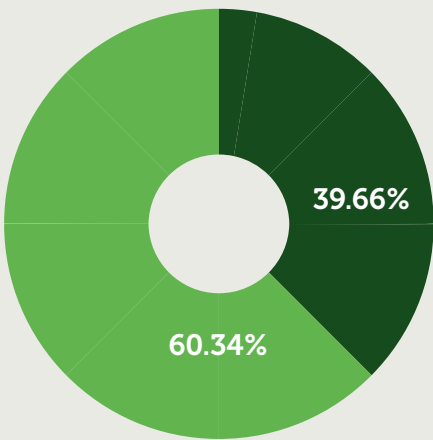
**Total revenue: \$1,725,746.00**



- Other revenue
- Revenue from Goods or Services

#### Expenses

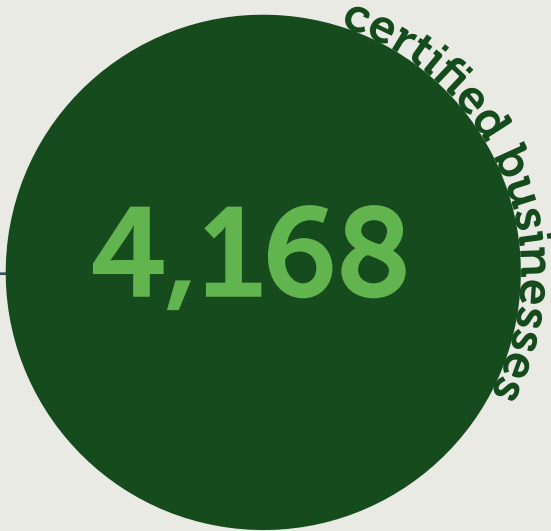
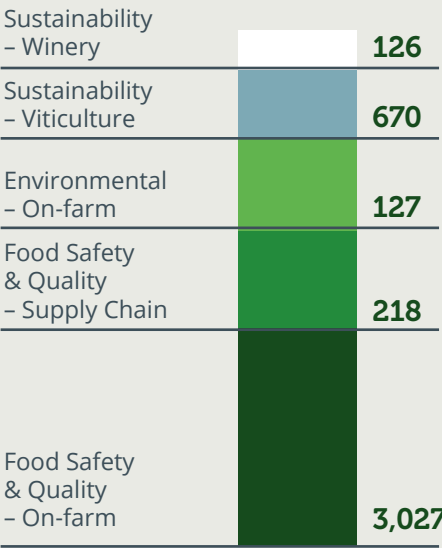
**Total expenses: \$1,652,408.00**



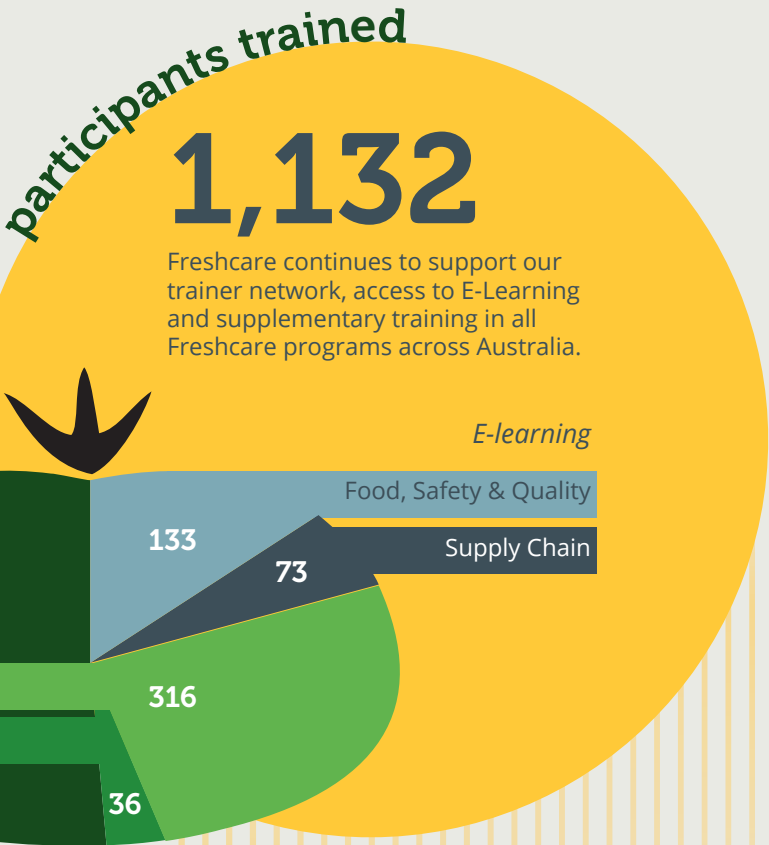
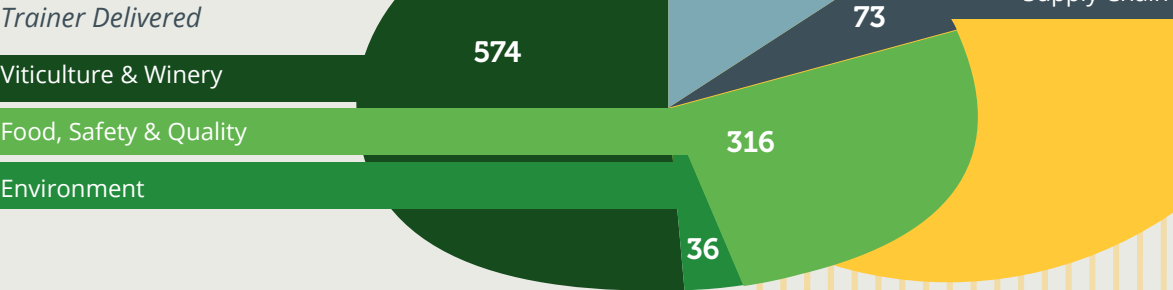
- Other expenses
- Operational expenses including wages

The Year in Review

Certification types

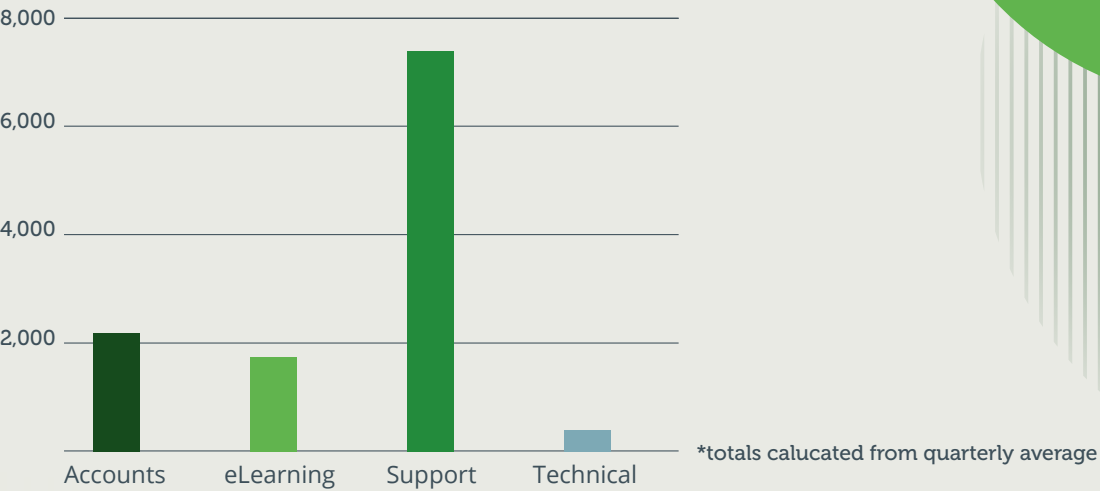


Freshcare Participant Training



Freshcare Customer Support Response

Freshcare has always provided local Australian customer support, with participants able to contact us directly and chat with our team who provide information, guidance and help. In 2023 Freshcare implemented Zendesk in our operational system. While the system has become an asset to our team, it means we can now track our response and support efforts. Zendesk allows for continual improvement and improved efficiency in response times to our participants and supported businesses.





# Transforming Grower Relationships with Communities

**Quality and Compliance Officer for OzGroup Co – Op, Shannon Kirsten has firsthand experience in the challenges growers face due to increasing urban encroachment into farming land.**

Shannon says the blueberry grower co-operative OzGroup has grown from 18 to 150 business in the past 20 years, operating across the Mid-North Coast NSW and Northern Rivers regions.

As more people have moved from big cities to the region, Shannon says the problem is now many blueberry farms are closer to residents, who don't have a farming background.

"They [local residents] can have this assumption that growers are spraying and using dangerous chemicals... but sometimes community don't understand what they are spraying, why they are spraying and the times they're spraying.

"They're wondering why are growers spraying at 2am in the morning, are they doing the wrong thing or are chemicals going into the water catchment?

"But some growers were spraying at 2 to 3am in the morning to protect the bee population, without the bees they can't pollinate their flowers, and then they can't have fruit.

"Growers have to manage their chemicals, otherwise they're not receiving their Freshcare certification," she says.

OzGroup works with local councils and sponsors community events to raise awareness and educate local populations about how blueberries are grown, and the strict requirements growers adhere to. The Co-op also open their packhouses for tours, to help combat the grower-community disconnect.

"We then have to provide loads of information to council and one of those things is their Freshcare certificate... to show growers are doing their due diligence," she says.

To assist in further community awareness Shannon says OzGroup is hoping to engage with schools this year, educating children on how their farms and packhouses work.

"Unfortunately, there is a huge disconnect with the kids and how their produce is being grown, and it starts with the kids.

"The kids understand, then end up educating the adults," she says.

Shannon hopes community and consumer knowledge of grower operations will only keep improving.

"If we spend more time in schools and educating community, if we tell community what Freshcare and Food Safety achieves throughout the whole supply chain, I think things will keep getting better," she says.

# Freshcare Grower's Celebrating 130 years of berry farming.



Image: Murray and Kevin Chapman of Blue Hills Berries & Cherries

**Celebrating 130 years running Australia's oldest berry farm, the Chapman family operate Blue Hills Berries & Cherries in the town of Silvan, situated in the Yarra Ranges east of Melbourne.**

Kevin and Tracey Chapman operate the Freshcare certified business across three blocks totalling about 50 acres growing cherries, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and boysenberries exclusively as a 'U-Pick' business.

The Chapmans don't package and sell any of their fruit to the wholesale markets but remain in the Freshcare program to support running an efficient farm, which helps them achieve a work-life balance.

"I find Freshcare quite user-friendly, it works for us to help manage the key tasks that need to happen to keep the farm operating smoothly.

"It's a good framework for us to use even though we don't pack and send any fruit to the market," explains Tracey.

Kevin says the choice to operate Blue Hills as a farm gate and 'U-Pick' operation, is the only way they can work as a small farm business.

"We like the lifestyle and we enjoy the work, but to grow and pack berries commercially I think you need to be a big operation these days," says Kevin.

Since the farm's inception 130 years ago, the original land has been divided between the Chapman sons across successive generations and has continued to make a significant

impact on people's lives. Blue Hills regulars, The Wellman family, have been visiting the farm for the past 30 years for their annual raspberry picking tradition.

"They spend the day picking raspberries and enjoying their time together, it's nice to be part of a long-standing family tradition," says Tracey.

With the cherry season finished and the berries growing slowing down in the coming months, Tracey and Kevin are looking forward to some much-needed break from the farm across winter.

# The Hazell Award

**The Freshcare Board announced a new award at The Summit which honors retiring Director Belinda Hazell, for outstanding contribution to sustainability and food safety in Australia's primary industries.**

In recognition of her outstanding commitment to sustainability and food safety in Australia and her contribution to the Freshcare organisation, we are pleased to announce a new award that will be chosen by the Board in her honor, in future years.

Belinda says she is honored, humbled and grateful for the opportunity Freshcare has provided her the ability to support growers, through influencing the systems they use every day.

Belinda has seen sustainability as a practice and concept become an increasing focus of farming and throughout industry. She hopes to see greater recognition of the work growers already do in this space.

"Sustainability has become more at the forefront of farming, it's something they've always done.

"What we need to do as a cohort is talk more about the fact, we have been doing this for a long time, and the community needs to more broadly value what farmers do," she says.



*"At the end of the day, I'm a grower at heart. When I've sat around the table with Freshcare and worked on how the programs have changed and evolved, it's always with a grower hat on."*

- Belinda Hazell.

Images: OzGroup blueberry growers & packing house



# The Australian Assurance Summit

Freshcare’s inaugural Australian Assurance Summit at Warwick Farm in Sydney, was hosted in November. The Summit brought together our diverse group of industry stakeholders from the fresh produce, supply chain and wine sectors. An overwhelming success, the two-day event identified key areas of growth across sectors, opportunities for industry and where the biggest challenges lie and how we can find solutions.



## Australian Assurance Summit

One of the major reoccurring themes throughout the Summit talks and panels focused on the importance of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting and its role in helping businesses tell their sustainability story and supporting the future of the Australian fresh produce and wine grape sectors.

The Australian Assurance Summit provided the chance to support our industry, collaborate, create solutions and share ideas to further secure a safe, sustainable and profitable future for Australian producers, supply chain and wine businesses and industry.

The feedback from delegates, speakers, sponsors and media has been overwhelmingly positive and we hope to see you at The Summit in 2025!

### Watch the highlights on YouTube



Event rated 4.69 stars by those that attended.



96% of attendees said they would recommend The Summit

### Summit Speakers

The Summit featured a diverse range of speakers, contributing to an engaging program, covering a broad range of topics and discussion areas relevant to our fresh produce, supply chain and wine participants, affiliated organisations and industry. Some highlights included:



Craig Reucassel  
(ABC’s War On Waste)

Craig’s insightful and wide-reaching speech was a fantastic open to the Summit. He talked about how our Australian production sector shouldn’t have to bear all the responsibility in areas like sustainability and food waste and consumers and communities strongly believe there’s an increasing need for government action in this space.



Dr Alexandra Bratanova  
(Senior Researcher, CSIRO)

Dr Bratanova opened the Summit’s second day, discussing the CSIRO’s latest findings on global ‘Megatrends’. The report examined our changing climate, geopolitical issues, the digitization of the world, the consequences for our health and wellbeing and the drive for us to become leaner, cleaner and greener.



Costa Georgiadis (Renown Australian Horticulturalist & Conservationist, ABC’s Gardening Australia)

Costa brought to The Summit Dinner energy, inspiration and thought-provoking ideas on the social licence of growers and the relationship to consumers and communities. He discussed our responsibility as an industry and individuals as stewards of the land and how we can all support the future of sustainability for future generations.



Images (left to right): Gail Woods - Freshcare Director; Richard Shannon - Executive Officer, Hort Council.



Images (left to right): Costa Georgiadis; Shannon Kirsten - OzGroup.





Freshcare & Industry Workshop

The Summit workshop session centred on some reoccurring questions and themes which emerged from the Summit and focused on three key areas of discussion.

Each group comprised of a range of delegates from varied industry sectors, which provided a broad range of ideas and perspectives. The discussions generated some insightful feedback for Freshcare and will inform ongoing strategic planning and vision. The Freshcare team hope to expand 2025 Summit sessions, to enable further development of industry initiatives.

How can Freshcare support you to tell your story to customers, community, and consumers?

Freshcare could play a crucial role in supporting growers to tell their story to various stakeholders, including customers, consumers, and the community. The discussions outlined that each group required specific education and communication, each exposing possible challenges and opportunities across each cohort. Ideas focused on understanding industry stakeholders and their needs, educating consumers and communities about the complexity of growing, empowering growers to tell their own stories and collaborating across industry associations and publications.

Would you support a Freshcare Trustmark?

Support for a Freshcare Trustmark in the workshop was generally supported by the discussion groups, but with need for clarification about its value to consumers and growers, which organisation should take ownership of a Trustmark, the logistics of implementation and where/how the Trustmark is displayed and relationships and likelihood of retailers supporting the scheme. Some practical solutions regarding QR coding supporting providence and traceability were suggested, of particular importance to domestic produce in export markets.

What would you like to see considered/not considered in a Freshcare Standards Review?

The delegates ideas and suggestions demonstrate a holistic approach to fresh produce standards to future-proof standards to encompass sustainability, efficiency and adaptability to adequately address future challenges. The discussion focused on the need to create a robust and responsive framework that addresses the needs of producers, auditors, and the industry which included; modulisation of standards, audit flexibility, inclusion of sustainability & environmental elements, independent MRL testing.



Images (left to right): The AusQual Summit Stand, behind the Summit scenes with Freshcare.



Summit Sponsors

We would like to thank and acknowledge our Summit partners and sponsors. Through their support, we were able to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to collaborate, discuss and secure the future of our fresh produce, supply chain and wine industries.



Summit Feedback

“Excellent event, I feel grateful to the organisers for the invitation to speak at the Summit”

“I really enjoyed learning about how AgTech can further support growers in this space especially with record keeping and using the ‘system’ approach rather than just focusing on audit time.”

“I thought it was fantastic, thanks for putting it together! It was a very approachable and comfortable crowd - I had the opportunity to chat to people who I wouldn’t normally, and I especially liked the workshop at the end.”

“Good job to the Freshcare team. A big job well done!!!!”

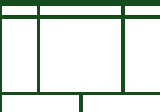
“Great event and great organisation.”



# Freshcare Future Focus Programs & Initiatives

The Freshcare Team and Board are continually assisting with challenges facing industry by advocating for our participants and growers to suppliers, customers and government.

Freshcare has a productive year planned for 2024, focusing on projects and initiatives which examine ways to gain regulatory recognition for the work our producers are already doing by bringing safe, sustainable high-quality food to consumers.



## Standards Review

To keep our programs and resources up-to-date and support the best possible outcomes for growers and businesses, Freshcare regularly undertakes an industry-wide review of our Standards. The review includes examining the Standards elements, accessibility and usability. Our Standards Review offers every business the opportunity to provide critical feedback and input, helping Freshcare to ensure our participants are armed with best business practice resources to deliver a sustainable and thriving industry.



## Modularisation of the Environmental Standard (ENV)

Sustainability and environmental requirements will become an increasingly important part of certification for primary producers worldwide. Through creating an add-on “module” system for participants, Freshcare aims to reduce duplication of certification requirements in the face of increasing customer, consumer and export demands on Australian growers, participants and businesses.



## Regulation Technology Research

Freshcare, in partnership with Hort Innovation, is examining how Regulatory Technology (RegTech) could be used to reduce the level of system duplication that exists for grower businesses related to compliance with industry, regulatory and crop specific requirements. As part of this project, Freshcare has released an industry-wide grower survey to help assess the level of compliance responsibility for grower businesses in the horticulture industry.

Supported by a \$471,000 grant from the Australian Government, the project is part of a \$6 million funding initiative seeking innovative solutions as part of the Regulatory Technology (RegTech) Research and Insights Grant Round of the National Agriculture Traceability Grants Program.

The broader goal of the multi-organisation RegTech Grant project is to find emerging technology and systems which make it easier for growers to provide traceability of their certification for food safety, quality, environmental and sustainability.



## End Food Waste Australia

An exciting project, partnering with key industry organisations to reduce Australia's annual food waste volume, which is currently estimated at 7.6 million tonnes costing our economy \$36.6 billion per year. Freshcare is collaborating with End Food Waste Australia to create an appropriate voluntary assurance program for food loss minimisation for horticulture grower participants.



## Approved Consultants

In response to the increased need to provide additional program support for program participants, Freshcare is establishing an approval process for consultants to be registered and provide recognised services for the Freshcare Standards. Meeting a set of criteria, Freshcare will approve consultants whose professional details will be publicly listed on our website.

This initiative will support growers to find and utilise consultants who have met core qualifications, training and experience requirements to provide Freshcare consultant services.

# Valued Industry Collaboration and Input

Freshcare is committed to collaborating with the broad range of stakeholders across the fresh produce supply chain, viticulture and wine industries.

Through creating working groups and industry led committees we provide the opportunity to drive the development of assurance programs that support, promote and provide security for Australian producers.

In addition to our existing Technical Steering Committee (TSC), Freshcare with direction from the Board, created two new industry collectives, the Freshcare Industry Collaboration Committee (FICC) and the Information Technology Committee (ITC).

## Technical Steering Committee (TSC)

The Technical Steering Committee provides advice and guidance on Freshcare Standards and the supporting program resources.

Members bring to the committee a wide range of experience across quality assurance, auditing, training, science and industry best practice to inform technical decisions on the Freshcare Food Safety & Quality, Environmental, Supply Chain and Sustainability Standards.

During the past year the TSC agenda has included the Freshcare Standards; maintaining and futureproofing; digitisation and modularisation; and the introduction of Primary Production and Processing Legislation in February 2025.

Additionally, the TSC discussed the program training, learning opportunities and industry upskilling.

As Freshcare moves towards a review of the Standards in 2024 we look forward to engaging with the expertise of our TSC members in the coming 12 months.

## Freshcare's Industry Collaboration Committee (FICC)

The Freshcare Industry Collaboration Committee (FICC) was created to drive the strategic development of assurance programs for Australian producers.

The first FICC meeting was held in conjunction with The Australian Assurance Summit, bringing together members from across a wide range of industry backgrounds. Members identified several opportunities and risks facing the industry now and into the future which focused on technology, industry communications, certification standards, political factors and the audit workforce.

Freshcare Chairperson, Allan Dall says the FICC aims to create a voice for all people who work across our broad industries through creating an inclusive collective to facilitate robust discussion and strategy development.

“As Australia's largest assurance standard in the horticulture and wine industries in Australia, this Board led initiative builds on our already strong governance framework and increases options for industry to contribute to our long-term strategy and direction.

“The Freshcare Industry Collaboration Committee creates an opportunity for members of industry and the supply chain to have meaningful input to the strategic direction of our assurance standards in parallel to our established Technical Steering Committees for each standard,” he says.

## Information Technology Committee (ITC)

Freshcare bought together several highly experienced IT providers to understand how we can provide participants with digital solutions to assist with supporting assurance for industry.

The major activity of the ITC was to examine how Freshcare could recognise IT solutions for cyber credentials and identify the potential for meeting specific elements of the Freshcare criteria.

Input from the ITC will continue to inform Freshcare projects and initiatives in 2024.



### Office Hours

Monday to Friday 8.30am-4.30pm AEST

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