



# PRESS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **PMA SOUTHERN AFRICA PARTICIPATES IN WORLD FOOD SAFETY DAY CELEBRATIONS**

Unsafe food kills an estimated 420 000 people every year. Children under five years are the most at risk, amounting to 125 000 deaths a year. Nearly one-in-ten people, or some 600 million, fall ill each year after eating contaminated food. This is according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Themed “Food safety, everyone’s business” World Food Safety Day will be celebrated on Sunday, 7 June to draw global attention to the health consequences of contaminated food. The initiative was developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Department of Health (DoH), Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) and the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS) in collaboration with the food industry and industry experts joined hands in promoting global food safety awareness leading up to World Food Safety Day.

Deon Mahoney, Head of Food Safety at the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Australia-New Zealand participated in a webinar with Dr Mphane Molefe at the Department of Veterinary Public Health, Dr Peter Vervoort at the National Animal Health Forum, Dr Gernard Neethling at the Red Meat Abattoir Association, and Dr Chris van Dijk at the Milk Producers Organisation.

A challenge faced by South Africa and the developing world is food security and food safety. Mahoney explained that there will be no food security without food safety. Ending hunger is about all people having access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round. Food safety has a direct impact on people’s health and nutritional intake.

“Horticulture plays a significant role in the South African agricultural industry in terms of its annual growth in production. According to [‘The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Industry in South Africa 2019’](#) report horticulture’s contribution to the value of total agriculture has steadily increased over the past two decades. Fresh fruit and vegetables accounted for 28.8% of the annual gross value of agricultural production in the 2017/2018 season. It was worth R78 billion in the 2017/2018 growing season and the sector employs over 300,000 people, more than a third of total employment in agriculture,” Mahoney said.

“The range of microbiological hazards found in fresh produce is limited compared to those found in meat, dairy products and seafood. Plus, many categories of fresh produce present a low risk, such as root vegetables like

potatoes and carrots. However, some categories are a higher risk, especially those consumed fresh such as melons, berries and fresh leafy greens. The usual suspects of Salmonella, Listeria, Campylobacter and a number of parasites such as Cryptosporidium and Cyclospora which may be transmitted to fresh produce. There is also the issue of chemical residues and environmental contaminants which can impact on the safety of fresh produce.”

“Unlike the meat industry and the dairy industry, the fresh produce industry does not have strong regulatory oversight, mostly because it wasn’t considered to present a high risk in the past. Nowadays there is a greater focus on fresh produce because of an increasing incidence of foodborne illness linked to fruits and vegetable. So there is a focus on managing food safety in terms of agricultural inputs, such as irrigation water quality, the use of untreated manure and fertiliser, proximity to animals and feedlots - as they are impacting the safety of horticulture and our fresh produce.”

“Consumers need to understand that there is no such thing as a totally safe food. There are risks inherent in everything. Most vegetables are peeled then cooked – these processes will remove any contamination if it exists, whereas washing fruits before consumption will be good enough too,” he said.

Mahoney said it is not advised to wash fruits and vegetables with sanitisers and disinfectants. He added that the COVID-19 virus is fairly fragile and is unlikely to survive washing with fresh running water or cooking processes.

Mahoney concluded by saying PMA is there to assist the industry in their journey to provide safe food for a growing world population and to assure market access for South African produce. PMA has recently appointed Lianne Jones as the new country manager for South Africa and she could be contacted with any enquiries on email [ljones@pma.com](mailto:ljones@pma.com)

#### **ABOUT PMA:**

The Produce Marketing Association (PMA) is a trade organisation representing companies from every segment of the global fresh produce and floral supply chain. PMA helps members grow by providing connections that expand business opportunities and increase sales and consumption. PMA has a unique network of more than 63 000 contacts from more than 2 700 member companies, based in 95 countries across six continents. These contacts span all sizes and types of businesses across the supply chain.

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