

SENDING SAFE AID WITHOUT HARMFUL PESTS AND DISEASES

FACTSHEET 03

For donors sending fresh produce and other food items

Please help us to safeguard our vulnerable environment and communities by ensuring that any humanitarian aid that is sent does not inadvertently introduce harmful pests and diseases

Why is this important to us?

The movement of food and other humanitarian aid is a known pathway for the introduction of harmful pests and diseases. Unless appropriate and timely risk management is applied, these new pests and diseases may become established and continue to cause long-term damage to our economy, environment and communities long after we have recovered from the emergency situation.

The introduction of new pests and diseases can affect the quality and yield of agricultural produce which can jeopardise food security. Pest introductions can also damage the sanitary and phytosanitary status of a country, making it more difficult to trade with other countries and build back the economy.

During crisis situations, we are temporarily constrained in our ability to implement our normal phytosanitary activities on donated goods at the border. This is because our treatment and processing infrastructure may be damaged or inaccessible; water, electricity and other services may be cut and staff may be unable to travel to work or may be diverted to emergency tasks. Additionally, other government agencies and officials may require the immediate release of goods to people in need without going through our normal process.

To ensure that our staff can focus effort on other priority activities such as food and shelter distribution, please help us by taking steps to mitigate the pest risk of donated goods **prior to export**.

Pest risk considerations for fresh produce and other food items

Different types of donated food items pose varying levels of pest risk to the aid receiving country. As a general rule, fresh produce (any kind of unprocessed fruit and vegetables, including leafy vegetables) poses a significantly higher pest and disease risk than processed and non-perishable food items.

This is because viruses, bacteria and other diseases can survive and reproduce in the cells of living plant material and insect pests such as fruit flies can lay eggs in fruits and vegetables which can hatch and proliferate once in the new country.

Generally, food items that are intended for immediate human consumption pose lower risk. Because it is less likely that the infested/infected produce will come into contact with other host plants in the environment, which would enable the pest or disease to spread. However, during an emergency situation, there is potential for fresh produce items which contain viable seeds (e.g. tomatoes, capsicums, eggplants, pumpkins, mangoes, papayas and apples) or that can be vegetatively propagated (e.g. taro, sweet potato and pineapple crowns) to be diverted from their intended use and be planted rather than processed or consumed. This action increases the risk of pest and disease introductions significantly.

Food items that have been processed (cooked, ground, dried, preserved, canned) pose a much lower pest and disease risk. Of these, milled products such as flours or flakes and preserved products such as canned fruits and vegetables pose the lowest pest risk.

Grains such as cereals and pulses can harbour storage pests such as khapra beetle, which infest stored products making them inedible. Storage pests are a serious concern for food security as they can destroy food and seed stores for the next season.

Prior to shipment it is best to store pallets of food items on surfaces that prevent contact with soil/grass and away from heavily vegetated areas that are artificially lit at night. This reduces the risk of pest contamination. If seasonal pest outbreaks (e.g. brown marmorated stinkbug) are a normal occurrence, or if the above conditions can't be met, consider using special protection e.g. wrapping/covering, to reduce pest contamination risk.



Mediterranean fruit fly larvae infesting citrus fruit (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bugwood.org).



Where possible please send canned, dried and otherwise preserved food (Shutterstock).



Inspect fresh produce for any contaminating pests or diseases prior to export (C. Dale).

What can you do to help us?

Before sending any aid, please work with your department of agriculture or relevant quarantine authority to ensure that:

- The goods are permitted into the country receiving aid.
- All import requirements of the receiving country are met.
- Required treatments and certifications are applied before export.
- The appropriate documentation and clearances are attached to the aid shipment.

The above processes are performed by your department of agriculture or relevant quarantine authority as part of normal trade/export practices. Please contact them if you have any queries on what to do.

Help us mitigate the pest risk prior to export by:

- Where possible, send lower risk food items such as canned, milled and otherwise preserved food items instead of fresh produce. In addition to posing lower pest risk, these items are also easier to store and distribute.
- Visually inspect any fresh produce or dried grain and other food items that are donated to ensure that they are free of any signs of pest and disease and are in otherwise good condition.
- Undertaking any required treatments e.g. fumigation, hot water immersion or cold treatment before sending any fresh produce or other food items.
- If available and possible, select seedless varieties (e.g. seedless watermelons, cucumbers, tomatoes etc.) over traditional ones to avoid the risk of diversion from human consumption.
- Ensuring fresh produce and other food items are sourced from reputable organisations, growers or facilities.
- Where possible, ensure that any fresh produce is sourced from areas free of quarantine pests and diseases.
- Removing all soil and other contamination from fresh produce and other food items prior to packaging and shipment.
- Selecting the best possible packaging to increase shelf-life and protect food items from contamination.

Funding provided by the Australian Government.

- If sacks and bags are used (e.g. for root vegetables or corms), ensure they are low risk: whenever possible, use woven polypropylene (WPP) bags rather than natural fibre bags (hessian, jute, sisal cotton cloth or burlap).
- Where possible, avoid sending open (uncovered or unsealed) crates, trays, lugs, pallet bins, wire bound crates and bulk bags as these can be easily contaminated.
- If the fresh produce has been sourced from another country, clearly state this on the consignment and on the phytosanitary certificate.
- Providing any other additional declarations including testing results for specific quarantine pests, phytosanitary and sanitation programs in the field or growing inspections in the field etc.
- Clearly stating on the phytosanitary certificate and on labels and stickers: "FRESH PRODUCE FOR IMMEDIATE CONSUMPTION, DO NOT STORE – DO NOT USE FOR PLANTING"; "FRESH PRODUCE FOR IMMEDIATE PROCESSING, DO NOT PLANT."

To ensure that the products sent are of greatest help, please re-consider sending the following items:

- Fresh, soft or summer fruit with a short self-life (e.g. berries, peaches).
- Fruit and vegetables which require constant refrigeration in the supply chain.
- Leafy vegetables with a high perishability (e.g. spinach, lettuces, swiss chards, fresh herbs etc.).
- Fresh produce including root vegetables, corms or tubers with soil attached, shoots (e.g. sweet or Irish potatoes, etc.) or roots (e.g. leeks, beetroots, carrots, etc.).
- Overripe or damaged produce (e.g. overripe mango).
- Produce in non-compliant, dirty, re-used, old or damaged packaging.

If packaging or packing is used, it should be new, clean and free of pests and other contaminants. Any freight containers that are used for storage or transport should also be cleaned and pest free (see [IPPC best practice guide on measures to minimise pest contamination](https://www.ippc.int/en/publications/89786/) for more information)¹.

¹ International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) recommendation on the safe provision of food and other humanitarian aid: <https://www.ippc.int/en/publications/89786/>.