

Fact Sheet – March 2020

COVID-19 Checklist for Hand Harvesting and Processing Plants



Background

As from midnight 25 March 2020 New Zealand moved to National Alert 4 in response to COVID-19. There are stringent measures around this status limiting businesses that can continue to operate (essential services), travel, etc.

The government has classified an essential service as a business that operates to provide the necessities of life to New Zealanders. In the horticulture industry this includes growers of fresh fruit and vegetables for domestic supply and export and other operations that directly support production. The olive growing sector is therefore part of the 'essential services' category of supplying the food chain under National Alert 4 **provided** the growers supply olives and/or olive oil for retail/wholesale.

The above does not apply if you do not have a National Programme registered with Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) or your regional Council **OR** you only grow olives for personal or friends/family use. **If any of these apply you do not fall under the Essential Services category.**

Currently there is no evidence of foodborne transmission being a significant pathway for the transmission of COVID-19. That is COVID-19 is unlikely to be passed on through fresh food produce. However COVID-19 may survive up to three hours on dry inanimate surfaces, and several hours on hands, tissues and other surfaces, although this depends on the nature of the surface, environmental conditions, etc.

Olive growers need to ensure that they have effective measures in place to protect their people and ensure food safety. Commercial producers and processing plants may look to implement their own measures, typically under the MPI Register for Safe Practice. A minimum Processing Plant Checklist is included in this Fact Sheet.

Horticulture New Zealand has an excellent section on their website dedicated to COVID-19 as it applies to horticulture.

<https://www.hortnz.co.nz/news-events-and-media/media-releases/covid-19-update-for-horticulture/>

Key Facts

- There is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through food.
- Extra care should be taken with hygiene and health to reduce the risk of COVID-19.
- Everyone needs to follow the social distancing requirements requested by the Government.

For further information see: <https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/safety/Pages/NOVEL-CORONAVIRUS-AND-FOOD-SAFETY.aspx>

All care has been taken in the preparation of this Fact Sheet.

If in doubt check out the Government or MPI websites on COVID-19.

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Olive Grove Checklist for Hand Harvesting

This checklist applies whether a grove is using family, friends, WOOFERS, staff, contract workers, etc. to assist with harvest, as well as courier drivers and any other visitors. Note there is a request that over 70s stay at home!

No people allowed on site within 14 days of returning from overseas travel.

Any person who appears visibly ill or has symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, flu like symptoms, gastrointestinal illness MUST be required to leave immediately.

Provision of hand sanitiser and hand washing facility accessible for all people. People are required to sanitise or thoroughly wash their hands when they first arrive and throughout the day.

Promotion of good hand and sneezing/cough hygiene.

No handshakes, hugging, etc.

Keep a distance of at least 2 metres between people where ever possible.

Limit handling and sharing of food, eat outside if possible otherwise open windows and doors for maximum ventilation.

Ensure the strictest hygiene among those preparing shared food and drinks but strongly recommend that people bring their own food and drinks.

Regular cleaning and disinfecting/sanitising of high touch services including but not limited to equipment, crates, transport vehicles, door handles, light switches, floors, walls. People should minimise handling of all of these to a must need basis.

The use of Personal Protective Equipment (masks, gloves, etc.) should be optional.

All visitors must be approved by the grove owner and must sign in via a Register. This Register should contain a declaration that the visitor has not returned from overseas travel within 14 days, has no signs of illness, and agrees to abide by prescribed hygiene procedures. The Register should also include the date, time of arrival/departure and contact details.

Note

The olives still need to be processed as soon as possible after harvest to preserve quality.

According to Pablo Canamasas, world renowned expert on olive oil production, harvest → processing time is one of the most important parameters affecting oil quality. Pablo recommends that fruit should be processed within 12 hours of harvesting to avoid quality issues. A delay longer than 24 hours will most likely have an impact on the oil quality. Time delay will result in aerobic and anaerobic fermentations inside the olives which will cause issues with FFA and organoleptic standards, at the least.

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Processing Plant Checklist

This checklist applies to all visitors to the processing plant staff.

Any courier deliveries to be non-signature required.

No people allowed on site within 14 days of returning from overseas travel.

Any person who appears visibly ill or has symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, flu like symptoms, gastrointestinal illness MUST be required to leave immediately.

Provision of hand sanitiser and hand washing facility accessible for all people. Visitors are required to sanitise or thoroughly wash their hands when they first enter the premises.

Promotion of good hand and sneezing/cough hygiene.

No handshakes, hugging, etc.

Keep a distance of at least 2 metres between people where ever possible.

To minimise the risk of surface transmission from delivery containers, the processing plant may require the delivering person to empty crates into a receiving bin, without touching the receiving bin and then take away the crates.

Regular cleaning and disinfecting/sanitising of high touch services including but not limited to equipment, crates, transport vehicles, door handles, light switches, floors, walls.

The processing plant may require their staff to wear Personal Protective Equipment.

All visitors must be approved by the processing plant manager and must sign in via a Register. This Register should contain a declaration that the visitor has not returned from overseas travel within 14 days, has no signs of illness, and agrees to abide by prescribed hygiene procedures. The Register should also include the date, time of arrival/departure and contact details.

Processing plants should check to see if they need to register with MPI.

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/covid-19-essential-primary-sector-service-registration/>

See the note on the previous page regarding harvest → processing time.