

BEST PRACTICE HARVEST GUIDELINES

EMS requirements for harvesting are set out in the NZ Avocado quality manual and include fruit maturity standards, harvesting method and handling procedures.

Rainfall

- Do not pick fruit if there has been more than 5mm of rain in the last 24 hours.
- Picking should only recommence at least 2 hours after the rain has stopped and when fruit are dry to the touch.

The appropriate period of time to wait before harvest will depend on the drying conditions on the day. If the fruit cannot “lose” water, the lenticels may still be hydrated and susceptible to handling damage. Be aware that although it may not have rained 24 hours prior to harvest, wet soils due to constant rainfall over a prolonged period can lead to increased turgor in fruit, and this may increase handling damage and subsequent fruit rot development.

Temperature

- Harvesting should be done at temperatures less than 30°C and not above 35°C.
- Fruit awaiting transportation must be held in the shade under cool conditions.
- Every effort must be made to deliver fruit to the packhouse on the day of harvest and must be delivered to the packhouse within 24 hours of harvesting.

Exposed fruit is vulnerable to sunburn. Fruit picked at higher temperatures will lose up to 10% more weight, respire at a much higher rate whilst hot, and take significantly longer to cool.

Physical damage

- Physical damage at any point must be minimised.
- Harvested fruit must not come into contact with an unprotected ground surface.
- All stalks must be carefully cut to 5mm or less.
- Bins are to be clean and free of sources of contamination.
- Bins used for holding and transporting fruit shall be handled in such a manner that

contamination and physical damage does not occur.

- DO NOT use drop bags when picking from elevated platforms.
- Do not drop avocados more than 10cm into picking bags or when emptying from picking bags.
- Do not overfill bins.
- Use specialised avocado clippers with rounded noses.
- Sterilise picking equipment daily.
- Keep fingernails short.
- Regularly check the condition of bins for potential fruit injury points.
- Remove all plant debris from picking bags and bins each time they are emptied

Physical damage to fruit can have an effect on fruit quality. **DO NOT** use drop bags on elevated work platforms. This is to maintain fruit quality by reducing the pressure on fruit and lenticel damage caused by collisions between the drop bag and the canopy and/or the ground. Dropping the picking bag is also a potential Health & Safety risk as the maximum Safe Working Load may be exceeded. Picking efficiency can still be maintained by placing bins closer to pickers. Using a drop bag restricts mobility through the canopy.

Food safety update

Contract harvesters do not need a Food Safety programme UNLESS they transport fruit and then need to be compliant under the Food Act 2014. Packhouses may also require contract harvesters to have an independently third party audited food safety programme.

Reference

Part 4: NZ Avocado Quality Manual 2019