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Why market access matters more than ever in food and agriculture

With more than 70 per cent of Australian agricultural production exported, securing and maintaining access to global markets remains a critical challenge for the nation's food, beverage and agribusiness sector.

As trade rules become increasingly complex and market access more difficult to achieve, ANZ says effective market access is now almost as important as producing the food itself.

According to ANZ's latest Food for Thought report, exporters are navigating a rapidly changing trading environment where access can depend on everything from quota limits and biosecurity rules to proving products are free from deforestation.

A steak exported to China can face sharply higher tariffs once import quotas are filled. Coffee sold into Europe may require evidence it is not linked to deforestation. Even rice supplies can be affected when major exporting countries restrict shipments to protect domestic consumers.

Gerry Karam, Head of Food, Beverage and Agribusiness – Institutional at ANZ, said production remains critical, but market access is progressively becoming an important source of competitive advantage.

"Australia produces far more food than it consumes, which means export markets are essential to the success of many agricultural industries.

"Producing high-quality food is no longer enough. Increasingly, success depends on maintaining access to the customers who buy it."

The report highlights how quickly market access can change. Australian wine exports to mainland China were worth about \$1.15 billion in the year ending March 2020 before falling to around \$11 million by 2023 after trade restrictions were introduced.

Production did not disappear, but access to the market was significantly constrained. For consumers, the consequences of changing trade rules can directly impact the price and availability of everyday products on supermarket shelves.

The report notes that trade is becoming more complex, with the number of food safety, animal health and plant health notifications lodged with the World Trade Organization increased from 198 in 1995 to 2,496 in 2025, reflecting the growing number of requirements exporters must understand and navigate.

"Market access used to sit quietly in the background. Today, it is becoming a strategic capability in its own right.

"Exporters increasingly need to demonstrate traceability, meet evolving standards, navigate changing regulations and maintain access across multiple markets," Mr Karam continued.

The report outlines that businesses that diversify markets, respond quickly to changing requirements and maintain strong compliance systems will be better positioned in an increasingly fragmented trading environment. Australia's reputation for safe, high-quality food and its strong biosecurity system remain important advantages.

"Australia's agricultural success has always depended on trade. As global food trade becomes more complex, maintaining market access is becoming almost as important as maintaining production itself," Mr Karam concluded.

Further insights can be found in the Q3 2026 edition of ANZ's Food for Thought report.

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