

Fruit and Vegetable Packer interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for fruit and vegetable packer roles focus on your reliability, food safety habits, and ability to keep pace on a grading or packing line. Employers want to know you can handle the physical work and follow hygiene rules without close supervision.

- **Process and reliability:** Questions about availability for seasonal work, shift rotations, and your ability to stand, lift and work in cool rooms.
- **Technical and food safety:** How you apply HACCP, Food Standards Code and Freshcare requirements, and how you grade produce.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of teamwork, following instructions, and handling pressure during peak harvest.
- **Scenario and judgement:** What you would do when produce is out of spec, the line slows, or hygiene is at risk.

A typical interview starts with a short phone screen about availability and fitness, then a face-to-face or site interview with a packhouse supervisor. You may be shown the grading line and asked how you would handle produce, and some employers run a paid trial shift to see your pace and attention to detail.

1. Can you walk me through how you grade and pack a load of produce, from arrival on the line to dispatch?

Why they ask

This shows whether you understand the full packhouse flow and where quality checks happen.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: start at receipt, explain grading criteria, packing, labelling, stacking and dispatch.

Example answer

"On arrival, I check the load against the receipt sheet, then tip fruit onto the conveyor. I grade by size, colour and firmness, removing any soft, split or mouldy pieces. Good fruit goes to the packing station where I fill punnets or cartons to the buyer spec. I label each carton with the correct date and line code, then stack pallets for the cool room or dispatch. Before the pallet leaves, I check counts and make sure the barcode scan matches the load. Anything out of spec goes to the reject bin and I record it if needed."

2. Tell me about a time you noticed a food safety or hygiene issue on a packing line. What did you do?

Why they ask

Food safety is central to the role. The interviewer wants to see you act rather than ignore a problem.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Focus on the action you took and the outcome for the batch or line.

Example answer

"During a stone fruit season, I was packing on a line when I saw a small patch of mould on a peach that had already passed the first grading table. I stopped the line and told my supervisor. We pulled the affected cartons from the pallet, checked the rest of the batch, and cleaned the brushes and belts before restarting. The result was that no contaminated fruit went to dispatch, and we added a second check at the packing station for the rest of that shift."

3. You are packing punnets on a busy line and you see a batch with soft spots and mould. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and whether you know when to stop the line.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: assess the batch, act to protect food safety, communicate, and keep the line moving where safe.

Example answer

"I would stop packing that batch and isolate the affected punnets. I would tell my supervisor straight away and check whether the issue is just a few pieces or the whole batch. If it is a few, I would remove them to the reject bin and keep going with clean produce. If it is widespread, the batch should be held and not dispatched. I would also check my gloves and the packing surface and clean them if needed, so the problem does not spread."

4. This role can involve repetitive lifting and standing for long shifts in a cool room. How do you manage your physical stamina and stay safe?

Why they ask

Employers need to know you can handle the physical demands and work safely through a full shift.

How to structure your answer

Practical answer: describe your routine, safe lifting technique, warm clothing, hydration, and how you pace yourself.

Example answer

"I am used to being on my feet for a full shift. I wear the right gear for the cool room, keep my lifting technique close to my body with bent knees, and rotate between tasks where I can. I take my breaks and drink water regularly, and I speak up if a task is causing strain or if I need to adjust my station. I also stretch before shifts and keep my gloves and sleeves in good condition so I can grip produce safely."

5. Describe how you keep your work area clean and meet HACCP or Food Standards Code requirements during a shift.

Why they ask

This checks that you understand hygiene as an ongoing duty, not just a task at the end of the day.

How to structure your answer

Technical process: list the routine, from start-of-shift checks to cleaning during breaks and end-of-shift sanitation.

Example answer

"At the start of a shift, I check that my station is clean and that the cleaning log is signed. During the shift, I clear offcuts and damaged produce regularly so they do not build up, and I wash or sanitise my hands and gloves when I change tasks. If I spill juice or produce, I clean it straight away to avoid slips and contamination. At the end of the shift, I clean the grading belts, brushes and surfaces with the approved sanitiser, and I record what I have done so the next shift starts with a hygienic line."

6. Tell me about a time you worked with a team to meet a tight dispatch deadline.

Why they ask

Packing is a team effort, especially during harvest. The interviewer wants evidence you can communicate and help others.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Highlight how you coordinated with others and what the team achieved.

Example answer

"During a peak harvest week, we had a large retail order to get on the truck before the cool room cut-off. I was packing punnets and noticed the labelling station was falling behind. I told my supervisor I could switch to labelling once my pallet was finished, and another packer took over my punnet line. We kept the conveyor moving and checked each pallet before it went to dispatch. The order went out on time with the correct labels, and no cartons were left behind at the end of the shift."