National Farmers Federation

10-Point Approach to Solving the Horticultural Labour Issue

The aim of this document - produced by the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and the NFF Horticulture Council - is to provide short and direct key points from the Horticulture industry to Federal and State Governments to help industry navigate through workforce shortages.

A. Immediate Term – (0-2 months)

1. *Seasonal Worker Program Pilot Expansion*

Industry is fully supportive of this program and understands the Federal Government has outlined its checklist to get this pilot replicated in other states. State Governments and industry must drive the pilot in their respective states by adequately addressing the following –

a. The State must be able to demonstrate and advocate that there is unmet labour demand in their respective horticulture sector.
b. The State must be able to manage the quarantine processes for the incoming workforce.
c. The State must be able to ensure that priority is given to returning Australian's from overseas.
d. The State's Chief Medical Health Officer must also endorse the program and be comfortable with the quarantine processes.

Industry is supportive of these measures and will continue to work with various State and Federal Governments to get this in motion.

Industry, however, needs support in determining which of the Pacific Islands will be able and willing to help provide a workforce next. The current NT SWP pilot is being sourced from Vanuatu, while industry has suggested Fiji and Timor-Leste may be the next possible options.

2. *Incentives for domestic displaced workers*

Industry and workers require a pathway to assist domestic workers who want to pursue employment in the horticulture sector.

NFF House
14-16 Brisbane Ave.
Barton ACT 2600
Locked Bag 9
Kingston ACT 2600
(02) 6269 5666
nff.org.au
ABN 77 097 140 166

a. One-off relocation support payment of $1200 for displaced workers moving to regions to work in horticulture
b. Seasonal Worker Incentive Trial – but the Hort Council recommends the trial would need to be rebranded – to offer support measures for people looking to work in the sector.
   Key elements of the trial include –
   i. a Provider Seasonal Work Incentive Payment of $100 per week for up to six weeks for DES Providers who place eligible DES Participants with eligible Employers.
   ii. a Seasonal Work Living Away and Travel Allowance of $300 each year for eligible Participants where the job is more than 120km from their home.
   iii. a Seasonal Horticulture Work Income Exemption allowing eligible Participants in receipt of JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (Other) to earn up to $5,000 each year from seasonal horticultural work without it being counted under the social security income test.

3. *Agriculture Workforce Code introduction*

The development of an Agriculture Workforce Code and endorsement from all states and territories is significant as growers need assurances of being able to continue to grow their fresh produce.

4. *Promotion of opportunities to work in agriculture*

A broad campaign promoting farm work and portraying it as a realistic and desirable option for workers, for both short term 'crisis' employment and then as a longer-term career path.

The campaign would be targeted at displaced Australians and — in addition to encouraging them to seek out opportunities to work in agriculture — would inform them of the resources (and incentives) which are available to support/encourage the move.

The program would be funded by government but run by industry with in-kind contributions and would include advertisements and articles in traditional and social media, a web presence (with 'downloadable' pamphlets and brochures), and direct outreach information & registration sessions. It could also include a question and answer service (probably via email although a hotline should be considered), provided that this does not duplicate the work of the Harvest Trail Services.

5. ***Accommodation support***

Industry requires appropriate accommodation support for an incoming workforce as they struggle to find suitable accommodation in regional areas.

With limited travel in regional areas we believe local accommodation support in hotels and motels may be suitable for the short term, but it requires certainty in terms of financial support from government for the worker and the grower.

This would could also serve as support to many regional businesses doing it tough in the current environment.

B. Short Term – (3-6 months)

6. ***Development of a National Agriculture Workforce Development Network***

Industry is supportive of the creation of a National Agriculture Workforce Development Network similar to that of the successful Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network (QAWN).

Industry proposes that each state has a representative reporting under the Department of Agriculture who works with industry, Harvest Labour Service Providers and government departments to improve connections between industry, jobseeker and service providers.

This network would help provide ongoing support to an issue which will likely continue for the next few years.

7. ***National Labour Hire Licensing/Registration Scheme***

Industry recognises this election commitment by the Federal Government to support a national registration scheme and understands the development has been delayed due to COVID-19.

Industry supports this initiative and would like government to prioritise its development as it remains a significant area of concern for the industry.

8. ***Working Holiday Maker restart***

Industry is supportive of the NFF and BYTAP joint proposal for a gradual, controlled, safe, and cost recovered/neutral restart to the Working Holiday Maker and Work and Holiday Maker programs to establish a clear, controlled, and risk-free way forward to allow backpackers back into Australia.

C. Medium Term – (6+ months)

9. ***Agriculture Visa/ Harvest Work Visa***

Industry is supportive of pathway to bring in a dedicated workforce to work in the Horticulture sector. The Horticulture Council supports both proposals currently with government to help drive a dedicated workforce into the sector.

10. ***Horticulture Industry Labour Agreement (HILA) additional occupations***

Industry is supportive of adding two skill level 5 occupations to the HILA to help provide a pathway for workers to remain in horticulture for the longer term. Adding these two roles will also give growers greater confidence they will have access to a reliable and efficient workforce for a number of years with a pathway to permanent residency.

The two occupations are:

- Horticulture Process Worker
- Horticulture Field Worker

NFF Horticulture Council Contact: Tyson Cattle | hortcouncil@nff.org.au | T: 03 9882 0277 | M: 0427 500 618

NFF Media Contact: Laureta Wallace | lwallace@nff.org.au | T: 026269 5666 | M: 0408 448 250