

Select Committee on Job Security
Answers to questions on notice
Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Inquiry: Select Committee on Job Security
Question No: IQ21-000089
Hearing Date: 11 October 2021
Division/Agency: Agricultural Policy Division (APD) G1
Topic: Fair Farms program
Hansard Page: 60,63
Question Date: 11 October 2021
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Ciccone and Senator Sheldon asked:

Senator CICCONE: To the department of ag: how many farms in Australia are eligible for the Fair Farms program, and how many have been certified?

Ms Deininger: Everyone is eligible for the Fair Farms program. I will get a figure on the number of people who are going through the program.

Senator CICCONE: If you could by the end of the week, or even today, that would be good.

Ms Deininger: I will see if I can get it today for the committee.

Senator CICCONE: Thank you.

CHAIR: Following on from that question—there may be an obvious answer to it, but I'm not aware of it: regarding the farm numbers, what is the number of farms overall that could apply for this arrangement that was just mentioned by Senator Ciccone?

Ms Deininger: Are you referring to the Fair Farms program?

CHAIR: Yes, I am.

Ms Deininger: All farms are eligible. I will come back in terms of the number of farms that are going through. There was some additional funding—about \$3 million, I think—announced recently to extend that program, to allow more employers to go through that particular program. I'm happy to come back; I will try to come back by quarter to on the figures, if I can get them.

CHAIR: That would be great. I appreciate that. I want to go to that other part of the question. It might be an obvious one that you all have the answer for—and I appreciate you giving us an answer to that—but what is the number of farms that could make an application to be part of this scheme?

Ms Deininger: I'm not sure of the question. I think what I've said is that there is a very broad opportunity for farms to be involved in that program. Let me come back to you on the numbers. That might then be able to provide some clarity in relation to that.

CHAIR: Thanks. Just to be clear, how many farms are there in Australia? That might be another way of saying it. That's what I was trying to compare—

Ms Deininger: Sorry. I will come back to you on a figure on that as well. I'll just check.

...

Ms Deininger: Senator, may I just clarify a matter. Earlier I mentioned in relation to the Fair Farms initiative that all farms are eligible. I would just like to clarify that it is horticulture businesses that are eligible for that particular program. So I will come back to you separately on the number of farms. The reason that horticulture is a focus is that they tend to be big employers compared to, say, grains or dairying farms, which tend to be smaller employers. I wanted to clarify my earlier evidence. I apologise for coming in at the end. We will come back to the committee separately on those numbers.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Deininger.

Answer:

- Fair Farms is an industry-led initiative aimed at fostering fair and responsible employment practices in Australian horticulture.
- Fair Farms' key objective is to lift employment practices across the Australian horticulture industry and to reduce the risk of worker exploitation.

- Fair Farms aims to achieve this through an industry-led assurance and certification program designed to support participating growers and other supply chain members with their compliance with Australian labour laws and industry standards.
- As of 30 June 2021, there are 328 actively enrolled participants in the program and 72 certifications have been issued following successful close-out and finalisation of the audit process.
 - While there has been significant growth in NSW and Queensland, COVID-19 has been a substantial barrier to uptake of the program, in particular limiting auditor availability.
 - ABARES advise that there were 10,400 horticulture farms in 2019-20.
- While the program is targeted at horticulture, Fair Farms intend to look at opportunities to expand the program, subject to demand and feasibility, to other relevant agricultural sectors in Australia.