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To: [Committee, Agriculture \(REPS\)](#)
Subject: Submission for food security committee
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Dear committee,

Thank you for establishing a committee to look at Food Security in Australia.

My husband and I grow HAND picked beans (green, butter, snake beans) various varieties of HAND picked peas (snow, snap and shelling), finger limes and we are currently trying to keep capsicums and other bean crops alive. I am also trying to grow cape gooseberries.

We do not hire any workers. Every aspect of horticulture farming is hard on the body and the skin. I believe any worker in horticulture work should be paid a very large pay to compensate for this body wrecking hard work. Any worker in the fresh food production should be held in very high regard. To be healthy humans we need to consume lots of fresh Australian fruit and vegetables. The less miles our fresh produce travels, the more healthier it is.

Super is a very relevant discussion to be had in the agriculture sector.

The previous federal government legislated to take 95% Compulsory super from backpackers when they exit Australia. Compulsory Super is suppose to be so we don't spend all our wages today, don't retire in poverty and more importantly that we fund our own age pension. Backpackers will not retire here. The crossbench worked with the labor party and got the tax on backpackers compulsory super down to 65%, landcare got some cash and Australians on government payment could earn few extra dollars as part of negotiated package. So if I was a backpacker I would not come and pick blueberries, beans, or oranges in Australia. Compulsory Super is not a play thing for any federal government. Super is government law and part of Australian workers wages.

Horticulture farmers are not price makers. We are price takers. We have to compete in the so called free market. Since our time farming in a very high cost, highly privatised country we have had to compete with different poor countries and poor developing countries. In a high cost country like Australia, all workers will obviously need a very large wage just to pay rent and have a few bucks spare. Wages in other countries that import to Australia may not be high cost like Australia is. There is a lot of commentary in the public arena about how good free trade agreements are. It's like every farmer in every country are winners when it comes to selling the public free trade agreements. How can every farmer in every country be a winner? That is not how competition works. There is only ever one winner. The rest of us just play the game till we go broke.

We have been farming since 2000. We were not gifted the farm, so we are still paying it off.

We have to play by federal government rules when it comes to the chemicals we put on our products and have had our products randomly tested. We passed. I would hope that all horticulture products entering Australia are tested for chemical residues and also bugs. Australia didn't have the 3 lined potato beetle, but somehow this terrible beetle has found its way into Australia. This beetle literally eats all the cape gooseberry plant. The prawn industry was decimated due to white spot. Not sure how that disease was imported into Australia.

Australia has just allowed apples to come to Australia from the US. Apple farmers will no doubt be complaining and worried about diseases entering Australia. But I am sure some Australian apple growers are exporting to other countries. That's free trade! Australia exports produce and Australia imports produce. There is always a loser. It is a lot of miles for fruit and vegetables to travel. With climate change here, surely the less planes in the sky the better for the climate and healthier and fresher produce if we relied solely on Australian fresh fruit and vegetables.

It has been reported that a farmer in the US can send a box of apples to Australia for \$1.40. That is only 30c more than it costs to me to send a letter in Australia. How can a farmer in the US export to Australia for such a small cost when to freight produce around Australia is so expensive?

My freight has gone up twice this year to send to Brisbane. I can't afford to send any further than Brisbane. 8 bean boxes costs \$44.00.
16 boxes is \$55.

We have not sent more than 16 boxes recently due to foul, crop killing weather. I am not sure how much it will cost to send more than 16 boxes of beans. So more than \$5 to send one 10 kg box of beans. Luxury of farming in Australia is we pay freight to get products to our farm and we pay freight for our produce to leave our farm.

Our styro boxes have gone up twice this year due to massive increase in gas cost for the styrofoam business. We are not in a position to pass on any increased costs as that is not how horticulture is treated in Australia. We send our healthy, carefully cared for produce to market and we take what we are given.

Australia is a very small country and it is reported that Australia grows a lot of food. We are a country of nearly 26 million people but grow enough for 75 million people. I find it terribly bizarre that a country that grows excess food has the need to import fresh fruit and vegetables that has travelled hundreds and thousands of miles.

What doesn't help our industry is commentary in the public arena that if farmers can't access pickers from a developing country, consumers will pay. This is terrible rhetoric for many reasons. It infers that the only cost we have is workers. It is not lack of workers that is high cost to horticulture. Every cost related to farming life has blown out, including fuel, power costs, seed, fertilizer, freight, pest management, repairs, maintenance, insurance, packaging and obviously our own living costs. No amount of imported workers will magically bring down the cost of producing healthy fruit and vegetables in Australia for Australians.

It also infers that Australians are lazy and don't want to do interim, seasonal and inconsistent work. One bad weather event and pickers don't have a job as crops have been wiped out.

The conversation should be how much it costs to grow a kg of beans and consumers should expect to pay \$10.00 per kg to cover costs to produce. An iceberg lettuce will take between 10-12 weeks and should cost \$6-\$10. Growing Produce is not like magic. It just doesn't appear on the supermarket shelf. Growing and Picking fruit and vegetables may not need a university degree, but there is an art form to it. If the Australian commentary is that Australians should just go pick beans instead of getting government assistance, that is terrible rhetoric. It is like farmers have to continually train bean pickers as obviously pickers will look to move to better paid, easier work on the body and more secure work. Horticulture workers are held in such low regard and that we should not respect these workers who are very important to us all being able to access good healthy Australian fresh fruit and vegetables.

We grow too much food in Australia according rhetoric in the public arena. Perhaps farmers should try growing enough crops that they know they can find workers for. For all and sundry to keep blaming everyone else because farmers can't find workers to do this very hard work, is bizarre. Why would any farmer think it is intelligent to plant acres and acres and acres of crops and then complain they have no workers. Farmers should grow enough food that they think they can find workers for.

Many decades ago, the federal government brought in a policy where farm workers had to show a tax file number. My husband recalls the federal government turning up at many Gympie farms to make sure all hard workers had a matching tax file number. My dad was on DVA pension (he was ww2 veteran) when the federal government made him pay back money.

The federal government has just made legislation where age pensioners can go pick blueberries and keep their age pension. So a complete circle in this space. Age pensioners can now pick beans for bit extra cash up to certain amount and keep all their age pension. This legislation has not been extended to any other Australian on

a federal government payment. Everyone in Australia is living in the current cost of living crisis. Not just age pensioners. You could infer that a small select cohort of Australians are on a Universal Basic Income. Only we are not all on a universal basic income. And that age pensioners can do a bit of work and keep their Basic Income.

About 30 years ago we were told that privatization would provide cheap power and private market is better supplying essential services. Clearly this ideology has failed in the energy space. Now governments are looking to interfere in the private market to bring cost of power down. No private business was ever going to do things cheap or at low cost. Like any business, they are in business to make a lot of profit for shareholders. Well some businesses make a profit. Currently we are paying off our power bill thanks to Ergon energy. Ergon have allowed us to do a payment plan. Ergon personnel did suggest that I try to cut costs. But sadly in horticulture I have to refrigerate my produce from the time they leave the paddock. Ergon suggested to install a smaller cold room, but we have no spare cash to change the cold room to smaller unit. And one day we hope to need the much larger cold room as we store our produce in the cold room until it goes to market and we only send produce twice a week.

Horticulture is unlike growing cows. Energy is key to keeping our wonderful produce in good condition from paddock to market.

I would love the commentary to change in the horticulture industry.

Where there is higher regard for the important role all workers in horticulture industry, and who primarily supply Australians with fresh healthy produce.

I hope my view of food security in Australia helps this important committee. If we are continually held in such low regard, why would any farmer stay in the industry?

Madonna

Sent from my iPad