
Existing Migration Options

1. Yandilla Park Pty Ltd is aware of the various migration visa options, including:
 - Temporary Long Stay Business (457) visa
 - Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme
 - Skill Matching Database
 - Working Holiday visa
2. To date Yandilla Park has not sponsored a Temporary Long Stay visa worker. If we were to do so in the future we would utilise our local Skilled Migration Regional Project Officer.
3. Yandilla Park has used the Regional Skilled Migration Scheme to access skilled employees, at the time lawyers were used and the process was very efficient and timely. We would consider utilising the Skilled Migration Regional Project Officer, who has been appointed to the role since the scheme was used.
4. People holding Working Holiday Maker visas are a very important source of seasonal labour for citrus, mango and table grape picking and packing. There has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of backpackers looking for work in the areas in which we operate and who are prepared to stay for longer periods because of the recent changes to Working Holiday Maker visas.

While an important source of harvest labour, backpackers are not ideally suited to citrus picking. Many find the work too demanding and have difficulty making adequate money (picking is paid at piece rates¹), resulting in high staff turnover rates.

Substantial resources are invested in new employees including induction training and payroll administration costs; and it takes several weeks before new pickers become really efficient at their job. Three-month work limitations placed on backpackers means the time and effort invested in skill development is lost after a very short time span. Overall our productivity is adversely affected by high staff turnover during a very busy harvest period.

5. Yandilla Park commends the recent changes to Working Holiday Maker visas that allow backpackers to stay in the country for an extra 12 months after completing three months work in regional Australia; we are already experiencing the benefits of these changes.

Recommendations – we recommend that the period of time a backpacker can work for one regional employer be extended from three to six months and that age limitations on Working Holiday Maker visas be lifted.

¹ Once skilled, pickers can earn between \$20 - \$25 per hour. Recently two backpackers were ready to walk off the job after picking less than a bin of fruit, our Harvest Co-ordinator convinced them to stay. Once skilled they were able to pick 9 bins each per day earning in excess of \$200 per day. Average earnings for skilled pickers would range from \$150 - \$200 per day.

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6. DIMIA website, Regional Outreach Officer and help line are all reasonably easy to access. In addition we can access resources through the Riverland Development Corporation such as assistance from the Skilled Migration Regional Project Officer.
 7. No recommendations or changes to terms or eligibility for existing migration options.

Guest Worker Visa

8. Yandilla Park Pty Ltd strongly supports the concept of a Guest Worker Visa program.
9. Each year the problems of sourcing suitable labour worsen and it seems that Australians are less and less inclined to do manual work. During the past season we relied heavy on backpackers and would not have coped without this reliable (but not ideal) source of labour. Our citrus packinghouses and harvesting co-ordinators are faced with an unenviable task of trying to co-ordinate staffing requirements while having to continually source more employees. We are experiencing the same issues with our table grape and mango businesses. The attached graph lists staffing shortfalls for our citrus business.

Shortfall Seasonal Labour 2005

Property Location	Citrus Packers	Citrus Pickers
Solora – Loxton	50	50
Kangara – Murtho	25	20
Yandilla Park Farms – Renmark	50	70
Sunraysia	20	50
Total	145	190

Between May and October 2005 Yandilla Park Farms alone experienced a picker turnover rate of 300%. Turnover continues to escalate despite providing very good working conditions, adhering to all health and safety requirements and offering whatever assistance possible to retain pickers.

Currently Yandilla Park has some 2600 hectares under production; 180 hectares are young plantings not yet in full production. A further 600 hectares are either under development or will be planted during 2006, resulting in a substantial increase in demand for harvest labour over the next 5 years.

In 2005 the Kangara property produced 22,000 bins of fruit in 2005, projections over the next 10 years are for an increase in production to 110,000 bins of fruit, increasing the number of harvest labourers required from 80 to at least 320 between the months of May to October.

Our region is experiencing a net population loss of –0.73 % pa, the decline and ageing of our population places further pressure on an already tight labour market.

Yandilla Park is seriously concerned about where to source future labour requirements.

10. Currently Yandilla Park use a range of strategies to recruit seasonal workers both for citrus packing and citrus picking. These include using Job Network agencies, harvest contractors, targeted advertising, letters to past seasonal workers inviting them back for each new season and developing strong relationships with local caravan parks and back packer hostels.

Yandilla Park also provides itinerant workers with assistance and advice on how to access local accommodation in efforts to encourage them to come to our region. Yandilla Park is innovative in developing strategies for attracting workers but have not been successful in recruiting the numbers required.

11. There are multiple economic benefits of a Guest Worker program for Yandilla Park including reduced staff turnover rates and the opportunity to re-employ the same workers year after year, reducing the need to completely re-skill employees each time a new recruit is hired. Refresher induction training is always provided for returning employees.

Yandilla Park Farm Managers estimate that 10 years ago crops could be picked using only a third of the personnel required for similar crops picked today. At that time harvest workers were more experienced and more inclined to pick fruit on an ongoing, long-term basis. Recruitment costs have increased by at least two thirds during the past 10 years; in addition there are substantial additional costs in supervising inexperienced pickers. Clearly our current recruitment and retention processes are costly and ineffective.

12. Yandilla Park recommend that costs associated with Guest Labour be distributed as follows:

Airfares – paid in advance by employers, reimbursed by employees through weekly payroll deductions.

Accommodation – employers assist in sourcing suitable accommodation and assist with bonds and upfront associated costs to be paid back by employees through weekly payroll deductions.

It would seem reasonable that air fares and accommodation costs should be borne by the employees, however, it is likely they would need some “up front” assistance, the repayment of which would have to be part of the visa conditions.

Translation Services – our region has limited access to translation services. Our total population of 35,000 has representation of 50 nationalities; our multicultural mix is quite unique. Many local people have limited English but are able to manage very well and there is a high level of community acceptance of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Recruitment and induction - costs to be met by the employer, as is currently the case.

13. The Riverland region currently lacks accommodation and transport infrastructure. Yandilla Park would work with Local Government and the Riverland Development Corporation to provide suitable accommodation and transport facilities.
14. Yandilla Park strongly agrees with the NFF proposed Guest Worker visa. Yandilla Park is not seeking to displace any of our local employees, or to reduce working conditions in any way, but we are extremely concerned about meeting future labour needs and see this proposal as a viable solution.

The Federal Government have expressed concerns in the media of Guest Workers overstaying their visas. We believe that an option to overcome this could be that a percentage of the wages earned are held in a bank account in the employee's name but which can only be accessed on the employee's return to their native country.

Yandilla Park is aware of unscrupulous harvest contractors using workers illegally in the country and others claiming welfare payments. Many in the horticulture industry are reduced, through necessity, to using such unethical operators who are clearly exploiting their employees and often compromising health and safety, as well as the welfare system.

Such contractors and unethical employers are destroying the efforts of the majority in the industry to improve practices and good will and to lift the profile and perception of the horticultural industry.

Guest Worker programs could eliminate the need for this black market source of labour.

15. Ideally Guest Workers would remain in the one region for the duration of their visa. The goal of Yandilla Park would be to re-employ the same workers year after year, improving individual skills and overall productivity.
16. As suggested by the NFF model a central co-ordinating body should oversee the program to ensure Guest Workers are treated fairly and equitably. Hire arrangements could work either via labour hire agencies or workers being employed directly by employers.
17. Once skilled, piece worker employees can earn an average of \$20 - \$25 per hour, whereas hourly paid employees earn more moderate amounts but still very generous in comparison to some of their local earning opportunities. Overall, earning opportunities with Yandilla Park could be expected to be most attractive to people from Pacific Rim and other Asian countries. It is also an alternative way of economically supporting neighbouring countries that may receive Aid from Australia.
18. Yandilla Park participated in a program called Cape York Partnerships. A group of approximately 15 Indigenous youth and a Project Co-ordinator travelled from

Cape York to pick fruit in the Riverland. The project was evaluated as being very successful in developing self-esteem, work ethic and life skills for some young people who had no previous experience in the workforce due to lack of employment opportunities in their communities. This could be considered an example of a Guest Worker model.

SUMMARY

Yandilla Park has experienced labour shortages for several years that are progressively worsening. There has been a noticeable decline in the reliability of employees, on any given day up to 20% of the workforce can simply choose not to attend work, and often do not attempt to advise their employer.

A Guest Worker Visa program is a viable option to resolve many of our labour shortage issues. Concerns of people overstaying their Visas or the impression that this program could impact of job loss can be overcome.

For further comment please contact:

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