

Trevor,

It is difficult to know the exact requirement for manual labour in our horticultural industries - but it is certainly much larger than the numbers of unwilling candidates available from local sources.

Horticultural employers have no issue with the up skilling of our work force - indeed the fact that we own a very successful registered training company is a statement that we are very serious about the need for higher work skills.

However horticulture is also has a large requirement for manual skills and these are in extremely short supply. We are the only major country that exports horticultural produce and products and does not have a regular supply of seasonal labour from a low wage country. Please do not assume by that comment that there is any intent from horticultural employers to pay under award wages - we merely seek to employ people who aspire to regular seasonal employment as labourers.

Backpackers fill some of this void - but the majority are not motivated towards manual labour and many will never have adequate manual skills. The sorting out process of backpackers and employers to hire suitable backpackers is often by trial and error - a costly task.

Guest workers can be targeted from countries that have large numbers of manual labourers already used to horticultural work and under employed in their own countries.

Family horticultural properties are in decline and many properties are now run by corporations that cover 100's and sometimes 1000's of hectares. The development and operation of properties on this scale can sometimes require large numbers of labourers.

It would be a huge relief if these producers could have confidence that a system was in place that could guarantee large numbers of labourers were available to meet the seasonal peaks associated with: harvesting, pruning and development. In SA horticulture I would estimate that currently 1000 people are required for 3 - 6 months each year.

If you say who is doing this work now - I contend no one:

- some tasks are being mechanised, when it would be better to work by hand if the labour was available.

- some tasks (picking, pruning, planting etc) are simply not being done.

Lost production and long term unsustainable practises such as these are very costly to horticulturists, the environment and the economy.

The Canadian example is now over 30 years old. Australia has free trade agreements with many countries that all have access to third world labour - sometimes without any protection from exploitation.

Horticulturists ask that our government level the playing field for Australian farmers by granting guest workers permission to enter the country for 3 - 6 months each year:

- no families
- employer responsible for travel and accomodation
- 30% of funds earned to be paid when the worker is back in their own country.

Yours faithfully,

Tom Martin.

Acting Chairman - Riverland Horticultural Council.