

Media Release

The Hon Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Minister for Regional Development

Minister for Agriculture

Minister for Resources



Thursday, 22 October 2020

GETTING VICTORIAN FARMS READY FOR A SAFE HARVEST SEASON

Farmers in north-west Victoria and across the state will continue to be supported to have the workforce they need and operate safely for the upcoming harvest season, thanks to support from the Victorian Government.

Minister for Agriculture Jaclyn Symes today visited Caruso Farms near Swan Hill to see how a Business Adaptation grant of \$70,000 will help the family-owned business that grows a range of fruit and vegetables including stone fruit, wine and table grapes, zucchinis and pumpkins.

Caruso Farms are using the funding to extend their vegetable packaging facility and build a sanitising station as well as extra bathroom facilities. The additions will allow the farm to ensure appropriate physical distancing between workers.

The Government is providing a comprehensive \$17 million package for industry to address unprecedented shortages caused by the coronavirus pandemic and associated travel restrictions so they can attract jobseekers for the critical seasonal workforce.

The package includes \$10 million from the *Agriculture Workforce Plan* to help businesses adapt to pandemic conditions, with an increase to the Business Adaptation Grants to help agriculture businesses meet health and safety requirements and adhere to physical distancing.

In addition to the grants, the Government's package includes new Seasonal Workforce Coordinators who, along with new Engagement Officers, are working locally with industry groups, employers, labour hire agencies, local government and other stakeholders to connect workers to jobs.

The Engagement Officers will also provide additional support to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, who traditionally make up a significant portion of the seasonal agricultural workforce. An advertising campaign will also be launched soon to connect jobseekers with opportunities to work in the agriculture sector.

There are a range of employment opportunities in the agriculture sector including fruit and vegetable picking and packing, grains harvesting, grain receival centre work and other roles essential to seasonal harvest.

Jobseekers can register now and be alerted when opportunities in the sector arise. To find out more about the Agriculture Workforce Plan go to: agriculture.vic.gov.au/agworkforceplan

Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Jaclyn Symes

"There is no silver bullet to addressing seasonal workforce needs during this pandemic – that's why we're working hard with industry to support them in a range of ways to adapt and prepare for a safe and productive harvest"

"I encourage farmers to register their workforce needs on the Working for Victoria platform to be matched with jobseekers, and work with our new Seasonal Workforce Coordinators and Engagement Officers who are making the local connections needed to support jobseekers into these job opportunities."