

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



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WORKFORCE SUPPORT IS THE CHERRY ON TOP FOR FARMERS

Cherry picking is underway across Victoria on a bumper harvest of more than 4,500 tonnes of cherries thanks to help from the Andrews Labor Government – ensuring kitchen tables will be brimming with the delicious Christmas favourite.

Minister for Agriculture Jaclyn Symes saw the seasonal workforce in action firsthand today at one of Victoria's largest cherry producers Koala Cherries, which supplies 500 tonnes of cherries and employs more than 300 workers during harvest across 10 farms in the Goulburn Valley and the Yarra Valley.

In a year like no other, the horticulture industry is facing a seasonal workforce shortage, but businesses such as Koala Cherries have been able to attract the workforce they need and operate in a COVIDSafe way, thanks to support from the *Agriculture Workforce Plan*.

Koala Cherries has used a Business Adaptation grant of \$300,000 to establish additional staff amenities including handwashing facilities, toilets and lunchrooms to comply with physical distancing requirements in the packhouse and on farms before harvest kicked off.

Further financial assistance through the Agriculture Workforce Plan will subsidise the costs of accommodation, transport, and relocation expenses for as many as 100 new workers.

The company is one of the growing number of businesses that has employed workers through the Labor Government's *Working for Victoria* platform, which links employers with jobseekers. Working for Victoria has around 93,000 jobseekers registered and 15,000 who are in regional Victoria.

Farm businesses and labour-hire providers are actively registering employment opportunities on the platform and there are now more than 1,000 agricultural jobs on offer.

A comprehensive \$17 million package is supporting Seasonal Workforce Coordinators across key growing regions to work closely with farm businesses and employers, local industry groups, schools and tertiary institutes, labour-hire agencies and local governments to address seasonal workforce shortages.

To raise even more awareness of these seasonal jobs, the Government is launching "The Big Victorian Harvest" campaign to inform local jobseekers about the numerous seasonal work opportunities in agriculture. It features real workers on farms across the state and highlights the jobs available right now in agriculture, including fruit and vegetable picking and packing, and other roles essential to seasonal harvest.

To find out more on seasonal workforce opportunities go to agriculture.vic.gov.au/bigharvest.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Jaclyn Symes

"We are encouraging Victorians looking for work to help us take on the Big Victorian Harvest and consider a job that's a solid day's work but packed with satisfaction."

"There is no silver bullet for the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in – we're working at this from every angle to help our growers get the workers they need as harvests ramp up and get Victoria's world-class produce to market."

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