

Media Release

Ms Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Regional Development
Minister for Agriculture



Tuesday, 6 April 2021

SEASONAL WORKFORCE WELCOMES PACIFIC POWER TO THE TEAM

Victorian farmers have received a welcome boost to their seasonal workforce with more than 200 Pacific workers starting on farms, thanks to a landmark agreement with the Tasmanian and Andrews Labor Government.

Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas met with the workers today as they started their first day on the job, picking and packing apples in the Yarra Valley.

The workers were among the first Pacific Islanders to fly in last month and undertake 14 days quarantine in Tasmania before arriving in Victoria over the weekend.

They have joined the workforce at Vernview Orchards at Launching Place - an apple orchard run by third and sixth-generation farmers Sue and David Finger.

Pacific workers have been part of the team at Vernview Orchards for more than eight years in a program that benefits both Victoria's \$15.9 billion agriculture industry and the economies of our Pacific Island neighbours.

Farmers and agriculture businesses have welcomed the restart of the *Seasonal Worker Programme* and *Pacific Labour Scheme*. The reintroduction of these programs is just one part of the Labor Government's comprehensive \$76 million package to support the industry to find the workers it needs this season.

The Government has co-contributed \$7.8 million to quarantine costs for Pacific Island workers, with industry contributing \$2,000 per worker.

Minister Thomas also announced a \$150,000 grant to the Approved Employers of Australia (AEA), which connects permitted employers to the Pacific Mobility Schemes, supporting businesses to access these workers.

The grant is part of the Government's \$1 million *Seasonal Workforce Industry Support Program*, which gives organisations dedicated resources to support local worker recruitment and retention in priority harvest regions.

Additional workers will join the agriculture workforce over the coming weeks as part of a planned, rolling flight schedule that will provide up to 1,500 workers. They will bolster the seasonal workforce across the state, from the Yarra Valley and Gippsland right across to Sunraysia.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas

"It's great to see the return of Pacific Island workers to our Victorian farms to bolster the local workforce with their valuable skills and expertise."

"Our approach to the challenges brought about by the coronavirus pandemic has been securing a mix of both international and local workers to equip agriculture businesses for this season and seasons ahead."

Quote attributable to Vernview Orchards owner Sue Finger

"Having these Pacific Island workers here over the past eight years has given us the confidence we need to grow our business."