

Media Release

Ms Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Minister for Regional Development
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EXTRA SUPPORT FOR FARMERS TO BUILD HARVEST WORKFORCE

The Andrews Labor Government is backing key horticulture regions through a program designed to help farmers attract and retain workers they need for the coming harvest season.

Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas met with members from Food and Fibre Gippsland who have received a \$49,500 grant to help connect jobseekers to employment opportunities with local growers, and improve communication with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the region.

The grant will also be used to help farmers understand transport requirements for workers - a common barrier that prevents people from taking on horticulture work.

Third-generation asparagus producer Adrian Raffa is one of Australia's biggest producers and exporters of asparagus at his farm at Tooradin in South Gippsland. At peak harvest Raffa Fields employs more than 200 workers each year.

Raffa Fields is one of the many farms in the region's \$1 billion horticulture industry that will benefit from Food and Fibre Gippsland's project, with a greater understanding of the needs of local jobseekers as it looks to boost its seasonal workforce for this season and for seasons ahead.

The grant is part of the Labor Government's \$1 million *Seasonal Workforce Industry Support Program (SWISP)*, which provides support for industry groups to employ additional staff and deliver new initiatives that assist farm businesses in priority harvest regions to recruit and retain seasonal workers.

Under the program, Agribusiness Yarra Valley also received \$100,000 to develop a seasonal workforce hub to connect employers with workers, as well as a targeted campaign to entice jobseekers to horticulture work.

Cobram and District Fruit Growers received \$51,000 to connect more young workers to horticulture jobs, and Ausveg Vic received \$56,700 to produce videos in multiple languages to highlight the COVIDSafe protocols of Victorian vegetable farms.

The program is part of the Government's comprehensive \$76 million support package to assist the industry to address the workforce challenges brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, and to develop targeted solutions driven by local communities.

The Victorian Government continues to provide support to farmers through the Seasonal Harvest Sign-On Bonus and the Pacific worker quarantine arrangement with Tasmania.

Quote attributable to Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas

"We recognise farm businesses and employers face continuing labour challenges and we are working closely with the industry as it develops a more sustainable seasonal workforce for this harvest and seasons to come."

Quote attributable to Member for Bass Jordan Crugnale

"We are the asparagus capital of Australia so it's important we support our producers and farm businesses like Raffa Fields to build their seasonal harvest workforce."

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