

Media Release



The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Minister for Regional Development

Minister for Agriculture

Acting Minister for Industry Support and Recovery

Acting Minister for Trade

Acting Minister for Business Precincts

Acting Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events

Acting Minister for Racing

Acting Minister for Employment

Acting Minister for Innovation, Medical Research, and the Digital Economy

Acting Minister for Small Business

Thursday, 23 December 2021

A BOOST FOR SEASONAL WORKFORCE THIS HARVEST

The Andrews Labor Government is backing farm businesses and workers across the state with improved training, skills development and additional support services to manage their peak harvest season.

Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas today announced \$2.9 million in new programs and initiatives as part of the Labor Government's ongoing support for the agriculture sector to strengthen its seasonal workforce.

A new \$600,000 pilot program will increase skills development and career opportunities for Victorians new to agriculture, while providing businesses with more workers to help build a sustainable and resilient local workforce.

The Seasonal Workforce Co-ordinators will continue their vital role, with \$1.1 million dedicated to assisting farm businesses to build a strong harvest workforce by creating better connections to local workers through industry groups, education providers and recruitment organisations.

The Seasonal Workforce Co-ordinators address labour shortfalls with regionally coordinated solutions that cannot be achieved by individual businesses or industries working alone. They also support workers with information on mental health and wellbeing, COVIDSafe measures, safe work practices and vaccination support.

To date, support for vulnerable workers has been an important part of the Government's Seasonal Workforce Program, particularly people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities who play a valuable role in the industry's seasonal workforce.

A \$1 million program will boost services provided by the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council and will extend this model more broadly across Victoria. This will ensure vulnerable workers have access to the information and support they need about COVIDSafe protocols and employment opportunities.

The package also includes funding to improve workforce data to enable more strategic management of the seasonal workforce as it moves across Australia's East Coast during the harvest.

The \$6 million *Seasonal Workforce Accommodation Program* will also continue, which has seen new accommodation, transport and support options for more than 2,000 workers rolled out across rural and regional Victoria.

These initiatives are part of the Government's comprehensive \$84 million *Seasonal Workforce Program*, and build on the important work already done in partnership with industry as it looks to a longer-term workforce strategy with lasting benefits for future harvest seasons.

More than 1,960 Pacific workers have arrived to support industry, with an additional 3,550 workers taking up seasonal horticulture work through the *Seasonal Harvest Sign-On Bonus*, boosting our local workforce.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas

"Victoria is Australia's food bowl. This new funding will continue to support workers and businesses manage their seasonal workforce during this harvest season and gear them up with the critical skills they need."

"Our focus remains dedicated to supporting industry and community groups who we know are best placed to understand local issues and remove barriers that prevent local workers from joining the agriculture sector."

Media contact: Nadia Dimattina, 0438 701 306 | Nadia.dimattina@minstaff.vic.gov.au