

## Media Release

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### **Visa extensions urgently needed for workers so farmers can guarantee supply of fresh fruit and vegetables**

Fresh produce growers from around the country are calling on the federal government to immediately extend the visas of seasonal workers and backpackers working in the fresh produce sector, in order to ensure the coronavirus (Covid-19) does not jeopardise the ability of farmers to supply fresh fruit and vegetables for all Australians.

AFPA member businesses and their third party grower network are specifically seeking the immediate extension of visa entitlements for more than 2,700 seasonal workers and 7,000 backpackers currently in the country.

“If we do not secure these extensions workers will need to return to their home countries and there will not be the required workers to harvest a large number of fruit and vegetable crops meaning Australians will not have access to healthy and nutritious fresh produce at this unprecedented time,” said Michael Rogers, AFPA CEO.

With more than 80,000 people employed in fresh produce, the current workforce includes significant numbers of Australians, seasonal workers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste, and backpackers from around the world.

“While there will be significant employment opportunities for Australians, with AFPA member businesses already employing more than 5,500 Australians across every state of Australia, industry also urgently needs an immediate extension of the visas for seasonal workers and backpackers who are currently in Australia,” said Mr Rogers.

The Australian fruit and vegetable industry is an essential service for all Australians at this difficult time – safe and nutritious fresh produce is key to ensure that we remain healthy and maintain strong immune systems. Picking and packing fruit and vegetables is labour intensive and requires workers familiar with the work and willing to work in a physical environment in regional and rural locations.

“Visa extensions for seasonal workers and backpackers will provide certainty for farmers and the workers employed. This will fill only part of the workforce requirements for fruit and vegetable farmers. Australians seeking work will also be able to contact farmers and fill roles which will be otherwise vacant,” said Mr Rogers.

**Media Contact:** Michael Rogers - CEO, AFPA: 0409 648 911