



Media Release

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Common sense solutions will ease looming horticulture labour shortage

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) commend the work undertaken by Citrus Australia in engaging with government to enable visa holders engaged in the harvest workforce to move from Victorian border towns across the Victorian-NSW border from today.

“Harvest workers be they Australians, Seasonal Worker Program or Working Holiday Maker visa holders underpin the fruit and vegetable industry. The engagement we’ve seen between Citrus Australia and the NSW Agriculture Minister is an example of industry and government arriving at a common sense solution that does the right thing by employers, employees and Australian consumers” said AFPA CEO Michael Rogers.

The fresh produce industry’s harvest workforce is made up predominantly of Working Holiday Maker and Seasonal Worker Program visa holders. This year, 4,000 fewer than normal Seasonal Worker Program visas will be issued and the number of Working Holiday Maker visa holders in Australia has reduced by 40%. The reduction in visa holder numbers has industry concerned there will be labour shortages during upcoming peak Spring and Summer harvests.

“Industry has lost access to a significant number of workers who traditionally perform harvest roles, but this is compounded by Australia’s domestic border closures where farmers cannot move workers between operations to meet peak harvest demand. The citrus industry, and Citrus Australia really demonstrated this problem when the NSW border was closed to the harvest workforce from Victoria” said Mr Rogers.

Modelling commissioned by the AFPA and undertaken by Deloitte Access Economics demonstrates that without the Working Holiday Maker visa holder workers that industry is reliant on, the industry would lose \$6.3 billion in production, which in turn could lead to a 60% price increase in the cost of fruit and vegetables to Australian consumers.

“Industry is trying to avoid a worst-case scenario and all we need are practical, commercial solutions to the problem. We need to incentivise Australians to undertake this work, understanding that many unemployed Australians may need to relocate to regional areas and enable workers to move intra and interstate.”

“In conjunction with this we must consider temporary migration pathways such allowing Seasonal Worker Program visa holders to enter Australia, which would provide farmers with workforce certainty and ensuring our ability to continue to supply fruit and vegetables to Australians” said Mr Rogers.

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

***About the AFPA** - The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is made up of Australia’s key fresh produce growers and suppliers. The AFPA represents half the industry turnover of the Australian fresh produce sector - \$4.5 billion of the \$9.1 billion total; 1,000 plus growers through commercial arrangements and more than 15,000 direct employees through peak harvest, and up to 25,000 in the grower network.*