

## Media Release

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### Seasonal Worker Program to stamp out illegal practices in Mallee

The announcement of the expansion of the Seasonal Worker Program in Mallee will significantly increase the visibility of farmers' business information within the Australian Government and help to stamp out illegal employment practices.

The Australian Government announced today the expansion of the Seasonal Worker Program to meet the requirements of horticulture producers in the Mallee region. In line with the requirements for the Seasonal Worker Program, this will allow for farmers information to be shared with any relevant Commonwealth departments and agencies including the Department of Home Affairs, the Fair Work Ombudsman, the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Taxation Office and any Commonwealth or State work health and safety authority.

This announcement follows the Victorian Farmers Federation releasing data on workforce needs in Mallee which highlighted that more than 70 per cent of growers surveyed are breaking the law and employing people illegally.

"The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) has committed to lawful and ethical employment practices in the fresh produce industry. The announcement today that the Seasonal Worker Program will be expanded in Mallee will require that all growers accessing the program are employing people lawfully and ethically" said Michael Rogers, CEO, AFPA

Today's announcement also includes the engagement of a Regional Coordinator to assist smaller businesses in creating the volume of work needed to meet requirements of the Program. Currently, a similar workforce management role is performed by approved labour hire contractors.

"Being able to move Seasonal Workers across different employers to meet the harvest requirements of different products will enable more businesses to access the program. This will open more growers' businesses to regulation and enforcement, which in turn will stamp out the significant portion of illegal business practice in the region" said Mr Rogers.

Members of the AFPA are some of the largest employers under the Seasonal Worker Program and are therefore committed to maintaining the integrity of the program. Any expansion of the program, including to the Mallee, must not undermine the current high standards required of approved employers under the program.

"Given the high level of reported illegal employment activity amongst horticulture growers in Mallee, hopefully the extension of this program will create a significant change in business practice in the region" said Mr Rogers.

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***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.*