



GrainGrowers Policy Position- Labour

Australian grain farmers require access to a productive workforce to keep their businesses running.

Background

Australian grain farmers require access to an affordable, flexible, reliable and capable workforce to keep their businesses profitable and productive.

The seasonal nature of grain production, specific skill requirements, the lure of resource projects and the industry's location in regional and rural areas of Australia often makes it difficult to attract and retain Australian workers. Overseas workers (especially backpackers on working holidays and foreign workers temporarily in Australia to support a better life in their home country) play a key role in fulfilling the seasonal labour needs of Australia's grain farming sector. There is also a marketing gap in terms of farmers being able to recruit suitable staff, both from Australia and overseas.

Workplace Health & Safety (WH&S), while critical to protect farmers and their families, is becoming overly complex and burdensome for many Australian grain farming businesses. To ensure proper compliance with federal government legislation, farmers must be familiar with the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and all associated material, including 23 Codes of Practice, 46 pieces of Guidance Material and 29 fact/information sheets. The sheer quantity of information can be overwhelming for small farming businesses, and farmers often struggle to maintain up-to-date knowledge of all WH&S requirements; including training of staff to comply with these obligations.

Our Position

GrainGrowers believe clearer pathways for workers to become farm employees, simpler visa and migration rules and a more sensible approach to Workplace, Health and Safety are crucial to ensuring farmers have access to the staff they require.

Promoting farming as an employment option and profession of choice through campaigns directed at job seekers and schools would highlight agriculture as a desired career and encourage those in capital cities to seek a job in regional Australia.

Potential tweaks to migration rules around temporary skilled visas (457) and working holiday visas (417) by including agricultural skills in the 457 visa criteria and continuing the second year visa extension to 417 holders could simplify the process of recruiting and retaining suitable workers and create possible paths to residency for those staff. GrainGrowers also fully endorses the expansion of the Australian Government's Season Worker Program to the grains industry.

Workplace Health and Safety regulations should be streamlined and modified to ensure duplication is reduced, ongoing compliance costs are lowered considering the practical nature of farming, while maintaining the safety and well-being of farm employees.

GrainGrowers is also supportive of an employment and welfare system that encourages greater participation in the workforce.