NT 2017 HARVEST LABOUR REPORT

MAY 2018

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# NT 2017 Harvest Labour Report

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Acknowledgements
Thank you to the Farmers who completed the NT 2017 Harvest Labour Survey.
Thank you to Clayton Consultants whom provided artwork.
NT Farmers appreciate the NT Governments Department of Trade, Business and Innovation for the funding to undertake these activities as part of the Workforce Planning Coordinator’s role.

Executive Summary
This report quantifies the need of seasonal labour and identifies the timings and locations within the NT horticulture industry. This information will contribute to the creation of a NT Farmers Association Workforce Development Plan.

The NT 2017 Harvest Labour Survey was conducted during February 2018, completed by a total of 54 Employers, is estimated as 70-80% of the melon and mango production in the NT. These 54 Employers represent 60% of the NT Farmers members (hitting the target of 60%).

A total of 2037 staff were required for the farms that responded (full time equivalent, part time equivalent and casual with 1575 casual staff required for the various harvest seasons.

The farmers met these needs mainly by direct employment of international workers (both backpackers and pacific seasonal workers). This identifies a risk to farmers where if pre-employment checks are not performed employers could be acting improperly. To reduce this risk recommendations have been made including keeping employers up to date with legislation changes and providing the opportunity for reputable labour hire agencies to inform farmers of their services.

Aim
The NT 2017 Harvest Labour Survey was conducted to benchmark on an annual basis and identify industry growth and track progress of closing gaps.

To create a strategic action plan (Workforce Development Plan) which will
- Gather demographic data from individual businesses to assist in identifying the industry composition
- identify the industry’s current state of workforce capability
- determine workforce development needs
- identify streams of where the employees are coming from
- Project the demand of businesses for VET, skills sets & tertiary qualifications
- Identify crucial workforce issues and trends affecting industry workforce demand and supply
- recommend solutions

NT Farmers Association canvassed growers on the 2017 workforce requirements and how those were met.

Background
The NT’s horticulture industry is located throughout regional areas including hubs at Alice Springs, Katherine and Greater Darwin. The commodities include vegetables, Asian vegetables, herbs, tropical fruit, green mangoes, ripe mangoes, melons, banana’s and hay.

Over the last few years NT Farmers have identified labour as being the biggest issue the NT horticulture industry faces. Due to the low population in the NT, lack of available workers, the low
skilled nature of the work, the repetitive nature of the (process) work, the hot and humid temperatures and other uncomfortable items such as bugs, mosquitoes and mango sap burn.

In August 2017 the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries were in the top 5 NT growth industries\(^1\)

National unemployment rate for 2017 was an average of 5.5%. The NT unemployment rate for 2017 was an average of 3.6\(^2\)

In the past the industry has relied on international backpackers to ‘top up’ the work crew during peak (harvest) season. This ‘top up’ consists of multiplying the workforce significantly for a short period. The ownership and management of NT farms is a 50/50 mix of small family business/corporate farms.

Changes to visa’s and Government policy has reduced the attainability of staff through these streams and reduced the attractiveness to potential travelers of working in Australia temporarily. E.g. The ‘backpacker tax’ uncertainty and long-term media coverage in 2016.

The government brought in changes to the tax rate on holders of Working Holiday visas (subclasses 417 and 462). Under this policy, originally scheduled to commence in July 2016, these visa holders would be considered non-residents for tax purposes and taxed 32.5 percent from the first dollar earned. In response to concerns, particularly from the agricultural and tourism industries, the government postponed introduction of the new tax rate. In August 2016 its review of the policy included establishment of a taskforce on seasonal workers and independent stakeholder engagement. The new tax rate, which came into effect on 1 January 2017, was reduced to 15 percent on income up to $37,000, with standard resident rates for income above this level.\(^3\)

The industry has the opportunity to grow; there is sufficient land, ground water and annual rainfall to meet future production, without the capability to access harvest workforce requirements this will be difficult to achieve. The case to access labour from South East Asia is strong as

- The workers are experienced farmers
- The workers are not prone to mango sap burn
- The climate is similar, therefore the workers are be physically able to perform the hot, heavy labouring work.
- The proximity to Darwin from South East Asia is close, with direct flights via most ports or via Singapore.

Previous surveys undertaken in the NT horticulture over past years show;

\(^1\) Labour market infographic August 2017 (NT Government Department of Business, Trade & Innovation)
\(^3\) ABARES Labour Force Survey May 2017
In the 2016 mango harvest season a portion of produce was not harvested, the total crop loss is recorded at $3.3 million. The labour shortage in the 2016 season was not due to a lack of labour, but rather mismanagement; demanding a lot of labour immediately, and too late in the season. Some growers were not being prepared and proactive in organising and assessing labour needs early in the season or before the season starts. It identifies the importance of crop forecasting and workforce planning. Most growers mentioned that they DO believe that they suffer from labour issues in general and that labour shortage will likely become a problem soon.

The 2015 Economic Profile of Plant Based Industries in the NT shows that there were 3,896 casual positions with 6,000 people used to fill those positions, due to the transient nature of the workers (here on holiday not specifically to work). There were 1217 Full Time Equivalent staff. The total wages bill was $80M.

The national agriculture white paper produced in 2015 introduced the Skilling Australians Fund, where businesses must either pay a training levy or provide their Australian employees with training. It is Governments stance to ensure that Australians have priority for jobs, studies have shown that the horticulture industry would prefer to employ Australians but are not able for various reasons.

The Federal Governments North Australia White Paper comments on a northern workforce for growth and as well as investing in skilling the people in northern Australia it supports workforce strategies such as the Designated Area Migration Agreement, Working Holiday Maker visa, Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labour Scheme.

The NT Government has committed to developing Katherine’s regional horticultural and agricultural potential, and also as a logistics hub to strengthen the town’s role as a transport crossway for Queensland and Western Australia commodities. It is the Government’s desire to develop a fully operational, multi-disciplined logistics and agribusiness hub to meet the current and future growth needs of Katherine, the Top End region and northern Australia.

Farmers have accessed staff for seasonal harvest duties for many years using workers from overseas who are here working their way around Australia with little money to start with and some without transport to leave the worksite. The demographic of these working holiday makers has changed over time and now some are from wealthy backgrounds who do not have to perform hard physical work to fund the travel to their next destination.

Other staff come from interstate whether travelling through or relocating (mostly temporarily). A small amount of staff are sourced locally as these staff require year-round employment to afford the cost of living in the NT.

The ‘backpacker tax’ argument during 2016/2017 has resulted in a decline in the number of working holiday makers coming to Australia. Reduced by 4.6% at 30 June 2017 compared to 30 June 2016. The Departments have had the following name changes

- Department of Employment is now the Department of Jobs & Small Business
- Department of Immigration & Border Protection is now the Department of Home Affairs

**Changes to various visas**

- Abolishment of the temporary work skilled (subclass 457) visa in March 2018
- Creation of Temporary Skill Shortage (subclass 482) visa in March 2018
- Streamlining of Seasonal Worker Program revealed in February 2018; changes to application form, changes to recruitment plan and removal of Add on Skills Training.

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4 Working holiday maker visa program report 30 June 2017 Department of Immigration & Border Protection
A new Pacific Labour Scheme visa is commencing in July 2018 for non-seasonal work
Second Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa initiatives to support northern Australia
On 18 November 2016, a second Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa commenced. From that date, subclass 462 visa holders who undertake three months (88 days) work during their stay in agriculture, tourism or hospitality industries within northern Australia may become eligible to apply for a second Work and Holiday visa. For this purpose, northern Australia includes all of the Northern Territory, and those parts of Western Australia and Queensland above the Tropic of Capricorn. A list of eligible postcodes is available at the Department’s website at http://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Visa-1/462-. There have been 409 second year subclass 462 visa grants since the commencement of this initiative.

The new Pacific Labour Scheme commencing in July 2018 may support some farmers (non-seasonal) e.g. banana farms.
There is still a gap where employers do not fit the eligibility criteria for the various employment programs. Small organizations and sole traders do not have the administrative support or resources to access the seasonal worker program to fill the low skilled short-term harvest work.
Another issue small businesses face is mandatory online reporting such as the Australian Tax Office, it is recommended that NT Farmers advocate for small business exemptions stating the case of unreliable internet service.
In addition to the information gained from the farmers whom participated in the 2017 Harvest Labour Survey, the two labour hire agencies servicing the NT horticulture industry have provided data on the 2017 harvest workforce.

The Workforce Planning Coordinator’s role (funded by NT Government, Department of Trade, Business & Innovation) includes
  o Providing upskilling of current industry staff including recognition of prior learning to enhance current skills and provide the incentive to develop further.
  o Improving access to the horticulture industry for young Territorian’s by providing a clear career pathway, stepping stones from primary school, secondary school, college and other industries.

Current investigation shows that there are many stepping stones missing including production horticulture skill sets not being ‘on scope’ within the horticulture courses delivered.

The industry is currently at risk by rogue players which has plagued the industry for many years. Labour hire licensing has been legislated in three other states (Queensland, Victoria & South Australia) in the last twelve months which is regulating the industry interstate, leaving the NT open to unscrupulous activity. To protect the industry from this risk it is recommended that NT Farmers Association advocate for labour hire licensing in the Northern Territory.

The NT 2017 Harvest Labour Survey was undertaken in February 2018, demographics identify industry composition, current workforce capability and future workforce development needs. Scope of participants includes small, medium and large-scale businesses across the NT horticulture industry. Data collection methods included survey monkey (online), a hard copy survey both in English and Vietnamese. A response rate of 60% was nominated as appropriate (as per previous labour survey response rates).
Evaluation

The 2017 harvest labour survey was completed by a total of 54 NT Farmers Members (Employers). This is estimated as 70-80% of melon and mango producers in the NT. These Employers are (hitting the target of 60%). The survey was completed in the following methods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardcopy English</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardcopy Vietnamese</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 1 asked for contact details, this information has been utilized to understand the legislative areas and local Government council areas.

All participants are based in the federal electoral division of Lingiari. The highest number of farms are within the Goyder legislative area division, secondly the Daly legislative area division and thirdly the Katherine legislative area division.

![Legislative Area Divisions Chart](chart.png)
As with the population the majority of farms were based in the Litchfield local government area with most of those farms being based in the south ward.

**Q 2 Asked what fruit/vegetables do you harvest seasonally?** The participants covered many commodities with mangoes being the highest and melons being the second highest amount of produce grown in the Territory. The other commodities include hay and forestry.
Q 3 Asked which Employment Programs the businesses accessed in the 2017 harvest season.

- Seasonal Worker Program
- Working Holiday Maker
- Seasonal Work Incentive Trial
- Job Active Harvest Labour Service
- Sentenced to A Job
- International Students with Work Visa
- Community Development Program
- None
- Other (please specify)

All Employment Programs accessed

A variety of Employment programs were accessed to fill the needs of the growers. The main source of staff is via the working visa’s available, firstly the backpackers (65%) then the seasonal worker program (36%) and international students (20%). The Seasonal Worker Program has been accessed both via direct hire and via labour hire contractors for approximately five years (since 2013).

There is overlap between working visa holders and the harvest labour service. The current Harvest Labour Service contract holder, The Job Shop have informed NT Farmers the percentage of workers placed through the HLS was 40% for the NT in 2017.
A labour hire contractor supplying to the industry has provided percentage of placements in 2017 by origin; 82% backpackers, 12% seasonal workers through the Seasonal Worker Program, 5% from interstate and 1% locals.

A second labour hire agency supplying to the industry (both to farms and to service contractors) has provided the following data in relation to the countries of origin of the workers in 2017. The highest percentage of 29% originated from Korea, secondly China 14%, France 9% and Indonesia 8%.

NT Farmers have investigated a Labour Hire Co-operative to share workers across farms but to date a group of farmers have not committed to the commencement of the Co-operative.

The harvest labour service registers candidates available to work creating a pool of workers who can work across Australia as required by the seasonality of the produce. A gap has been identified in relation to the HLS between the employers understanding and satisfaction with the HLS.
Q 4 Asked the percentage rate on how harvest staff were employed (direct or via a Labour Hire Agency)

Direct Employment 69%

Very few employers (21%) utilise labour hire agencies, due to previous poor performance by some labour hire agencies in the NT horticulture industry; committing to providing staff and not delivering as per the Employers requirements or taking payment but not delivering leaving farmers out of pocket. The fact that so many farmers employ direct raises concerns around risks of illegal activity and this additional workload, perhaps without formal training (e.g. recruiting staff without checking the visa has working rights). This highlights the need for NT Farmers Association to support members by offering training in recruitment and staff management.

The Workforce Planning Coordinator has facilitated fair work compliance workshops in Darwin, Katherine & Alice Springs in 2018 for members (as this training is fairly generic to employers NT Cattleman’s Association members attended also). An information session on the various employment programs farmers can access was held in Darwin in February 2018. NT Farmers Association was successful in gaining funding towards 10 student places in farm business management training to be held in Darwin in May 2018 (5 student places have been offered to the NT Cattleman’s Association members).

There are currently two Labour Hire Agencies in the NT that specifically service the horticulture industry. Many farmers do not want to pay a commission fee for the service. There is an opportunity for Labour Hire Agency – Farmers Forums where the agencies provide information on what is involved in their service and what the fees cover (e.g. performing pre-employment checks as part of risk management). This would provide an opportunity for Farmers to provide feedback for Agencies to improve performance and offer a better service to Farmers.

With many farms performing direct recruitment there is a risk here, if the recruitment procedure is not followed such as omitting to
  - check that the workers have the right to work in Australia
  - perform pre-employment checks (e.g. reference checks)
Q5. Asked where the 2017 harvest workers were employed from?

- Local
- Local Indigenous
- Interstate non-Indigenous
- Interstate Indigenous
- Overseas (please specific country and visa category)

A large mix here, some employers have a mix of employees; locals, interstate, overseas. Of note there are more locals employed in the industry than expected (35%) with 10% of those locals being indigenous. The highest number of staff are from overseas with the remaining staff coming from interstate (non-indigenous).

Origin of staff

This pie chart shows the employees origin.

Q6 How many staff did you need for the 2017 season and how many actually employed (include permanent staff)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positions</th>
<th>Needed for 2017</th>
<th>Employed in 2017</th>
<th>Shortfall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>1,875</td>
<td>1,706</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,090</td>
<td>1,878</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where in 2016 (during the backpacker tax argument) there was not enough staff to pick the produce and produce causing a loss of income. In 2017 there is a gap in available labour, relative to need with 36% of surveyed employers not having the required number of workers creating a higher and longer-term workload for the employed staff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Total(All Sectors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mango</td>
<td>1369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melon</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tropical Fruit</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total(all sectors)</strong></td>
<td><strong>1829</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note this is all commodities including non-seasonal.
Number of seasonal (casual) staff required for each area as per the 2017 Harvest Labour Survey.

Greater Darwin: 1067
Katherine: 493
Central Australia: 15
Q 7 Asked what were the dates of the 2017 harvest seasons applicable to the commodities?

Appendix B is a Harvest Calendar which shows the months of harvest, relevant to location & produce as per the 2017 Harvest Labour Survey.

Green mango season in both Darwin & Katherine ran from May to November 2017, ripe mango season commenced in July in Darwin, September in Katherine and concluded in January 2018. Melon season in Darwin ran from May to October 2017. Melon season in Katherine ran from April to October 2017. Vegetables were harvested in the greater Darwin area during February to October 2017. The grape harvest season was November and December 2017. Tropical fruit was harvested all year.

This information can be supplied to the federal governments jobactive harvest trail for the website. The commodities with the highest staffing requirement are mangoes and melons, as vegetables and some tropical fruit are harvested year-round these commodities are self-sufficient (with farmers performing the harvesting themselves or with a small number of local staff). The commodities with the highest staffing requirement also had the highest number of staff from overseas. Accessing short term harvest workers via working visa’s including the Seasonal Worker Program, Work and holiday makers, working holiday makers and international students with working rights. The reasons that the seasonal produce has the greatest gaps in labour includes the short-term nature of the work and the hot and humid weather during the ripe mango harvest season.

Many participants did not complete questions 8 a or 8 b this section of the survey in full therefore the report shows the information gained.

Q8. a. Please state the number of full time positions that were required over the 2017 harvest period. If one full time person performs two or more occupations, please write the title and responsibilities in ‘Other’.

8.b. Please list the qualifications and skills sets preferred for those positions you listed above. Please include any specialised skills e.g. drone operating, GPS operating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Health Safety Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Plant Operator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck Driver</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm hand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Farm Manager undertakes many other positions including Human Resources Manager, Work, Health & Safety Officer, Supervisor, Mechanic, Truck Driver, Administration Officer, Accounts Officer, Warehouse Officer, Plant Operator and Farm Hand.

Responsibilities include risk management, training of staff, irrigation maintenance, planning daily duties, machinery maintenance, market monitoring and communication.
Knowledge required for staff includes when to harvest crop and how to pack produce while handling with care, how to administer first aid.

Skills include a suitable English level to communicate requirements and expectations. Mechanical, plant operation, staff management, welding and fencing.

Many full time equivalent staff perform more than one role, some have multi-responsibilities across business management, human resources, staff supervision, market liaison and mechanical maintenance. It is noted that many of these farmers do not have qualifications in one or more fields.

It is recommended that NT Farmers support these important industry personnel with upskilling. The skills required to perform these roles include; staff management, communication, time management, decision making and prioritizing.

Most family farms operate with 1-2 Full Time Equivalent, consisting of a couple where one can work full time in Government or Private enterprise and assist on farm after 9-5, this also supplements the income.

Another model that works well is where Corporate farms have farms interstate that produce at different times of the year, leaving a skeleton crew to maintain the NT farm throughout the year then transferring the Full Time Equivalent staff from interstate temporarily for the NT harvest season. This mechanism works well for these companies especially considering the Territories low population and lack of trained or experienced labour. These workers count as transient workers.

Others access the Seasonal Worker Program (a foreign aid program) which provides the low skilled temporary workers for the season. There are two options to access this program, one is directly as an approved employer, the second is through an approved contractor. There are many conditions to becoming an approved employer, including high administrative and up front costs this option is not cost effective (including the time required) for small farms to become approved employers. Small growers surveyed who have accessed the program via an approved contractor have been extremely happy with the quality of workers noticing increased productivity.

Q 9
Tick all that you provide to harvest employees.
- Onsite accommodation camp site unpowered
- Onsite accommodation camp site powered
- Onsite accommodation room shared with others
- Onsite accommodation room per person If offsite accommodation is supplied please state the style of accommodation_________________
- Accommodation caretakers/house parents
- Meals
- Cooking facilities
- Uniforms
- Access to laundry facilities
- Laundry service
- PPE
- Training
- Recreation e.g. day trip to local tourist attraction
- Transport
- IT services e.g. internet access, Wi-Fi.
- Other please specify
Due to farms rural locations and lack of proximity to public transport 100% of farms provide onsite accommodation, which has been the norm for many years. All participants provide accommodation of some description; camping non-powered, camping powered, shared rooms or individual rooms mostly with shared bathroom facilities (separate for males & females) & some with ensuite bathrooms.

Other facilities provided to the ‘live in’ staff include cooking facilities, laundry facilities and mandatory training and personal protective equipment.

The combination of bad employers and the stories in the media in relation to the mistreatment of farm workers has contributed to a damaged industry reputation (Australia wide). An inquiry into establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia was completed in 2017 with the recommendation that the Australian Government introduce a Modern Slavery Act in Australia which should include measures to address labour exploitation, including establishing a labour hire licensing scheme and making changes to Australia’s visa framework.

Some large employers who employ direct have a good reputation amongst backpackers who share via word of mouth and social media that the farm is an ‘employer of choice’ which results in queries via social media or phone to the employer during following seasons. These ‘employers of choice’ supply comfortable accommodation, cooking facilities, laundry facilities, areas to eat or rest during rest breaks that are bug free, training and some allow music to work along to. One large farm also has accommodation caretakers, maintaining the accommodation and facilities is an extra cost to the farms.

Q 10 was not answered by all participants due to privacy concerns, therefore a total for industry is unable to be accurately published.

What was the organisations total gross wages bill for the 2017 harvest (including superannuation and tax)?
Recommendations

The following recommendations would assist to develop the NT horticulture industry.

It is recommended that NT Farmers Association

1. Continue advocacy for a National Specific Agriculture visa, to access workers with farming experience and who are acclimatized to the weather e.g. South East Asian workers

2. Continue advocacy to improve NT horticulture industry access to current international work visas.

3. Facilitate “Labour Hire Agency – Farmers Forums” twice throughout the year pre-mango season & pre-melon season (at Katherine & Darwin). The agencies provide information on what is involved in their service and what the fees cover (e.g. performing pre-employment checks as part of risk management), as well as receive feedback to improve performance and offer a better service to Farmers.

4. Conduct the NT harvest labour survey annually to make comparisons; identify industry growth and staffing requirements, including training needs.

5. Share the harvest labour calendar dates with the Harvest Labour Scheme coordinators (Department of Jobs and Small Business) and others.

6. Include upskilling for farmers engaging labour direct e.g. recruitment and staff management. within the NT horticulture industry Workforce Development Plan.

7. Continue to improve access to the horticulture industry for young Territorian’s and include the various programs within the Workforce Development Plan.

8. Create a promotional plan to promote the NT horticulture industry as a great place to work and progress a career.


10. Support the Regional Development Australia NT proposal “The Sweetest Job Campaign” a campaign to attract and train locals in the NT horticulture industry including facilitating farm access for training and employment opportunities, providing a funding contribution from the Workforce Planning Coordinators budget (with approval from the NT Government Department of Trade, Business & Innovation) and approaching other stakeholders for funding contributions.

11. Investigate further the countries of origin for mango and melon farm labour to develop a specific promotion strategy.

12. Advocate for the accreditation of labour hire agencies or labour hire licensing in the Northern Territory.

13. Advocate for small business assistance (e.g. gaining alternatives to online reporting to Federal agencies such as the Australian Taxation Office).
Conclusion

The NT 2017 Harvest Labour Survey has benchmarked the current staffing requirements of the industry throughout the year at various locations for various commodities. There is opportunity for industry growth, once the labour issue is improved. The gaps identified include:

- The low population, low unemployment rate, cost of living and short-term nature of the work are factors that prohibit local employment.
- The constant changes to visa’s is another administrative burden that the farmers simply do not have time or money to maintain currency. The amount of administration imposed by bureaucracy reduces the amount of time spent of core business (feeding the world).
- Small businesses do not have the resources to invest into the Seasonal Worker Program.
- A visa for the short-term process work specific to the horticulture industry.

Through the Workforce Planning Coordinators activities these gaps have also been identified:

- Production horticulture skill sets are not ‘on scope’ within the horticulture courses delivered.
- There is a lack of horticulture Trainers in the excellent learning facilities due to funding.
- Lack of horticulture subjects within middle and secondary school curriculum.

NT Farmers Association canvassed growers on the 2017 workforce requirements, trends have been identified affecting industry workforce demand and supply;

The mango industry being the biggest employer.

A total of 2037 staff were required (full time, part time and casual) 1575 casual staff were required for the harvest seasons. The farmers met these needs mainly by direct employment of international workers.

There was a shortfall of 187 positions remaining unfilled across the industry.

The industry needs to be promoted to improve misconceptions and be protected from rogue operators and misinterpretation of the law.

Workforce issues have been identified and recommendations made for suggested solutions. Although the survey did not identify the demand of businesses for VET, skills sets & tertiary qualifications the requirement has been noted through the Workforce Planning Coordinators activities and will be collated during the creation of the Workforce Development Plan.

Appendices

Appendix A Skilling Australians Fund
Appendix B Harvest Calendar