



Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals
Minister for Agriculture**

Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash

**Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family
Business**

The Hon David Coleman MP

**Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant
Services and Multicultural Affairs**

Dr Anne Webster MP

Member for Mallee

M E D I A R E L E A S E

Growing workforce for horticulture in Mallee

Farmers, including horticulture growers in the Mallee region will have better access to the labour they need this season to harvest their fruit with the Australian Government acting on concerns raised by the community.

Minister for Agriculture Senator Bridget McKenzie said the Regional Agriculture Migration Package was a practical response to the desperate need in the region for greater access to migrant labour.

“This package from our government shows what effective local representation can do for a community,” Minister McKenzie said.

“Local member, Dr Anne Webster, has been advocating for her community to get better access to a migrant workforce and has highlighted just how complex the issue is.

“This package is about getting the right labour at the right time at the right place, making sure there is suitable accommodation available and ensuring compliance with workplace laws.

“Importantly, the package will give growers, especially smaller growers, access to the Seasonal Worker Programme pilot, with a Regional Coordinator to help them club together to provide the volume of work needed to attract and sustain the harvest workforce.

“The Wimmera-Mallee is a critically important food producing region – accounting for 10 per cent of all horticulture farms and generating more than \$1.35 billion for our national economy – we can’t risk having that valuable fruit rot on the orchard floor.”

The changes mean that up to an additional 1,000 Pacific workers could be available this season, building on almost 4000 additional places available to workers from Vietnam, Thailand and Poland under the Work and Holiday visa program.

Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, said the extension of the Seasonal Worker Programme pilot to the Wimmera-Mallee was for an additional two years.

“The Morrison Government is committed to backing Australian farmers by improving access to seasonal workers to support regional communities and small businesses,” said Minister Cash.

“The Seasonal Workers Programme pilot will allow additional workers to assist eligible Australian growers for the upcoming harvest season.”

Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, David Coleman, said while our first priority is always to fill jobs with Australians, the immigration system is helping to address regional skills gaps and grow local economies.

“Last year more than 43,000 second year visas were granted to working holiday makers who worked in regional areas – a 20 per cent increase on the previous year. This year we’re adding the potential for a third year visa for WHMs who do an additional six months of regional work,” Minister Coleman said.

“This year we’ve also set aside 25,000 regional skilled visa places in our permanent migration program to further support regional businesses, including farmers.

“The Government is working with the horticulture industry to establish a Horticulture Industry Labour Agreement before 2020, to increase access to migrant workers at different skill levels, replicating similar agreements with the dairy, meat and pork industries.”

Member for Mallee, Dr Anne Webster, said the program was a win for the region.

“I’ve been taking the concerns of our growers to Canberra for months now and I’m pleased to see we have been listened to,” Dr Webster said. “We need to make sure these workers have appropriate places to live in our vibrant regions.

“Through this package, we’ll put an accommodation broker in the Wimmera-Mallee to work on innovative accommodation solutions. That’ll come from active, constructive partnership with local councils, state governments, industry, and communities.

“We have the chance to make sure we can get the fruit off the trees for our growers, and generate additional economic activity through the accommodation component of the program. That adds up to a win-win for the Mallee.”