

Answers to questions taken on notice
Mr Michael Pisasale – Murray Irrigation

MR CHANTHIVONG: I just want to ask around the labour and skills shortages in the agricultural sector. I think part of it is due to the fact that there has not been a lot of transitory migration due to the pandemic. I am just wondering from the industry's perspective, what sort of policies and changes we should institute to attract perhaps younger Australians having their gap year, rather than gallivanting off to Europe and North America, and spending their time in country Australia to pick some fruit, see regional Australia and have a bit of fun. How do we attract that pool of labour to give them a different experience? They can still go overseas, such as to Europe, but I just wonder though, given the recent changes because of the pandemic, whether there might be an opportunity for the industry to really attract that labour pool to help with the labour shortage and also avoid food going to waste because no-one is picking it.

Answers provided:

1. Feedback from the Dairy industry:

In the dairy industry the big gaps in the workforce are on-farm with farm managers and farm hands, and in the service sector with large animal vets and cold-face technologies such as robotics eg inventing, installation and maintenance. Often a successful new-to-industry person has had a great past experience on a farm, even a simple visit as a child. A gap year could provide this, even allowing the person to leave after 12 months to hopefully return as their career develops. A gap year with exposure to whole of industry could be brilliant for those who don't quite know where they want to go. An experience in the dairy industry in Victoria offered a gap year opportunity over the last 2 years and uptake was not been strong. The program was aimed at 18 years or more with a vehicle licence required. This was usually a traineeship with TAFE. Younger placements are often in need of higher supervision (as you would expect) with also corresponding support to the host farm business.

Farm businesses must have in place great policies around HR and WHS. Proven or likely to be good employers also factor into our duty of care. Also need to be aware of the care needed for a young person- as in focus on the experience not just to be a labour unit- hence a focus can also be what else can be done for them. Also an understanding that wage mightn't be the only driving factor- for example acknowledging extra days off or goals in training qualifications.

2. Feedback from broader agriculture industry:

- **More universal wages** - A wage structure that may encourage younger people in the industry, for example a 17 year old could work just as hard as a 20 year old and receive similar pay. It is also very important to ensure better supervision and a much higher duty of care for younger individuals interesting in work in agriculture.
- **Working conditions**- A scheme that gives students (and reassures their parents!) of their potential working conditions - eg phone service, air conditioned house, travel access, knowing the employer treats employees well, on-farm safety & pay rates.
- **Farm profiles**- Broader marketing of the farm industry. For example, raising the profiles, education and values of farming in schools to strengthen an underlying desire to want to work in agriculture and the "status" of agriculture in schools. Activities such as farm tours and talks can be held with a student placement program with corresponding support (similar to apprentice support mechanism for

all placements). A staggered introduction to the agriculture industry might also work e.g. talk, tour and then work again.

- **Technology** - Use of technology in Agriculture to make working conditions easier and more intellectually stimulating for the more tech-savvy younger generation (technology or animal husbandry standards).
- **Promoting the agriculture adventure**- It is an adventure, challenge, chance to build practical skills, meet other people and can be done with little money in the pocket (unlike going OS as you will be earning money). Ensure that the roles have variety, connectedness to others and they are not just a labour unit – but actively looking to give the gap year person a great experience.
- **Reducing the farm fear factor** - help reduce this around not knowing what to do, working with animals, being isolated because by pumping up the enjoyable work, meeting a good cohort and being a skilled, practical person on your return.
- **Farms Promoting themselves**- Working with farmers to help make their employment offer attractive, how do they make it worthwhile for people to stay on the job, what will they walk away with at the end (in terms of life skills and experiences) and will people who have worked on the farm recommend others to follow in their footsteps (the farmers who had a steady stream of backpackers were typically getting their farm recommended in group chats by people who had a good time). Linking prospective students to good farm businesses.
- **Encouraging School Leavers**- A program to specifically target school leavers to have a gap year in agriculture. Like #buyfromthebush #GapitOzAg or something where businesses register to host Gap students and post wonderful moderated imagery and experiences.
- **Information**- The availability of on-line sources and supporting information as another avenue for those looking to enter the industry and those looking to employ.