



Growing Well-Being – Jobs for People from the Pacific on Australian Farms

November 2018

“And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.”
Deuteronomy 10:19

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Isaiah 58:6-7

Our Pacific neighbours have growing problems with unemployment due to limited opportunities for economic development. For example, the government of the Solomon Islands reports that each year 18,000 people reach working age, but only 3,000 new jobs are created. Thus, being able to have people go overseas to work and send money back to their families in the Pacific is vital to being able to address the problems of poverty in the Pacific. People working overseas and sending money home is now the biggest source of foreign income for Fiji, Samoa, Timor Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu.

The Australian Government has set up a program to allow people to come from the Pacific and work on Australian farms for six months at a time. The Seasonal Worker Program last year brought in 8,457 people from the Pacific, which was a 37% increase on the year before. While there have been some problems of exploitation on the program, the people on the program are given safeguards against exploitation that do not exist for other people from overseas working on farms. People on the Seasonal Worker Program are given access to unions and community groups, including churches, to try and ensure they are being treated fairly.



Men from Vanuatu working on an asparagus farm in Gippsland. They are saving money to buy a 4WD vehicle to be able to take people in need of medical treatment from their village to the nearest health clinic.

Tongan father of six Lafaele Kautai told *The Australian* newspaper in October 2018 that with the money he earned from working in Australia “We built a house and I have already bought a light truck for taking some water, for cousins’ and also my cattle.”

By comparison, the tens of thousands of people working on farms in breach of their visa conditions, largely from Malaysia, are subjected to ruthless exploitation by the labour hire businesses that employ them and the Australian farmers that benefit from their labour. There are organised rings trafficking Malaysians into Australia to work on farms, lying to them that they will be legally able to work on the farms.

Malaysian journalist, Saiful Hasam, went undercover in 2016 to work for a labour hire contractor supplying labour to Swan Hill based company Cutri Fruit. Cutri Fruit supplies product to Coles and Woolworths. While acting as a person working in breach of his visa,

Saiful spoke to a senior manager of Cutri Fruit about the exploitation he was being subjected to.

"Are you legal? You got legal papers?" replied the farm manager caught on a concealed recording. "I can't employ you direct. You don't have the paper. You know what I mean? That's why we use the contractor because, I don't know, they dodgy it up."

The National Farmers Federation and other farmer bodies are arguing there is a shortage of 100,000 people needed to work in rural areas. However, rather than support the well-being of people from the Pacific they want a new "agricultural visa" that will not include the safeguards against exploitation that are provided by the Seasonal Workers Program. The National Party has taken up their cause, while the Liberal Ministers of the Coalition Government have stated their support for a massive expansion of the Seasonal Worker Program.

The Pacific countries easily have the people to fill the 100,000 needed, as if 15% of working aged people in the Pacific came to do work in Australia (a realistic proportion) that would be 140,000. A further 400,000 would be available from PNG, which has also been permitted on the Seasonal Worker Program.

We need to show our support for those in the Commonwealth Government that support increasing the number of people from the Pacific being able to come and work in Australia with proper safeguards against exploitation.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

Senator The Hon. Marise Payne

Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Scott Morrison MP

Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Contact him on his website at
<https://www.pm.gov.au/contact-your-pm>

Points to make in your letters:

- Welcome the Government's commitment to increase the number of workers coming from the Pacific to work on the Seasonal Worker Program.
- State that this is the way the government should find the people to work on Australian farms, as it makes a real difference to the lives of people in the Pacific while meeting the labour needs of Australian farms.
- Ask that the expansion of the program must not be at the expense of the safeguards the program provides against exploitation.
- Seek assurance that the government will reject the introduction of an agricultural visa that will lack the same level of safeguards against exploitation as are provided by the Seasonal Worker Program.
- Also request assurance that changes will not be made to Working Holiday Visas to encourage more backpackers to work on farms. Point out that the Fair Work Ombudsman has already reported that tying work on farms to a visa extension of a year has contributed to severe exploitation of backpackers on farms, including employers seeking to pressure female backpackers for sex in exchange for the visa extension.