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The document must be attributed as the DEWR 2024 *Harvest Trail Services Evaluation Report 2020–2022*.

Table of contents

Glossary of acronyms and key terms	v
Executive summary	i
The evaluation	i
Difficulties in meeting harvest labour needs	ii
Awareness and take-up of HTS	ii
Implementation and delivery of HTS	iii
Promoting fair and safe work in HTS	iii
Employer satisfaction with HTS	iv
Worker experiences with HTS	iv
AgMove	iv
Departmental Response	vi
External factors impacting on the delivery of the program	vi
Next steps	vi
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Harvest Trail Services	1
Harvest Trail Information Service	2
1.2 AgMove	2
1.3 Harvest Trail Services Industry Collaboration Trial	3
1.4 Contextual background	3
The horticulture industry in Australia	3
Typology of the harvest workforce in the horticulture sector	4
Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on harvest labour	5
State government initiatives	5
Attracting harvest workers: examples from other countries	6
2. The evaluation	8
2.1 Methodology	8
2.2 Quantitative research	9
Harvest employers	9
Harvest workers	10
Online Employment Services job seekers	10
2.3 Qualitative research	11
2.4 Administrative data sources	11
2.5 Data limitations to note	11
Language barriers	11

Participant recall and confusion	12
Other challenges	12
2.6 Research ethics	13
3. Findings on harvest labour market	14
3.1 What employers look for in harvest workers	14
3.2 Recruitment methods in the harvest industry	16
3.3 Employer-reported barriers to recruiting harvest workers	17
Lack of accommodation	18
Lack of transport options	19
3.4 Worker views on harvest work	20
3.5 OES job seeker views on harvest work	22
4. Harvest Trail Services awareness and take-up	24
4.1 Awareness	24
Employers	24
Harvest workers	26
4.2 Take-up	30
5. Implementation and delivery of Harvest Trail Services	33
5.1 Challenges establishing the program	33
Harvest outcome fee	35
5.2 High number of applicants as an ongoing challenge	36
5.3 Engagement between HTS providers, harvest employers and other stakeholders	37
Harvest employer views on HTS provider engagement	38
Engagement with industry and other stakeholders	39
6. Promoting fair and safe work in Harvest Trail Services	41
6.1 HTS providers and fair and safe work practices	41
6.2 Employer views on fair and safe work	42
6.3 Worker views on fair and safe work information	43
7. Employer satisfaction with Harvest Trail Services	47
7.1 Hiring harvest workers through HTS	47
Experiences hiring through HTS providers	49
HTS providers' understanding of employer needs	50
Provider ability to source workers during COVID-19 restrictions	51
7.2 Employer views on quality of candidates referred by HTS providers	53
7.3 Employers' overall satisfaction with HTS	55
8. Worker satisfaction with and experiences of Harvest Trail Services	57
8.1 Views on interaction with HTS providers	57

Harvest workers on income support	59
8.2 Overall harvest worker satisfaction with HTS	60
9. AgMove	64
9.1 Awareness of AgMove	64
9.2 Experiences of administering and claiming AgMove	64
Lengthy reimbursement timeframe	64
Administrative burden	65
Confusion over AgMove rules and application process	66
9.3 AgMove as a motivator to relocate	67
Providers are generally supportive of the intent of AgMove	67
Employers and industry views are mixed on whether AgMove incentivises relocation	68
Other factors limiting the impact of AgMove	69
Likelihood of harvest workers relocating	70
Likelihood of OES job seekers to relocate	71
9.4 Harvest workers' likelihood to recommend AgMove	72
10. References	74
11. Appendix A	76

List of figures

Figure 1: Employer awareness of HTS by sample source	24
Figure 2: Self-reported awareness of HTS among harvest workers prior to referral	27
Figure 3: HTS awareness among harvest workers by age group	29
Figure 4: Employer types using HTS	31
Figure 5: Employer views on HTS providers assisting them to understand fair and safe work	43
Figure 6: Employer views on whether hiring workers through HTS providers is a time-consuming process	50
Figure 7: Employer satisfaction with candidates by employer organisation size	53
Figure 8: Employer satisfaction with referred workers	55
Figure 9: Harvest employers' likelihood to use HTS again	56
Figure 10: Harvest employers' likelihood to recommend HTS to other employers	56
Figure 11: Agreement that the harvest work you were referred to was ...	57
Figure 12: Harvest worker likelihood to use HTS again by cohort type	61
Figure 13: Harvest worker likelihood to use HTS again by age group	62
Figure 14: Harvest worker likelihood to use HTS again by income support status	62
Figure 15: Likelihood of recommending AgMove by residency status	73

List of tables

Table 1: Performance of major horticulture products in Australia, 2020–21	3
Table 2: Summary of fieldwork	9
Table 3: Methods employers reported using to source workers before and during COVID-19 restrictions	17
Table 4: Employer-reported barriers to recruiting harvest workers	18
Table 5: Top 12 reasons given for taking up harvest work	20
Table 6: Reasons for declining harvest work offers	22
Table 7: OES job seekers' likelihood to consider harvest work	22
Table 8: Disincentives to harvest work according to OES job seekers	23
Table 9: Sources of HTS awareness among harvest employers	25
Table 10: Sources of HTS awareness among harvest workers	28
Table 11: Sources of HTIS awareness among harvest workers	30
Table 12: HTS employers by number of vacancies advertised	31
Table 13: HTS work placements by participant demographic	32
Table 14: Participants on whether their HTS provider talked to them about fair and safe work	44
Table 15: Harvest workers' recall of information their HTS provider gave them	44
Table 16: Harvest workers' ratings of helpfulness of fair and safe work information	45
Table 17: Proportion of HTS workers referred who were hired	48
Table 18: Employers reporting that HTS providers referred fewer workers than they needed, by employer harvest labour needs at peak harvest	48
Table 19: Total agree responses by respondent group	59
Table 20: Views on whether the AgMove application process was straightforward.	66
Table 21: Employer views on whether relocation assistance is essential in addressing labour shortage	69
Table 22: Likelihood to relocate among all OES job seekers and OES job seekers who indicated they would consider taking up harvest work	72
Table 23: Major harvest areas in Australia	76
Table 24: HTS Industry Collaboration Trial projects	77
Table 25: Awareness of HTS and HTIS among harvest employers	78
Table 26: Information provided to employers by HTS providers	78
Table 27: Overall employer satisfaction with the quality of referred workers	79
Table 28: Reported main reasons for not being satisfied with the quality of candidates among harvest employers	79
Table 29: Awareness of AgMove among harvest workers interested in relocating for work and OES job seekers	80
Table 30: Applied for a harvest job that required relocation	80
Table 31: Where harvest worker jobs required moving to	80
Table 32: Other supports for harvest workers	81
Table 33 Likelihood of taking up harvest work among OES job seekers	81
Table 34: Likelihood of considering relocating for harvest work among OES job seekers	82
Table 35: Harvest workers' self-reported interaction with AgMove	82
Table 36: Whether AgMove was necessary for harvest workers to accept their harvest job	83

Glossary of acronyms and key terms

ABARES	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Science
AgMove	Australian Government initiative that provides relocation assistance to people relocating to regional areas to undertake short-term agricultural jobs, including harvest work.
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CATI	computer assisted telephone interviews
ESS Web	Employment Services System (ESS) Web is an online service that allows employment services providers to administer employment services for job seekers under Workforce Australia Online for Businesses, Disability Employment Services, Transition to Work, and other employment contracts including Harvest Trail Services. It is managed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.
General job seeker	A job seeker who may not necessarily have participated in Harvest Trail Services
Harvest areas	Specified areas in which Harvest Trail Services providers operate
Harvest employer	An entity whose business activities involve harvest work within a harvest area
Harvest worker	A worker who is placed into harvest work
HLS	Harvest Labour Services
HTS	Harvest Trail Services
HTIS	Harvest Trail Information Service
jobactive	The government's mainstream employment services program from 2015 to 2022. It was replaced by Workforce Australia in July 2022.
MR	Multiple response, as used in surveys. This means that respondents can pick any number of responses to answer the question. As respondents can pick more than one survey option, the total percentages will not add up to 100.
NHLIS	National Harvest Labour Information Services
OES	Online Employment Services
OH&S	operational health and safety
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme

Executive summary

Harvest Trail Services (HTS) connects workers with employers in 16 harvest areas across Australia. Horticulture is a vital but complex industry in Australia that faces unique challenges in sourcing a sufficient workforce. While issues with sourcing workers existed before COVID-19, the pandemic has increased some of these challenges.

This evaluation indicates that HTS providers are making efforts to ensure that harvest employers who engage with HTS receive appropriate assistance through sourcing available and suitable workers, and planning for local workforce and recruitment needs. Similarly, HTS providers attempt to make sure workers are placed into appropriate harvest work that is fair and safe, and harvest employers involved in the research suggested that they take this seriously and provide relevant training to workers.

Harvest employers were appreciative of HTS providers locating potential workers, screening them for suitability, and preparing them for work in the role with minimum administrative burden for employers. Employers' main criticism of HTS was its inability to source enough workers; however, many acknowledged the environment in which HTS providers were operating, particularly noting the shortages of overseas workers and the restricted mobility of people at a time of closed borders in Australia due to COVID-19.

Harvest workers were also generally positive about their interaction with HTS providers, and the majority found that they were placed into work that was relevant to their skills, abilities and location. Nearly 6 in 10 (59.6%) of all respondents in the quantitative research indicated that they were *likely or very likely* to use HTS again, compared to a quarter of workers (25.0%) who indicated that they were *unlikely or very unlikely* to do so.

The evaluation shows that HTS appears to be facilitating harvest employers to find suitable workers and contributing to getting more Australians into harvest work. However, it became clear during the evaluation that the program's impact is potentially affected by major infrastructure and logistical barriers that are beyond the scope of the program to address. These barriers include a shortage of or unaffordable – or in some cases no – accommodation and suitable transport options. The evaluation could not separate the impact of HTS from these factors. This limited its ability to identify and/or measure conclusively the program's overall impact.

The evaluation

This evaluation sought to examine elements of the effectiveness, appropriateness and reach of HTS (and, to a lesser extent, AgMove). The evaluation was designed to explore:

- the extent to which HTS meets the needs of harvest employers
- the impact and reach of HTS in contributing to the employment of Australian harvest workers, including those on income support
- the extent to which HTS has resulted in improved community understanding of the legal requirements for fair and safe harvest work
- the implementation and ongoing delivery of HTS.

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) conducted the evaluation of HTS and engaged Wallis Social Research (Wallis) to conduct research to support the evaluation. Fieldwork was conducted between February and July 2022.

The research involved:

- telephone and online surveys with harvest employers (n=259), harvest workers (n=1,319), and Online Employment Services (OES) participants (n=250)
- in-depth interviews with harvest employers (n=10), harvest workers (n=40), HTS provider representatives (n=6), jobactive providers (n=8), and industry representatives (n=8)
- 2 roundtable discussions with departmental staff.

Difficulties in meeting harvest labour needs

Participants in the qualitative fieldwork, particularly harvest employers and industry representatives, offered significant insight into the difficulties of recruiting harvest workers and managing horticultural businesses in general. While not a specific focus of the evaluation, these provide important context for the operation of HTS and for assessing the program's impact.

Employers, industry representatives and HTS providers commonly mentioned the significant challenges harvest employers face in finding enough workers for harvest work. This is most notable during peak harvest seasons, when additional staff are required to harvest and pack produce within tight timeframes (for example, to ensure it is distributed for sale at the optimal stage).

Harvest employers reported requiring workers who were willing to work and reliable, first and foremost. They generally did not require workers to be skilled or experienced; much more emphasis was placed on worker characteristics and attitude.

The difficulty in finding suitable harvest workers can be attributed, according to employers surveyed and interviewed, to several key factors. Inability to access affordable (or in some cases any) accommodation and lack of suitable transport options in harvest locations were frequently mentioned as obstacles in finding workers. In general, the evaluation found a perception among harvest employers that people are unwilling to perform harvest work (with 69.5% of harvest employers surveyed reporting this as a barrier to recruiting).

Of harvest workers surveyed, 68.8% of those who had declined a harvest job placement indicated that they had done so because they found another job, while 15.6% said the pay was too low and 14.1% indicated that the type of work was not attractive.

Awareness and take-up of HTS

HTS recorded 35,186 harvest work placements between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2022, with 2,204 employers advertising at least one vacancy during the same period. Fruit and nut tree growing was the most prevalent business type among the harvest employers surveyed, followed by other crop growing and 'other harvest work'.

Awareness of HTS among harvest employers was fairly high (with a total of 71.5% of employers surveyed reporting being aware or somewhat aware of HTS before being surveyed), whereas harvest worker awareness was more difficult to discern (56.3% reported being aware of HTS before being

referred¹). Harvest workers interviewed generally struggled to differentiate HTS from other government services, such as AgMove or jobactive.

The fieldwork indicates that agriculture/farmer peak and industry bodies play an essential role in raising awareness of HTS among harvest employers. In contrast, word of mouth was a much more prominent source of awareness according to harvest workers.

Implementation and delivery of HTS

HTS providers were given significant flexibility around how they implemented the services in their regions. Some HTS providers mentioned that they found establishing the program without more specific direction to be a challenge. Other providers expressed their appreciation of the flexibility they had in implementing the program, even if they had found this challenging at first.

HTS providers were generally positive about managing HTS, while noting the high number of direct registrants² they had to register into the Employment Services System (ESS) Web as an ongoing issue. Several providers had developed their own ways to manage the large number of people looking for work, such as developing systems for better recording and communicating with candidates.

The qualitative fieldwork indicated substantial engagement between HTS providers, harvest employers and industry peak bodies. HTS providers described actively establishing and maintaining contact with harvest employers and working to maintain their understanding of local employer labour requirements. HTS providers also mentioned harvest employers contacting them directly, which had increased significantly during the labour shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Promoting fair and safe work in HTS

HTS providers described working with employers to encourage fair and safe working practices, including by offering training and regular updates of relevant information. Some providers reported checking on fair and safe work practices during employer site visits to the best of their ability, while acknowledging that they are not professional safety auditors.

Most harvest employers interviewed mentioned delivering safety inductions to their harvest workers, including details on fair work and job-specific training. Over 6 in 10 (61.4%) employers agreed that their HTS providers supported them in understanding fair and safe work practices, though they indicated in the qualitative fieldwork that HTS providers were not their main source of information, in particular for fair work regulations.

Many HTS providers interviewed stated that they assess potential harvest workers for their capacity to perform essential work tasks and offer them an induction, job-specific training, and/or relevant information on fair and safe work. Harvest workers surveyed were generally satisfied with the information provided by their HTS provider: over 4 in 5 (80.4%) said the information was helpful.

¹ Harvest employers were asked if they were aware of HTS before taking the survey. While this might not be as reliable a measure as having tested awareness before interaction with HTS, this was not considered a feasible method for this evaluation.

² 'Direct registrants' are those who are not on income support. Anyone can apply for a job through HTS, but those not already on the system have to be registered then by the HTS provider into the ESS Web.

Those who offered reasons for this (in open text survey responses) tended to focus on the information being relevant and detailed.

Employer satisfaction with HTS

Most employers (89.4%) who reported attempting to recruit through an HTS provider had hired workers referred to them. Of these, 48.4% said they had hired half, a majority or all the workers referred to them by HTS providers, while 43.0% said they had hired a minority of those referred. Whether employers thought that they had been referred enough workers was dependent on their labour needs; businesses that reported requiring more workers at their peak (20 or more) were less likely to agree that HTS providers had referred enough workers for their needs.

Many employers interviewed said they had relied primarily on word of mouth, social media advertising, or labour hire firms to find workers prior to COVID-19, but that they were compelled to look for additional sources of labour (including through HTS providers) due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Employers who had recruited through HTS providers were particularly happy with the screening HTS providers conducted of potential candidates, that workers had all the required paperwork to start, and that the process was administratively easy for them.

Overall, 45.6% of employers reported that they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the quality of candidates referred to them, while 32.0% were dissatisfied (21.4% were 'neither dissatisfied nor satisfied'). Again, levels of satisfaction differed between businesses with different peak labour needs (with a total satisfaction level of 59.1% for businesses that needed 19 workers or fewer, compared to 31.6% for those needing 20 or more workers). Employers interviewed had mixed views on candidate quality; those who were dissatisfied mostly noted a poor attitude, unwillingness to perform the harvest work, and unreliability.

Most employers suggested that HTS providers were not able to source enough workers to meet their needs, though many also noted that increased labour shortages (particularly due to COVID-19 restrictions) were the main cause of this, rather than any lack of effort from the providers.

Worker experiences with HTS

Respondents to the harvest worker survey were generally very positive about the suitability of jobs to which they were referred. The majority agreed that the job was suitable in terms of location (76.6%), length of employment (73.9%) and level of physicality required (70.7%) and was relevant to their skills (68.0%). Harvest workers interviewed who spoke about interacting with an HTS provider gave mixed responses. Some were appreciative of the assistance provided and how approachable/responsive their provider was.

More than half (59.6%) of workers surveyed indicated they were likely or very likely to use HTS again in the future. Visa holders were more likely than Australian citizens / permanent residents to report that they would use HTS again.

AgMove

Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job for short-term agricultural work (also referred to as 'AgMove') provides financial assistance to support people to relocate to regional areas and undertake short-term agricultural jobs, including harvest work. Most harvest employers and many harvest workers interviewed had heard of the AgMove program, albeit not all recognised or could recall the name

'AgMove'. A total of 77.6% of harvest workers surveyed indicated that they were aware or somewhat aware of AgMove before the survey, compared to 26.8% of OES job seekers surveyed.

Most harvest workers interviewed mentioned that they appreciated the extra assistance offered by AgMove but indicated that it was not a primary factor in making the decision to relocate and that they would have done so anyway. HTS providers, and to a greater extent harvest employers and industry representatives, recognised that providing relocation assistance was helpful to people looking to move to take up harvest work, but were generally sceptical of the influence AgMove had over those considering whether to move.

Some HTS and jobactive providers said that AgMove mostly benefited harvest workers who were already considering or committed to moving. Other factors, such as a lack of accommodation and transport in harvest areas, were commonly mentioned as having a greater impact on the willingness of workers to relocate.

Harvest workers who had applied for AgMove remarked on the length of time the reimbursement took to process. Some participants stated that they had followed up with HTS providers numerous times, while others reported waiting many months before they received the money. Many participants in the qualitative fieldwork expressed uncertainty about what they could claim as part of AgMove and what they were required to use as evidence in seeking reimbursement. From a provider perspective, the main issue with AgMove was the time it took to process the claims.



Departmental Response

Harvest Trail Services Context

Harvest Trail Services (**HTS**) is a job placement service for short term seasonal jobs in the horticultural sector. It is the only industry specific, job placement program delivered by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

The HTS program evaluation provided insights and highlighted the strengths of the program, and areas for improvement from the point of view of HTS Providers, harvest workers and harvest employers. Importantly, the evaluation also identified key external barriers that limited the program's impact (including accommodation and transport constraints in regional areas).

The findings noted the program's value in sharing fair and safe work information with employers and potential workers, and minimising administrative burden for employers by locating and screening potential workers.

External factors impacting on the delivery of the program

A range of external factors had and/or continue to have an impact on the performance of the HTS program, including:

- COVID-19 border closures that impacted working holiday makers and the cessation of relocation assistance (**AgMove**) that was introduced as a short-term COVID-19 measure to support the agricultural sector.
- An increase of employers accessing the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (**PALM**) scheme for seasonal harvest work.
- Employers preferring to engage 'return workers' due to improved productivity and reduced recruitment and training costs.
- Investment and adoption of new technology by farmers due to tight labour markets.
- Severe weather conditions (e.g. flood and fire) that impact crops production.
- Scarcity of accommodation and transport options in regions.

Next steps

While the evaluation found that HTS did assist horticultural employers that use it, and that HTS supports job placement of workers in harvest regions; administrative data indicates that there has been an ongoing, and significant decline in the use of HTS by both employers and potential workers.

Overall, advertised Vacancies and Job Placements in HTS continue to trend down:

- When compared to 2020-21, advertised Vacancies in HTS declined by 33% in 2021-22 and 38% in 2022-23. Job Placements similarly declined by 41% in 2021-22 and a further 31% in 2022-23.
- With nearly all Harvest Areas collectively recording fewer placements in 2022-23 when compared to 2021-22.

A key aim of the HTS program was to increase the number of Australian job seekers being assisted, this has not occurred.

- Only 8% of Job Placements were made to participants in receipt of income support in 2022-23 compared to 17% in 2021-22.
- Less than 5% of all workers placed had been employed for longer than 4-weeks, less than 3% had been employed post 8-weeks, and less than 2% of placements had lasted more than 12-weeks.

The current HTS Deed and HTIS Contract ended on 30 June 2024.

1. Introduction

1.1 Harvest Trail Services

Harvest Trail Services (HTS) connects workers with employers in harvest areas across Australia. HTS aims to:

- address harvest employers' recruitment needs in harvest areas
- improve community understanding of the legal requirements for fair and safe harvest work
- increase the number of Australians employed in harvest work.

Harvest work, as defined in the HTS Deed, includes one or more of the following activities:

- production of harvest crops, including picking and pollinating
- planting and preparation for planting of harvest crops, including clearing and trenching
- propagation of harvest crops, including growing new plants from seeds
- packing shed operations
- local and immediate harvest crop processing within a harvest area
- local storage and local transportation of harvest crops.

HTS is delivered by 6 provider organisations (HTS providers) across 16 harvest areas in Australia. The role of HTS providers is to connect workers with employers to fill seasonal harvest vacancies.³ Local HTS providers help employers by posting job vacancies, screening and matching workers to positions, and helping employers understand their responsibilities to their workers. HTS providers help workers to look for harvest work, help them understand what is involved in harvest roles, and provide information on pay and conditions.

Harvest workers who might use HTS include Australian citizens or permanent residents, working holiday makers who have visas with appropriate working rights, overseas students with working rights, and temporary work visa holders with general work rights in Australia. Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme (PALM) participants are not eligible to be placed in harvest vacancies by HTS providers.

Prior to 1 July 2020, HTS was known as Harvest Labour Services (HLS). Harvest Labour Services was introduced in 1998 to address perceived labour shortages and manage the risks associated with crops not being picked on time. The program aimed to link working holiday makers and Australians looking for work with seasonal harvest jobs.

In the 2019–20 Budget, the Australian Government announced changes to HLS and National Harvest Labour Information Services (NHLIS), including name changes to Harvest Trail Services and Harvest Trail Information Service (Treasury 2019). The changes aimed to encourage more Australian job

³ These vacancies may include a variety of jobs like fruit or vegetable picking, packing, pruning and planting. The type of work varies between locations and the time of year. Jobs are available in harvest areas in most Australian states and territories. Jobs are seasonal and can range from just a few weeks to 6 months or more (DEWR n.d.).

seekers to take up seasonal work and included funding of \$24.1 million over 4 years. As part of these changes, a range of measures were introduced, including:

- expanding the number of HTS areas from 11 to 16 (see Table 23)
- incentivising HTS providers to place Australian job seekers in receipt of income support into seasonal work⁴
- enhancing the Harvest Trail Information Service and the Harvest Trail website.

Harvest Trail Information Service

HTS is supplemented by the Harvest Trail Information Service (HTIS), which aims to provide comprehensive and up-to-date information about harvest work opportunities around Australia through the [Harvest Trail Services](#) website and the National Harvest Guide ([updated quarterly](#)). HTIS also provides a telephone service for employers wanting to list vacancies on the online Harvest Trail jobs board or to connect with their local HTS provider, and for people looking for harvest work or to find out about local and regional accommodation and transport options. HTIS produces the quarterly State of the Australian Harvest Trail Market Report, which includes details on labour shortages, demand for harvest workers, recruitment practices, and emerging or declining horticultural industry businesses or crops.

1.2 AgMove

In May 2021, to further support Australian farmers and help boost the harvest workforce, the Australian Government announced Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job for short-term agricultural work (AgMove), which provides financial assistance to support people to relocate to regional areas and undertake short-term agricultural jobs, including harvest work. To be eligible for AgMove, a person needs to:

- move away from home and complete minimum required hours and weeks of agricultural or harvest work
- be either
- an Australian citizen or permanent resident
- a temporary visa holder with general working rights in Australia (for instance, working holiday makers or international students)
- be at least 18 years old (or have graduated year 12 and be 17 years old)
- have not claimed AgMove in the last 6 calendar months.

Under AgMove, Australian workers can access reimbursement of up to \$6,000 and up to \$2,000 for visa holders with general working rights (working holiday makers and some international students). To receive AgMove reimbursement of relocation costs, Australian workers and eligible temporary visa holders are required to complete a minimum of 120 hours over at least 4 weeks to be eligible to claim the maximum amount of \$6,000 or \$2,000 respectively.

⁴ HTS providers can claim a harvest outcome fee of \$550 (GST inclusive) for harvest workers on income support payments who complete at least 80 hours of paid work over 4 weeks; \$1,100 (GST inclusive) for harvest workers on income support payments who complete at least 240 hours of paid over 12 weeks; or \$1,375 (GST inclusive) for harvest workers on income support payments who complete at least 520 hours of paid work over 26 weeks.

From 5 May 2021, HTS providers, including the HTIS provider, were exclusively responsible for delivering AgMove. As of 30 June 2022, AgMove was fully subscribed.

1.3 Harvest Trail Services Industry Collaboration Trial

The \$1 million Harvest Trail Services Industry Collaboration Trial (the Trial) was announced as part of the 2019–20 Budget. The Trial involved the selection of 5 organisations to develop innovative approaches to promote new opportunities in the horticulture sector and encourage people to take up these opportunities while meeting employer demand. It ran over 2 years from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022 (Cash 2021). The successful organisations were AUSVEG Ltd, Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers Cooperative, Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers Ltd (GrowCom), Fruit Growers Victoria, and the Northern Territory Farmers Association (NT Farmers).

The Trial projects targeted various groups of people ranging from students, local job seekers, migrants and refugees, to horticulture growers and employers and employment services providers. Each selected organisation had set objectives ranging from developing promotional videos to providing training or pre-employment assistance to job seekers.

Due to the unique and targeted nature of each individual project and the limited resources available, the effectiveness of the Trial was not examined as part of this evaluation. A brief overview of each project is at Table 24.

1.4 Contextual background

The horticulture industry in Australia

The horticulture industry is vital for food security. It is an important sector of the economy and a major source of income and employment for many communities.

Horticulture is Australia’s third-largest and fastest-growing sector of agriculture (EY 2020). In the 2017–18 financial year, the industry had a gross value of around \$11 billion and fed a domestic market that had grown by over 2% each year for the past 2 decades (Wu et al. 2019). In 2020–21 the Australian horticulture (excluding wine grapes) industry reached an estimated gross value of \$11.92 billion (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2022). The major horticultural product groups in that year were fruit, vegetables, and nuts (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2022).

Table 1: Performance of major horticulture products in Australia, 2020–21

Product	Production volume (tonnes)	Production value (\$ million)	Export volume (tonnes)	Export value (\$ million)
Fruit	2,542,439	5,752.10*	421,439	1,216.40
Vegetables	3,831,301	4,913.50	215,374	264.0
Nuts	255,766	1,196.30	124,724	873.90

Source: Australian Horticulture Statistics Handbook 2020/21 (Hort Innovation n.d.).

*Some processed fruits are not included in total production value.

Major horticulture growing areas in Australia include Goulburn Valley (VIC), Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (NSW), Sunraysia (VIC and NSW), Riverland region (SA), Northern Tasmania, Southwest (WA), and coastal northern New South Wales and Queensland (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 2022).

Typology of the harvest workforce in the horticulture sector

Horticulture is a labour-intensive industry, requiring a reliable supply of productive labour. Employers in the horticulture industry are reliant on a diverse range of workers, both domestic and overseas, on an ongoing and temporary basis to pick, pack and grade fresh fruit and vegetables and perform other related harvest work (Howe et al. 2019; Campbell 2019, pp. 47–48). Australia’s horticulture and harvest workforce consists of:

- local Australian workers (Campbell 2019, p. 53; Howe et al. 2019), including:
- Australian residents living in towns and regions close to farms
- long-term unemployed people who live in towns and regions situated close to farms and receive social assistance (for example, income support payments)
- recent migrants who have obtained permanent residency status, including those on humanitarian visas, who reside in towns and regions close to farms
- mobile Australian workers, for example retirees or ‘grey nomads’ who move from one location to another.
- temporary visa holders, who make up the majority of the seasonal horticulture workforce in Australia. The Australian horticulture industry is increasingly reliant on a temporary migrant workforce (Howe et al. 2019; Howe 2020). These include working holiday makers (WHMs),⁵ participants in the PALM scheme,⁶ international students⁷ and New Zealand citizens
- undocumented migrant workers. Typically, these are workers who overstay their visas and have no or restricted work rights (Campbell 2019, p. 53; Howe et al. 2019).

There is some debate about the prevalence of labour shortages in the industry (Reilly and Howe 2019; Howe et al. 2019, pp. 48–50; Campbell 2019). Research on labour challenges in the Australian horticulture industry by Howe et al. (2019, p. 48) conducted from 2016 to 2018, involving qualitative and quantitative research with horticulture growers, workers and other stakeholders, found no indication of a systemic labour shortfall in the industry on a nationwide scale. However, it appears that many employers face workforce supply challenges. According to Reilly and Howe (2019, pp. 94–95), these challenges include:

- shortages in specific areas of the horticulture industry, notably in isolated or remote areas that do not appeal to WHMs, migrant workers or other local workers

⁵ WHM visa holders are required to work in approved industries and areas for specified work, which includes harvest work. In 2021–22 a total of 97,359 WHM visas were granted to overseas workers (Department of Home Affairs 2022a).

⁶ The PALM scheme permits eligible workers from 9 participating Pacific Islands countries and Timor-Leste to take up jobs in various industries in Australia, including the horticulture industry (PALM n.d.).

⁷ International students (for example, student visa subclass 500 holders) are permitted to work while studying. Generally this type of visa allows international students to work up to 40 hours per fortnight. However, due to labour shortages, the Australian Government temporarily relaxed this limit in all sectors of the economy until 30 June 2023 (Department of Home Affairs 2022b).

- shortages of workers with necessary skills and motivation to work in the sector and for fixed or long periods during a harvest
- difficulty in keeping local workers who are unwilling to perform the physically demanding work required by the industry
- unreliability of WHMs working only to meet their visa requirements.

Research by Howe et al. (2019, p. 6) suggests that the horticulture industry is less appealing to local workers, and that harvest employers have a perception that these local Australian workers are less motivated to do harvest work and less reliable. In addition, these employers face challenges in retaining local workers due to the hard and physical nature of work in the industry (Reilly and Howe 2019, p. 95). On the other hand, local workers who are newly settled migrants from developing countries are seen to be a reliable and attractive horticulture workforce in some regions of the country (Howe et al. 2019, p. 6).

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on harvest labour

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions on both overseas workers and workers in country who could not cross internal borders made it even harder for growers and employers to find a reliable labour force. The horticulture industry was particularly impacted by the pandemic's restrictions on Australia's available local and international agriculture workforce. Notably, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, on 20 March 2020 the Australian Government closed its borders to all non-citizens and non-residents of Australia. Only Australian citizens or residents and their immediate family members could travel to Australia (Campbell and Vines 2021).

The overall number of workers used by Australian horticulture farms has declined on average since 2019–20, according to a report from ABARES (the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Science) based on surveys of Australian farms. This report found that the monthly average number of workers declined from 146,200 in 2019–20 to 116,900 in 2021–22, mostly caused by a reduction in the number of overseas workers (Downham and Litchfield 2022).

In 2020 the Joint Standing Committee on Migration heard evidence about the need to address the labour shortages Australia's agricultural and horticultural industry was facing during the harvest season and the pandemic. In its interim report, the committee recommended addressing shortages by incentivising and enabling Australians, WHMs and other visa holders remaining in Australia to move to the regions to pick fruit (Joint Standing Committee on Migration 2020). Since March 2020 the Australian Government had implemented a number of measures to incentivise Australians and visa holders to fill workforce gaps resulting from the pandemic. For instance, Australian job seekers and visa holders were encouraged to take advantage of seasonal work opportunities through reforms to HTS that went into effect on 1 July 2020 as explained in Section 1.1.

State government initiatives

In addition to Commonwealth government programs and initiatives to attract people to harvest work, several state governments have established their own initiatives. Such initiatives ranged from marketing campaigns to financial assistance for relocation.

For instance, in 2020 the New South Wales (NSW) Government began to promote seasonal work and connect employers with workers looking for available harvest jobs and information on harvest work,

including through HTS and AgMove, via its designated Help Harvest NSW website (NSW Government 2021).

In addition, in 2021 the NSW Government encouraged public servants (for example, staff from the Department of Regional NSW, including Local Land Services, and the NSW Department of Primary Industries) to volunteer to help farmers with any harvest in NSW by providing them with 5 days' special leave (Department of Primary Industries 2021).

Similarly, the Queensland (QLD) Government's Pick Queensland initiative aimed to attract and retain seasonal workers across the state's agriculture sectors by encouraging Queenslanders and working holiday makers to apply for agriculture jobs, including harvest work (Queensland Government n.d.).

The Government of Western Australia (WA) provided employers and workers with various resources including a job search and registration platform specifically focused on WA, information on pay and conditions, financial incentives via the Paid Escape initiative, and accommodation and travel allowances through the Regional Agriculture, Tourism and Hospitality Workers Travel and Accommodation Support Scheme (Government of Western Australia 2022).

The Government of South Australia (SA) attempted to help the sector by providing information on harvest jobs and resources (for instance, HTS and AgMove) and offering financial assistance via the Regional Work SA initiative, which helps to fill seasonal and regional vacancies including harvest work across South Australia (Department of Primary Industries and Regions n.d.).

The Victorian Government assisted agriculture sector workers who started seasonal harvesting roles in 2021 or early 2022 by providing them with financial remuneration. For instance, new Victorian agriculture sector workers could claim up to \$2,430 through the Seasonal Sign-on Bonus or Summer Seasonal Sign-on Bonus (AusvegVic n.d.). Furthermore, the Victorian Government worked to raise awareness of job and training opportunities in agriculture sectors, including horticulture (DEECA n.d.).

Attracting harvest workers: examples from other countries

The issue of attracting and retaining workers, including local workers, to horticulture industries is not unique to Australia but is experienced by many countries with similar economies, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Canada the economic effects of pandemic-related restrictions placed many Canadians out of work and reduced the inflow of temporary foreign workers (for example, a total ban on the entry of temporary foreign workers by the government of New Brunswick). Research by Falconer (2020) showed that producers struggled to find enough willing Canadians to work on farms to make up for the lack of temporary foreign workers. Additionally it takes time and resources that many growers and employers might not have to train Canadians to replace temporary foreign labour, especially during busy harvesting times (Falconer 2020).

In 2020, the UK Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, together with the British food industry, launched the Pick for Britain campaign, which involved a website and a central online recruitment hub with the aim of attracting and encouraging UK citizens to help with the harvesting of fruit and vegetable crops (National Farmers Union 2020). Similarly, in the same year the

German Ministry of Agriculture launched a website called The Land Helps (aiming to connect farmers with volunteers willing to help), and the French Government promoted harvest jobs to people from cities willing to help 'save' harvests across France (ILO 2020, p. 2).

2. The evaluation

The department is required to progressively monitor and evaluate Australian Government employment services and programs under the terms of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and specific directives from Cabinet.

This evaluation sought to explore elements of the effectiveness, appropriateness and reach of Harvest Trail Services (HTS). The evaluation was initially intended to explore:

- the extent to which HTS meets the needs of harvest employers
- the impact and reach of HTS in contributing to the employment of Australian harvest workers, including those on income support
- the extent to which HTS resulted in improved community understanding of the legal requirements for fair and safe harvest work
- the implementation and ongoing delivery of HTS.

The initial evaluation scope was ambitious. Decisions have been made as necessary during fieldwork and data analysis to refine the focus to address evaluation questions where enough data could be collected and to respond to changing priorities. In particular, the evaluation's ability to measure the impact of the program was impacted significantly by major contextual factors such as COVID-19 (and the resulting restrictions on movements of people around and into the country) and infrastructure challenges in harvest areas. Data collection subsequently captured a broad range of subjects at a high level, rather than focusing on all elements in detail.

2.1 Methodology

The evaluation of HTS employed a mixed methods approach, drawing on both quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (interviews and roundtable discussions) methods. To provide context and an overview of the Australian horticulture industry, a literature review examining the characteristics of the industry, labour market and workforce was conducted in 2019–20.

The department commissioned Wallis to undertake research to support the evaluation. A summary of the fieldwork conducted for this evaluation is below, at Table 2. Resulting fieldwork data was analysed by Wallis and by the department's evaluation team, in conjunction with administrative data and program monitoring materials.

Table 2: Summary of fieldwork

Stakeholder group	Qualitative	Quantitative
	No. interviews	No. participants
Employers	10	259
Workers	40	1,319
OES job seekers	-	250
HTS providers	6	-
jobactive providers	8	-
Industry representatives	8	-
Departmental staff roundtables	2	-

2.2 Quantitative research

Harvest employers

A survey of harvest and agricultural employers⁸ was conducted between March and May 2022. The survey was distributed using a multi-mode approach: participants could complete the survey by telephone using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI); online; or via a hard-copy questionnaire that was mailed to them. The option of completing the survey in hard copy was offered based on Wallis's previous experience conducting research with farmers and other agricultural employers. This was part of an attempt to maximise the response rate, noting that employers were not reimbursed for their time in completing the survey.

A total of 3,183 employers and labour hire companies were invited to participate in the survey. This included:

- 1,467 employers plus a further 124 labour hire businesses recorded in departmental data as having had a job placement through HTS. These are referred to as 'HTS employers' throughout this report
- 2,187 harvest and agricultural employers plus a further 35 labour hire businesses sourced externally from a commercial sample supplier. These are referred to as 'non-HTS employers' throughout the report.

There were 259 completions: 20 via CATI; 165 online; and 74 in hard copy (a split of 194 HTS employers and 65 non-HTS employers). An additional 127 hard-copy surveys were received from out-of-scope employers (i.e., employers who said that they did not employ seasonal harvest workers but still returned the survey). In addition to these, a small number of in-scope hard-copy surveys were received after the fieldwork cut-off period).

⁸ As AgMove is part of this evaluation, the employer survey included employers from the broader agricultural sector rather than focusing only on those in the horticulture industry.

It should be noted that this response rate is very low (6.8%). It is not a representative sample and cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of possible respondents. These results should, therefore, be interpreted with caution.

Harvest workers

A survey of workers was conducted, with pilot fieldwork in April 2022, and the main fieldwork between May and July 2022. A sample of HTS workers was sourced from program administrative data, consisting of individuals who had been recorded as having an HTS job placement. In total, 11,202 workers were approached to participate, resulting in 1,319 completions: 377 via CATI and 942 online.

Wallis employed several strategies to boost response rates, including extending the fieldwork period, allowing for additional email and SMS reminders, and broadening the timeframes during which the CATI team attempted to telephone respondents. The ultimate response rate of 15.1% is typical for this type of survey in research conducted by the department, but the sample size should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. It does not constitute a representative sample and cannot be extrapolated to the wider population of possible respondents.

Online Employment Services job seekers

A separate short online survey was conducted with job seekers who had taken part in an Online Employment Services (OES) survey that Wallis had conducted for the department previously. Job seekers from the OES survey who opted in to participate in further research were invited via email to participate in a short survey about harvest work. The purpose of this survey was to get an impression of the attitudes toward harvest work among job seekers who may not necessarily have participated in HTS. These are referred to as 'OES job seekers' throughout this report.

Job seekers participating in OES were assessed as the most job ready, did not require any specialised assistance, and had the capability to self-manage on an online platform. Consequently, while still having the choice to opt out of OES to a provider-based employment service (particularly jobactive), such job seekers are assumed to be able to secure jobs without the assistance of a provider. As a job seeker cohort assessed as requiring minimal additional assistance, they were chosen as a suitable cohort from which to seek views about harvest work.

The survey was conducted in July 2022, with 1,963 job seekers invited to complete the survey. A total of 250 job seekers completed the online survey. The response rate of 12.7% is low. It should be noted again that this does not constitute a representative sample and cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of possible respondents. These results should be interpreted with caution. Survey data were not weighted.

2.3 Qualitative research

Wallis conducted the qualitative fieldwork between February and July 2022. Qualitative fieldwork included in-depth interviews and roundtable discussions with:

- harvest employers
- harvest workers sampled from administrative data
- HTS and jobactive providers⁹
- industry representatives including from peak industry bodies representing vegetable, fruit and nut growers
- departmental staff who were closely involved in the policy and delivery of HTS, including account and contract managers, and HTS program team staff.

Employers and workers who opted into further research in the quantitative research component were invited to take part in in-depth interviews. On average, these interviews lasted around 30 to 45 minutes.

2.4 Administrative data sources

The evaluation drew on administrative data sources where available to supplement fieldwork data. The administrative data included:

- HTS program administrative data
- HTS provider annual reports for April to June 2022. The reports include a detailed description of HTS in each location, as well as strategies used to attract and retain workers and how these have worked (or not)
- Harvest Trail Services Industry Collaboration Trial 2020–2022 final milestone reports. These reports detail the implementation and delivery of objectives by each selected organisation.

2.5 Data limitations to note

Language barriers

Many harvest workers telephoned by the CATI team spoke a primary language other than English. Many were not proficient enough in English to complete the survey or participate in a qualitative interview. Korean, Vietnamese and Chinese were the most commonly reported languages among those whose primary language was other than English.

While the survey did include a pilot testing phase, cognitive testing of the questionnaire was not included in the research planning. Pilot testing involves sending the survey link to or calling a small sample before releasing to the larger intended sample of respondents to test the questionnaire. In this instance, CATI pilot testing was conducted; this allowed for CATI interviewers to note any consistent difficulties among respondents in interpreting the questions. Cognitive testing involves an interview-style read-through of the questionnaire to reflect on the meaning of each question and the flow of the questionnaire; it is more in-depth and allows for a thorough examination of the wording. Cognitive testing could have resulted in a more robust questionnaire tool that was more easily and

⁹ Fieldwork for this project was conducted prior to jobactive being replaced by Workforce Australia on 4 July 2022 and only with jobactive providers, so they are referred to as jobactive providers throughout this report.

consistently understood by respondents. This should be taken into consideration for future research with this cohort. Conducting cognitive interviews to test the questionnaire among those whose primary language was not English would be beneficial for research in the future.

Participant recall and confusion

Seeking feedback on Harvest Trail Services from employers and, in particular, harvest workers recorded as having used the service, proved difficult. During qualitative fieldwork, it became apparent that employers and workers often found it difficult to recall interactions with the program specifically. Instances of interaction were often confused with other programs such as AgMove, and possibly state government initiatives. For instance, some employers used the term 'harvest bonus' when referring to AgMove, and others, when explicitly asked about HTS, described AgMove in their answers. Further to this, participants might not retain the 'Harvest Trail Services' name; for instance, some participants found it difficult to recall an interaction with 'an HTS provider' but named the individual provider who assisted them.

This could be due to time elapsed since the participant interacted with an HTS provider, or it could be indicative of a tendency to group different branches of government servicing into one.

The evaluation team tried to mitigate this issue by limiting the scope of sampling to participants with a recorded job placement in the past 14 months, balancing the time lapsed with the need for sufficient sample. According to the survey, the majority (76.8%) of participants were recalling interactions with HTS that could have occurred up to 18 months prior to being surveyed. A small proportion (8.5%) of participants indicated that the harvest job they had been referred to through HTS was more than 18 months prior to the survey being undertaken.

When interpreting the findings, the evaluation team have had to make some assumptions about participant feedback (for example, where a participant referred vaguely to applying for reimbursement for accommodation or other relocation expenses, this might be assumed to mean AgMove unless otherwise indicated).

Other challenges

Whereas the sample of harvest workers contacted were from those recorded as having been placed through HTS according to administrative data, many workers contacted for the survey said that they found the harvest job themselves, and that contact with an HTS provider had been minimal (for example, assisting with relocation). In interpreting the initial classification questions, some did not consider their HTS provider to have assisted them to *find* harvest work and categorised themselves as out of scope. This was also true of many interviewed: over half described a limited interaction with HTS providers or having found their harvest job themselves. These participants were able to provide valuable insights on AgMove and/or harvest work, but not on experiences with HTS.

The CATI team reported that, compared to typical surveys, a higher proportion of calls went to an answering machine/message bank recording. During the fieldwork phase, an adjustment was made whereby interviewers reaching an answering machine/message bank recording then left a voice message explaining the survey. The purpose of this was to encourage online completion by the respondent and/or make the respondent more likely to answer their phone the next time the CATI team phoned them.

A number of workers refused to do the survey because they were 'on the road' and did not consider themselves to be in a position where they could complete the survey over the telephone.

2.6 Research ethics

The research plan for this evaluation was reviewed by the department's internal Ethics Review Panel on 2 March 2022.

3. Findings on harvest labour market

Key points

- Harvest employers reported that first and foremost they looked for workers who were reliable and willing to work. They generally did not require workers to be skilled or experienced, placing much more emphasis on worker characteristics and attitude.
- Employers in the research noted that the difficulty in finding suitable harvest workers can be attributed to several key factors, including an inability to find affordable accommodation, and transport issues in harvest locations. There is also a perception among harvest employers that people are unwilling to perform harvest work.
- Of the harvest workers surveyed, 68.8% of those who had declined a harvest job placement indicated that they had done so because they found another job, while 15.6% said the pay was too low and 14.1% indicated that the type of work was not attractive.
- OES job seekers indicated they would be far less likely to consider harvest work: 70.0% reported that they were unlikely to do so.

All participants interviewed during the qualitative fieldwork offered significant insight into the difficulty of recruiting harvest workers and managing horticultural businesses in general.

In particular, research participants commonly mentioned the significant challenges farmers and other harvest employers face in finding enough workers to manage their businesses. This is most notable during the harvest seasons, when additional staff are required to harvest and pack produce within tight timeframes). Many employers mentioned that not having enough workers to complete this work leads to waste (for instance, produce left to rot in fields), significant financial losses, and ultimately price increases for consumers.

3.1 What employers look for in harvest workers

Asked about harvest worker qualities, most employers suggested that they typically expected a willingness to work, a good attitude, and physical capability to do the work (which is often physically demanding, repetitive and/or in extreme weather conditions).

For many employers, having prior skills in harvest work was not an important aspect if potential workers had the right attitude and work ethic. Some employers mentioned that they were looking for certain skills among candidates, such as those with a requirement to operate specific machinery or equipment. Most employers stated that high-level English language skills were not crucial as long as workers had enough language competency to understand instructions.

‘[Workers] don’t need any skills ... [they just need to] work hard ... in hot conditions. No language. General courtesy ...’ (Harvest employer, interview #62)

‘... the tasks that we perform are mainly common-sense tasks. But there’s also – we would like those that work for us to understand simple instructions. If there is a lack of – like, if there’s a language barrier, we try and find someone that can speak their language.’ (Harvest employer, interview #64)

'We don't always look for skilled people. We look for ticketed people, i.e., forklift tickets, maybe a truck licence or something like that.' (Harvest employer, interview #60)

Overall, among the interviewed employers there was a strong preference for backpackers or overseas workers over local Australian workers. This was commonly due to a perception among many employers that local workers were not willing to do this type of work, had a poor attitude or, in the case of income support recipients, were just trying to fill mutual obligation requirements and would ultimately not be reliable or suitable.

'And the Australians that come out here, nah, it's too hard for them, "Nah, we're going back home." Whereas the backpackers that I have – you know, we're out in the middle of nowhere here – and they love it. They just love to get out here, out of the city life that they're used to in Europe or wherever they are. They love it.'

(Harvest employer, interview #67)

'... the harvest machine is totally driven by overseas workers. That's the bottom line. And if we are not letting overseas workers in our country, we are stuffed.'

(Harvest employer, interview #68)

'Because the sort of people they put on your farm we've had before, and it doesn't work. Because their attitude, they're (income support recipients) being forced to go out there, they don't want to be here. They're meeting a requirement that is for their own requirement, their ideas are not for future development, it's just meeting the requirement before they can get another pension.'

(Harvest employer, interview #63)

Some employers mentioned that they had a preference for Australian workers, specifically retired workers or 'grey nomads'. Others who preferred local workers over backpackers saw their choice as a convenient option, with local workers being more likely to have their own transport and, as was important in some cases, more likely to stay in the role.

'And there's certain people I tend to employ. Grey nomads, type of thing. This year we had a few people from out of the area and they were set up to come and camp, and had a van, that type of thing.'

(Harvest employer, interview #62)

'We try very hard to hire Australian workers now. We prefer them over backpackers ... It's helped us to realise that there are Aussie workers out there, we just have to persevere. And we really do prefer the Australian workers. A lot of people might think that Aussie workers are just lazy and what have you, but you get that in every nationality and race. And we prefer the Aussies because now we don't have the communication breakdowns ... They've got a better chance of getting themselves to work, because a lot of the backpackers don't have transport ... Because they're local, they're already living in the area. Whereas backpackers are – the very name suggests what they are. They're backpackers; they're backpacking around.'

(Harvest employer, interview #60)

3.2 Recruitment methods in the harvest industry

Most employers mentioned their reliance on word of mouth and social media to recruit harvest workers. Many employers interviewed expressed having little difficulty getting workers prior to the restrictions put into place to limit the spread of COVID-19 in 2020, mostly due to the large number of backpackers who frequented their locations. Being able to reach large numbers of potential workers is crucial for harvest employers, as they often have significant labour needs at harvest time, sometimes only for short periods.

‘It’s a combination of things, we’ve tended to use returning employees, word of mouth, we recruit through more traditional channels and use a service called [SERVICE NAME], almost a management platform to put ads to places like SEEK, Bing, free job sites, that sort of advertising. Depending on who’s there, locally, we’d use Facebook, or in the more remote areas we’ve used a central social hub like the supermarket or the post location to provide physical advertisements. And we’ve worked with other partners like the cane growers’ association, and millers potentially as well.’ (Employer, interview #65)

‘There were a number of – the press. But then we did Facebook to a lesser degree, but Gumtree. We tried Facebook, but we found Gumtree in the last couple of years has been an opportunity for us. Just to put an ad out there.’
(Harvest employer, interview #62)

‘We’ve always advertised on our Facebook page. And in desperation, sometimes I’ve put up signs at the local shops ... Yes, word of mouth. And the other big one that we used to use that we don’t use now, because we don’t have the backpackers, we used to put signs up at the backpackers’ hostels.’ (Harvest employer, interview #60)

In some cases, employers described novel recruitment methods they or other organisations in their communities had come up with. One employer described a system whereby local caravan parks would organise transport for large groups of backpackers (before COVID-19 restrictions) to travel to local farms, and how this created a good source of recurring harvest labour as more travellers came in and spread the word about local work.

Employers involved in the fieldwork were clear that COVID-19 restrictions severely restricted the harvest labour market. Many employers noted that during this period they faced a labour shortage, and described how this forced them to look at alternative avenues to source workers.

Employers surveyed were asked how they typically found harvest workers before and after March 2020¹⁰ (when COVID-19 restrictions were put in place) (Table 3). As in the qualitative research, both HTS employers and non-HTS employers reported that the key method of sourcing workers before and during COVID-19 restrictions was word of mouth (70.3% and 65.9% respectively).

Other key methods selected included social media (45.8% and 46.2%) and labour hire firms (36.1% and 43.8%). HTS providers followed, with an increase from 22.5% of employers reporting using HTS

¹⁰ Note: employers were asked how they typically recruited harvest workers in a single survey; they were not asked this question at different points in time.

providers to recruit harvest workers before the COVID-19 pandemic and 29.7% reporting using them after.

Table 3: Methods employers reported using to source workers before and during COVID-19 restrictions

Method	Before March 2020	After March 2020
Word of mouth	70.3%	65.9%
Social media	45.8%	46.2%
Labour hire firms	36.1%	43.8%
HTS provider	22.5%	29.7%
Recruitment site	20.5%	20.5%
jobactive provider / other provider	19.3%	17.7%
Seasonal Worker Programme	14.5%	19.7%
Newspapers or magazines	11.6%	12.4%
Local signage	10.0%	12.4%
Ad on Harvest Trail website	8.4%	7.2%
HTIS	5.6%	4.0%

Source: Employer survey Q6. How has your organisation typically found workers to fill vacant harvest positions? (n=249) (MR).

Note: As indicated by 'MR' this question was multi-response, so percentages will not add to 100%. They represent prevalence of different methods mentioned by employers.

3.3 Employer-reported barriers to recruiting harvest workers

Harvest employers were asked in the survey about the main barriers they typically faced in filling harvest positions. The most common response, selected by more than two-thirds (69.5%) of employers, was that people are not willing to do harvest work. This was followed by seasonality of work, selected by almost half of employers (42.5%), lack of accommodation on the property or in the wider community (38.6%), market wages not motivating job seekers / potential workers (33.6%), and the lack of availability of a seasonal workforce from overseas (29.0%). A full list of responses is provided at Table 4 below.

Table 4: Employer-reported barriers to recruiting harvest workers

Response	No. responses	%
People 'not willing' to do this type of work	180	69.5
Seasonality of work	110	42.5
Lack of accommodation on property or in community	100	38.6
Physicality of work	89	34.4
Job seekers / potential workers not motivated by market wages	87	33.6
Seasonal workforce from overseas	75	29.0
Remote location of farm/s or property	66	25.5
Workers' lack of transportation	66	25.5
Weather conditions (e.g., heat, humidity, climate related)	62	23.9
Cost of workers relocating for seasonal work	32	12.4
Seasonal workforce from interstate	28	10.8
Lack of staff	16	6.2
Lack of skilled staff	5	1.93
Other	10	3.9
None	3	1.16

Source: Employer survey Q5. What are the main barriers your organisation typically faces in filling vacant harvest positions? (n=249) (MR).

These views reflected those expressed by employers in the qualitative research, who commented on the negative perception of harvest work among potential workers, the physical requirements of the work, and the difficulty of managing logistical issues such as accommodation and transport.

'So many Australians are not willing to work or forced to work. And when they do work, they're not employable! Sorry, I'm a bit frank ...' (Harvest employer, interview #62)

'I stand there in 35, 38 degrees. It's warm, it's hot. By the time you're finished, you're tired. People ... yeah, find some of the work taxing. Physically taxing. And, yeah, they, you know ... some would prefer just working at a till in the supermarket, at an air-conditioned supermarket.' (Harvest employer, interview #64)

Lack of accommodation

A lack of affordable accommodation (or, in some cases, any accommodation at all) was consistently mentioned (often unprompted) by employer fieldwork participants as a key barrier to addressing

labour shortages in regional areas, particularly in terms of enticing people to move to take up seasonal harvest work.

‘... If you’re working for someone and you’re not getting work more than once or twice a fortnight, accommodation, cheap accommodation, would be a barrier. ‘Cause they are also competing with the tourist industry. So, the employees are coming into an environment that’s driven by tourists. Which would actually be a barrier to them, ‘cause tourists would give – you would charge them a high price.’
(Harvest employer, interview #68)

‘If you can find accommodation. That’s the big thing. We know people that have been looking for rental properties for six months. And they’re couch surfing, et cetera, et cetera.’ (Harvest employer, interview #60)

‘I think the biggest issue for some of the Harvest Trail providers is going to be accommodation; regional accommodation has always been a big issue, and finding quality accommodation is probably more to the point.’ (Industry representative, interview #26)

Lack of transport options

Another commonly reported barrier to sourcing labour supply was access to transport and other difficulties associated with the remoteness of harvest employer locations. Employers mentioned that they often need workers to have their own transport because public transport is not an option. Further, workers need to be willing to travel long distances in some cases to each shift, if not staying on the farm or in the immediate community.

‘Fundamentals ... you need a car; you need transport. You need accommodation. And there’s no public transport. Just spell out there’s no public transport because we’re 20kms out of town.’ (Harvest employer, interview #62)

‘We prefer them to have their own transport, of course, because we don’t have any transport to bring them out there.’ (Harvest employer, interview #60)

‘So one of the key triggers is transport, above and beyond. That’s something that people in local areas, who may be keen to work, but being a farm, we have no public transport in regional. We don’t have great public transport in general. And that’s one of the things that isn’t covered in the current contract, which we feel is definitely something that needs to be identified. We don’t necessarily have the budget for that, which proves difficult. But that’s the first thing that comes up.’
(HTS provider, interview #15)

A few interview participants mentioned they knew of some employers looking to provide accommodation and transport to attract more staff. One HTS provider mentioned that employers who can provide accommodation are better able to retain staff. One employer who already offered this commented that they were still unable to find enough workers.

‘One of the employers that comes to mind is a farm in the [NAME] region who has put together low-cost container housing in a remote area. And it really is about

these value-adds that an employer can provide. And we want to work with employers of choice, those that value staff, that retain staff. And some have done – providing accommodation, quality accommodation, has been really successful.

Again, transport.’ (HTS provider, interview #15)

‘At that time of year, we actually have about thirteen flats on site; like I said, they’re pretty basic, but we could actually provide accommodation. When it comes to harvest time, we have 250 people do a harvest; we can’t house everyone. And we used more labour hire last harvest, and there were people I know who wanted a job and were happy to take the job, but the problem was they can’t live anywhere.’ (Harvest employer, interview #69)

3.4 Worker views on harvest work

Harvest workers were asked as part of the survey what aspects had attracted them to harvest work (participants were able to select multiple responses). The most common answer was ‘Enjoy working outdoors’, which was selected by over a third (34.9%) of participants. Just over a quarter (27.3%) said they wanted to do something different, and just under a quarter (23.1%) indicated they wanted to work in other parts of Australia. A further 20.8% wanted to work with family/friends or meet new people, and 20.5% indicated that AgMove had influenced their decision to take up harvest work (Table 5).

Table 5: Top 12 reasons given for taking up harvest work

Reason	No. responses	%
Enjoy working outdoors	460	34.9
Do something different	360	27.3
Work in other parts of Australia	305	23.1
Work with friends/family and/or meet new people	275	20.8
AgMove incentive	271	20.5
Gain new skills	259	19.6
Harvest lifestyle	252	19.1
Want to assist the industry as it faces labour shortages	217	16.5
Wanted a job to keep me fit	208	15.8
Lots of job vacancies	207	15.7
Short-term nature of the contract	202	15.3
Requirement of work visa	199	15.1

Source: Worker survey Q11. What attracted you to harvest work? (n=1,319) (MR). Table shows top 12 reasons provided (those with a prevalence of over 10%).

Harvest workers who provided a written response in the survey largely mirrored the other options offered in response to this question.

‘Fresh opportunity and a bit off an escape, a working holiday.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘Travelling with friends and good job with no commitments.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘I was travelling at the time and just needed some money. I have always had an interest in agriculture but it was the region I was in at the time, it was the main source of employment.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘Working with produce and farming interested me, it wasn’t something I’d done before.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘It was available and they wanted workers.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

Of the survey participants who recalled that they had received an offer of a harvest job placement but had declined, the majority (68.8%) indicated that the reason they had declined was finding another job.

However, the next most common reasons offered for declining were low rate of pay (15.6%) and the type of work not being attractive (14.1%). Others included a lack of accommodation, a lack of transport, being paid at piece rates,¹¹ and low-quality accommodation (Table 6).

¹¹ In February 2022 the Fair Work Commission announced its decision to make changes to the Horticulture Award, including the new minimum wage guarantee for pieceworkers and record-keeping obligations for employers, commencing on 28 April 2022. All pieceworkers must get at least the ‘hourly rate for the pieceworker’ according to the minimum wage guarantee, whether or not they have earned that amount under a piecework payment system (Fair Work Ombudsman 2022).

Table 6: Reasons for declining harvest work offers

Reason	No. responses	%
Found another job	44	68.8
Rate of pay was too low	10	15.6
Type of work was not attractive	9	14.1
Didn't want to work for piece rates pay	6	9.4
Not able to get transport to the location	6	9.4
Lack of accommodation on farm or in area	6	9.4
The job required relocation	5	7.8
Low-quality local accommodation	5	7.8
Not physically capable of the work	4	6.3
Competing caring responsibilities	2	3.1
Weather conditions	2	3.1

Source: Worker survey Q8. Why did you decline the offer of a harvest work role? (n= 64) (MR).

3.5 OES job seeker views on harvest work

OES job seekers¹² were asked how likely they were to take up harvest work in the future on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 represented 'Not at all likely'. More than half (54.8%) indicated that they were very unlikely (0 or 1) to take up harvest work. Only 3.6% of these job seekers indicated that they were very likely (9 or 10) to do so (Table 7).

Table 7: OES job seekers' likelihood to consider harvest work

Response	No. participants	%
Very likely	12	3.6
Somewhat likely	44	11.6
Neither	29	8.0
Not likely	33	15.2
Not at all likely	115	54.8
Don't know	17	6.8

Source: OES job seeker survey Q1. On a scale from 0-to-10, with 0 being 'Not at all likely, and 10 being 'Extremely likely', how likely would you be to consider taking up harvest work in the future? (n=250).

¹² That is, those sampled as part of another, non-harvest related research project who opted into further surveys. See Section 2.2 (Online Employment Services job seekers).

The main reasons provided by OES job seekers for not wanting to consider harvest work were health issues, a lack of fitness or a perception that they were ‘too old’ (36.8%); a general reluctance to move away from their home, family and friends or not wanting to live regionally/remotely (18.4%); and a perception of harvest work as being too hard for the pay rates offered (16.9%).

Another 12.5% said they had experience or qualifications in another field and were not looking to change this – possibly due to these job seekers confusing the survey question with an offer to receive referrals to this type of work in the future. A further 11.8% indicated that harvest work was not of interest to them. A smaller proportion (6.6%) specifically mentioned a view or perception that harvest work was exploitative, with poor conditions and low pay. Many of these mentioned they ‘had heard’ of this through someone else, and a few had experienced harvest work previously and had formed this view (Table 8).

Table 8: Disincentives to harvest work according to OES job seekers

Reason	No. responses	%
Health issues, lack of fitness, age	50	36.8
Don't want to move, too far, or too remote	25	18.4
Too hard, low pay	23	16.9
Have other qualifications, experience, or goals	17	12.5
Don't want to / not interested	16	11.8
Perception of exploitation and poor conditions	9	6.6
Caring responsibilities	8	5.9
Transport, fuel costs	4	2.9
Accommodation concerns	2	1.5
Don't know much about it	1	0.7
Other	12	8.8

Source: OES job seeker survey Q2. What is the reason you are unlikely to consider seeking assistance from a Harvest Trail Service provider to find harvest work in the future? Coded from open text responses (n=136). Many responses included multiple reasons and have been coded across multiple categories.

Note: 21 job seekers responded that they already had a job, providing no other reason for not considering harvest work in the future. It has been assumed that these respondents misunderstood the question, and these were removed from the total.

4. Harvest Trail Services awareness and take-up

Key points

- Awareness of HTS among harvest employers was fairly high, whereas awareness among harvest workers was more difficult to discern. This was mostly because harvest workers interviewed generally struggled to differentiate HTS from other government services, such as AgMove or jobactive.
- The fieldwork indicates that agriculture/farmer peak and industry bodies play an essential role in raising HTS awareness among harvest employers. In contrast, word of mouth was a much more prevalent source of awareness according to harvest workers.
- Administrative data shows that HTS recorded 35,186 harvest work placements between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2022, with 2,204 employers advertising at least one vacancy during the same period. Fruit and nut tree growing was the most prevalent business type, followed by other crop growing and harvest work among the harvest employers.

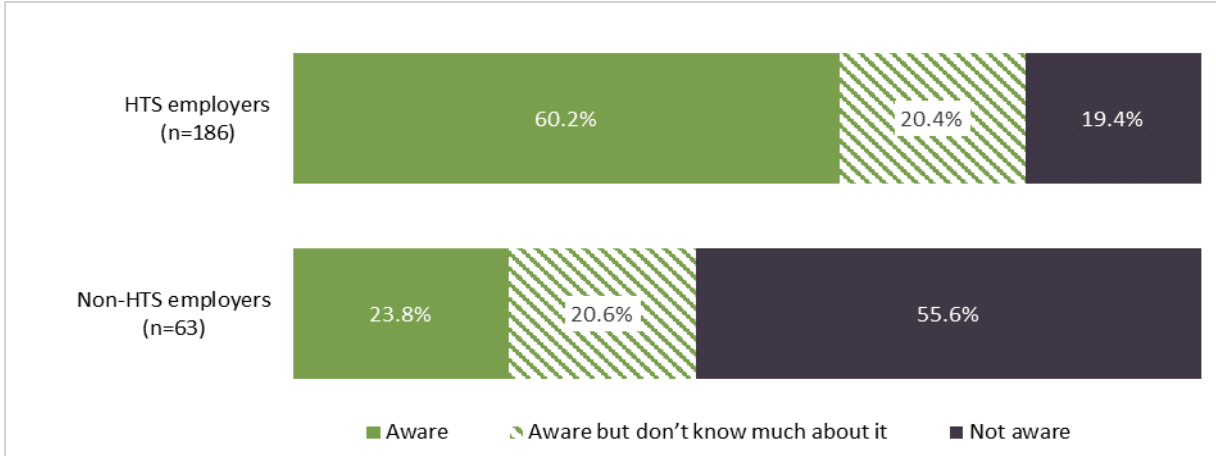
4.1 Awareness

Employers

Most (71.5%) employers surveyed reported being aware (51.0%) or somewhat aware (20.5%) of HTS, while just over a quarter (28.5%) reported being unaware (Table 25).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, employers recorded as having had a placement through HTS were far more likely to report being aware of HTS (60.2%) than externally sourced harvest employers (23.8%). Both groups recorded very similar levels of being somewhat aware of HTS (being aware of HTS but not knowing much about it) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Employer awareness of HTS by sample source



Source: Employer survey Q8. Prior to being contacted about this survey, were you aware of Harvest Trail Services or the National Harvest Trail Information Service? (base n=249).

The fact that 19.4% of HTS employers reported not being aware of HTS could be due to the lag time between engaging a harvest worker through HTS and completing the survey, a lack of recall of the

HTS program/name, or a staff member completing the survey who was not aware of HTS or not in the business at the time. During the qualitative fieldwork with harvest employers, it became apparent that the interaction involved in hiring (or attempting to hire) through HTS could be brief in some cases, and some employers did not necessarily remember dealing with ‘Harvest Trail Services’ but instead recalled the specific HTS provider or organisation they used. This finding is supported by findings in the jobactive evaluation (DEWR 2022, p. 197) which noted that many employers were unaware of the jobactive brand but that recall was improved when the actual name of the provider organisation was referred to.

Employers who were aware or somewhat aware of HTS were asked how they first became aware of HTS. The most common source of awareness, selected by 38.8% of employers, was an agriculture/farmer peak or industry body, followed closely by HTS providers (29.8%). Other common sources were word of mouth (17.4%), government websites (13.5%), a current or potential employee (11.2%) and traditional media (10.1%) (Table 9).

Table 9: Sources of HTS awareness among harvest employers

Source	No. responses	%
Agriculture/farmer peak or industry body	69	38.8
Harvest Trail Services provider	53	29.8
Word of mouth	31	17.4
Government website, promotion or information session	24	13.5
Current or potential employee	20	11.2
Traditional media	18	10.1
Field day / agricultural show / Jobs Fair	17	9.6
HTIS newsletter or direct approach	16	9.0
Social media	12	6.7
jobactive provider	11	6.2
Harvest Trail Services poster / other	11	6.2
Labour hire firm	11	6.2
Other	6	3.4
Don't know	2	1.1

Source: Employer survey Q9. How did you first become aware of Harvest Trail Services? (n=178) (MR).

All harvest employers in the qualitative research indicated that they were aware of HTS. Most harvest employers mentioned that they had been interacting directly with HTS providers, or appeared to know a lot about the program.

Employers in the qualitative fieldwork most mentioned learning about HTS from industry peak bodies.

‘We heard about Harvest Trail through our peak industry body, [ORGANISATION NAME].’ (Harvest employer, interview #60)

‘Through industry magazines, maybe even industry conferences and things like that.’ (Harvest employer, interview #63)

Other information sources for employers included HTS providers themselves, who in some cases directly contacted employers or delivered information sessions for local growers to raise awareness and promote the services.

‘I’m trying to remember. I’m feeling like someone might have called – someone from the [HTS PROVIDER] office called to ask a question; I can’t remember what it was about, and then I mentioned that it was hard to find people and they said they’ve got people looking for work there, so they started sending people our way.’ (Harvest employer, interview #69)

‘I suppose we just ring farmers, as well. We see them advertise on Facebook; we’ll ring them.’ (HTS provider interview #11)

‘The provider ran some information sessions, yeah. Also I jumped on the website and had a go myself, just seeing what the workers are going through and how the process works, how they find work and link to farmers.’ (Harvest employer, interview #61)

HTS providers are required to work with local employers to inform them about the program and provide information on recruiting harvest workers. Employers who indicated that they had received information about HTS from an HTS provider most commonly reported that they had received information about HTS and how it worked (75.5%), followed by information about recruiting harvest workers in their area (54.3%). About a third (30.9%) reported receiving information on strategies to recruit harvest workers and address shortages (Table 26).

Harvest workers

Some harvest workers interviewed knew about HTS and its services, especially those who had used HTS providers before. However, harvest workers generally struggled to differentiate HTS from other government assistance or services, particularly AgMove but also other services such as jobactive.

When interviewed, harvest workers were asked how they became aware of HTS. The most common response among these research participants was word of mouth. Many workers mentioned that family, friends or even employers had suggested that they look into HTS, especially when it came to relocation assistance.

In addition, social media played a crucial part in conveying information about HTS and its services among qualitative fieldwork participants. Facebook was one of the most cited social media platforms for finding information about HTS among harvest workers. There were also some harvest workers

who mentioned other sources for learning about HTS, such as online employment marketplaces (for example, SEEK) or government websites dedicated to searching jobs.

‘My brother had mentioned that there was some recompense for the travel and anything I needed to do the job. So, then I think I did a bit of online [searching] and found the [HTS PROVIDER NAME] was the organisation that looked after this area.’ (Harvest worker, interview #46)

‘I think like word of mouth, from former, other working holiday makers, seeing that there was a relocation opportunity. That’s how we heard about it.’ (Harvest worker, interview #41)

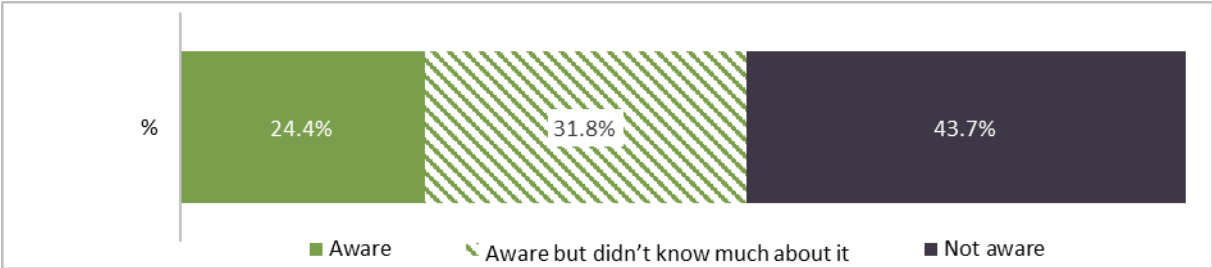
‘I think when I first saw it was on Facebook, I think? Just because they were advertising jobs on there.’ (Harvest worker, interview #34)

‘Through SEEK and job sites and then they directed me to [HTS PROVIDER NAME].’ (Harvest worker, interview #60)

‘I think it was originally on this job seeker page where you search for jobs – so government job seeker – so some – ‘cause we used to looking for outdoors and active-type work. And ‘cause I’d had the experience in New Zealand, I did look into that side of – type of work as well. So, I suppose between background knowledge and then just using the internet to search for jobs, so yes.’ (Harvest worker, interview #33)

Harvest workers surveyed were asked if they had been aware of HTS before being referred to HTS (or finding their HTS role). Just over half (56.3%) said they had been aware of HTS before this, with a quarter (24.4%) of the total reporting being aware and about a third (31.8%) being aware but not knowing much about it. Just under half (43.7%) indicated that they had not been aware of HTS before being referred (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Self-reported awareness of HTS among harvest workers prior to referral



Source: Harvest worker survey Q12. Were you aware of Harvest Trail Services before this job? (n=1,319).

It should be noted that it is difficult to gauge awareness levels prior to exposure to HTS, given that participants were asked to recall a previous state of awareness. It should also be mentioned that, as with the employer interviews, it was clear that harvest workers struggled to remember the name ‘Harvest Trail Services’ and showed a significant level of confusion about the difference between HTS and other services.

However, reported levels of awareness prior to a recorded interaction with HTS suggest a good level of awareness of HTS among those looking for harvest work, with some room for improvement in terms of reaching more harvest workers in the community and directing them to HTS providers or the Harvest Trail job search tool.

Survey respondents who had heard of HTS (indicating that they were aware of HTS or aware but did not know much about it) were asked how they first heard about HTS. Among these respondents, the most common source of awareness was word of mouth (34.4%). The next most common source was through an online job search site (19.4%), followed by another government website or promotional email (15.4%), an employment services provider (15.1%), or the Harvest Trail website (14.4%) (Table 10).

Interestingly, despite a clear indication from qualitative research of the importance of social media for employers in recruiting harvest workers, only 7.7% of survey respondents recalled hearing about HTS through this channel. The reason for this apparent difference could be that participants first heard about HTS through word of mouth predominantly (as was asked in the survey) but sought further information through social media (as mentioned by many qualitative participants). This could also be due to some participants attributing a Facebook mention by a friend, for example, to social media and others attributing this to word of mouth (Table 10).

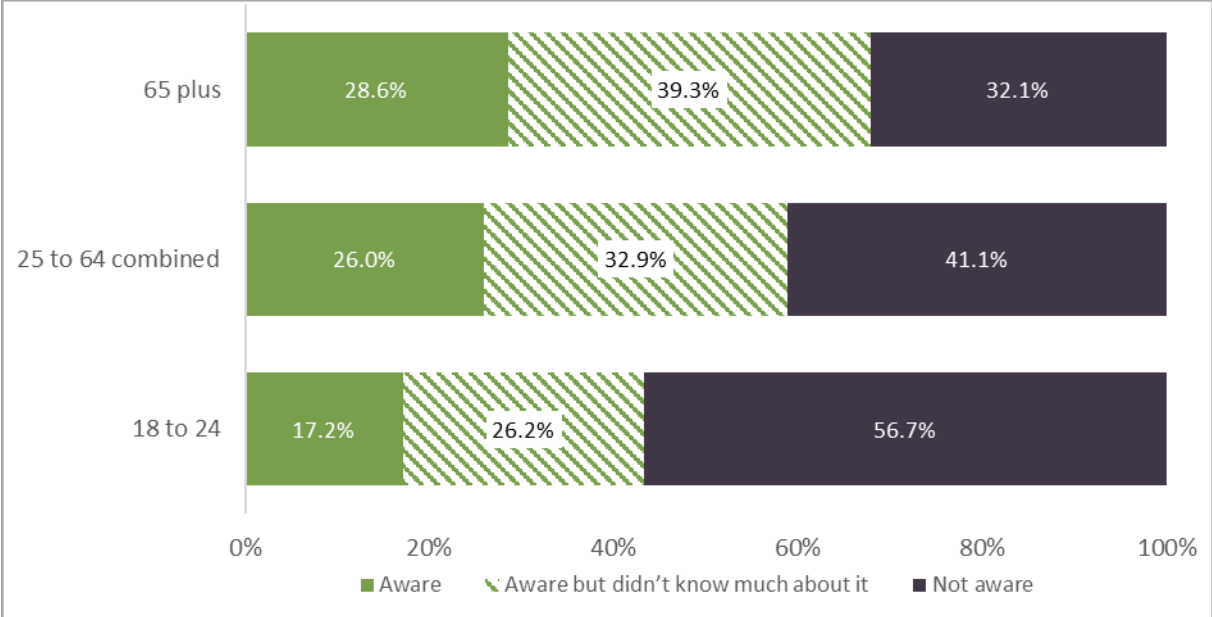
Table 10: Sources of HTS awareness among harvest workers

Source	No. responses	%
Word of mouth	255	34.4
Online job search site	144	19.4
Government website/email	114	15.4
Employment services provider	112	15.1
Harvest Trail website	107	14.4
Labour hire firm	87	11.7
Harvest Trail Information Service	79	10.6
Employer / former employer	59	8.0
Social media	57	7.7
Industry body	57	7.7
Centrelink	56	7.5
Traditional media	28	3.8
Harvest Trail Services provider approached me directly	28	3.8
Other online	18	2.4
Other	23	3.1
Don't know	22	3.0

Source: Harvest worker survey Q12B. How did you first become aware of Harvest Trail Services? (n=742) (MR).

Awareness of HTS appeared to increase with age among harvest workers surveyed (Figure 3). Awareness was highest in the 65 and over group, in which 28.6% indicated that they were aware of HTS and 39.3% indicated some level of awareness ('aware but don't know much about it'). Levels of HTS awareness were fairly consistent in the 25 to 64 age group, in which 26.0% indicated that they were aware and 32.9% somewhat aware. The lowest levels of awareness were reported by those aged 18 to 24, of whom only 17.2% said they were aware of HTS and 26.2% somewhat aware.

Figure 3: HTS awareness among harvest workers by age group



Source: Harvest worker survey Q12. Were you aware of Harvest Trail Services before this job? (n=1,319).

Harvest workers reported similar sources of awareness for HTIS as for HTS. Of those who reported awareness or some awareness of HTIS, 26.7% indicated that they had heard about it by word of mouth, 20.8% from the HTS website, 16.3% from an HTS provider and 16.1% via an online job search site (Table 11).

Table 11: Sources of HTIS awareness among harvest workers

Source	No. responses	%
Word of mouth	126	26.7
Harvest Trail website	98	20.8
Harvest Trail Services provider	77	16.3
Online job search site	76	16.1
Government website/email	68	14.4
Employment services provider (jobactive)	60	12.7
Labour hire firm	56	11.9
Agriculture / farmer peak or industry body	50	10.6
A previous employer	38	8.1
Centrelink	34	7.2
Social media	25	5.3
Traditional media	12	2.5
Other online	8	1.7
Field day / agricultural show / Jobs Fair	7	1.5
Other	10	2.1
Don't know	29	6.1

Source: Harvest worker survey Q13B. How did you become aware of Harvest Trail Information Service (HTIS)? (n=472) (MR).

4.2 Take-up

According to the department's administrative data, as at 30 of June 2022, a total of 2,204 employers/businesses had advertised via HTS. The majority of HTS employers (76.3%) advertised between 1 and 19 vacancies. A smaller portion of the HTS employers (13.3%) advertised 20 to 49 vacancies, with the remainder advertising 50-plus vacancies (Table 12). For the purposes of HTS reporting, 'vacancies' is the number of positions available in a job advertisement that is created and posted on the Harvest Trail jobs board; these might represent multiple positions (for example, one vacancy for strawberry pickers might be recruiting 15 harvest workers to do that role).

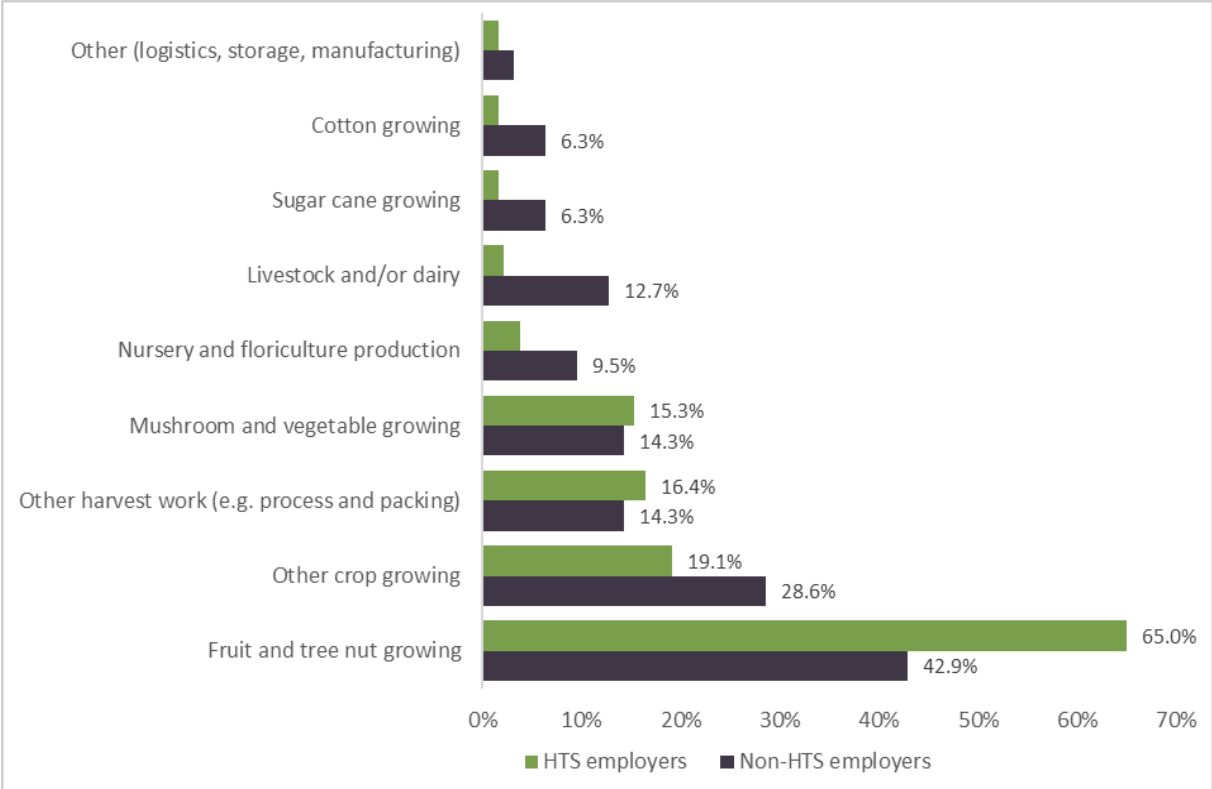
Table 12: HTS employers by number of vacancies advertised

Vacancies	No. employers	%
1 to 19	1,683	76.3
20 to 49	294	13.3
50 to 99	128	5.9
100 to 199	61	2.7
200 to 399	25	1.1
400+	13	0.6
Total	2,204	100

Source: Internal department dashboard 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022.

To get an understanding of the main employer types using HTS to source workers, employers surveyed were asked what their organisation grows, packs, produces or supplies. While there were differences between the proportions of HTS employers and non-HTS employers for different industries, the most common business type for both was fruit and nut tree growing (65.0% of HTS employers; 42.9% of non-HTS employers), followed by other crop growing (19.1% of HTS employers; 28.6% of non-HTS employers) and ‘other harvest work (e.g., process and packing)’ (16.4% of HTS employers; 14.3% of non-HTS employers) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Employer types using HTS



Source: Employer survey Q2. What harvest crops does your organisation grow, pack, produce or supply? (base n=249) (MR). Note: Labels under 5% have been removed.

According to administrative data, between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2022 HTS recorded 35,186 work placements in total. More men are recorded as having been placed through HTS over this period (56.5% of total placements) than women (43.5%). Just over half (51.6%) of those placed were people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Far more of the HTS caseload were young people than mature age (aged 50 and above) people (23.2% compared to 11.8%) (Table 13).

Table 13: HTS work placements by participant demographic

Demographic	No. participants	%
Men	19,881	56.5
Women	15,301	43.5
CALD	18,146	51.6
Youth (under 25)	8,154	23.2
Mature age (50+)	4,160	11.8
Person with disability	1,983	5.6
Indigenous	1,448	4.1
Homeless	1,419	4.0
Ex-offender	1,240	3.5
Refugee	634	1.8
Parents	430	1.2

Source: Internal document dashboard 16 – Harvest Trail Services (HTS) – 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022 HTS work placements by participant demographic.

Note: A work placement is when a participant finds a job (including harvest) on their own or with assistance from their provider.

5. Implementation and delivery of Harvest Trail Services

Key points

- HTS providers found establishing the program without specific instructions challenging, though some providers enjoyed the flexibility they had to establish the program.
- HTS providers were generally positive about managing HTS, while noting the high number of direct registrants to register into ESS Web as an ongoing issue from an administrative standpoint. Several providers had developed their own systems to address this and to communicate with potential candidates.
- The qualitative fieldwork indicated substantial engagement between HTS providers, harvest employers and industry representatives. According to HTS providers, far more employers contacted them directly during the labour shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.1 Challenges establishing the program

HTS provider representatives described their extensive experience working and operating in agriculture, horticulture or employment services, including in regional Australia, for many years. For instance, one HTS provider had been involved in the different iterations of HTS for 20 years, and another had over 25 years of experience in employment services.

HTS providers noted that setting up the operational requirements of the program in their area was a challenge, with some explaining that they were not provided with specific instructions on how to do this and others noting the additional administrative burden that this created. Some also mentioned that HTS providers did not collaborate with each other on setting up the program initially, citing uncertainty as to whether they should be sharing this information.

‘One of the main issues was ... there weren’t any templates or processes already set up, given there had been eleven other regions ... So it was quite a struggle to – couldn’t hit the ground running, that’s for sure.’ (HTS provider interview #12)

‘I think it’s very important to have the right processes in place. Because like [NAME] said, the admin burden – I don’t think that they (the department) realise how admin heavy this is and that there’s a lot of work going on behind the scenes, and also financial implications for the business. So my lesson would be to make sure that when you start up something like this, have the processes first.’ (HTS provider interview #12)

However, a few providers specifically mentioned that, while working out how to establish the program was difficult, they appreciated the flexibility to do so in a way that worked for them and their location, and the support they received to do this.

‘I think it’s with any government contract, if I’m honest, but what is the take-away lesson for us with the HTS is you have to be flexible ... if you look at this contract, it hasn’t been going for very long and already we’ve had multiple variations and changes within it, and if we kept referring back to what was the old – we would have failed by now, so I think the take-away is always about making sure we know

what the guidelines are and what we're doing; asking questions if we're not clear ...' (HTS provider, interview #11)

'Well, I think they did – the department did put their trust in us to do our job. And they still do say you're the experts. And so I think, from that point of view, there haven't been any issues. The micromangement side of it, I think they've got a good balance there. So that allowed us to do what we needed to do to get things in place. I think we needed to hear that a few times though, didn't we, 'cause we were so worried. And they're going, no, we trust you. You do it. You make the decisions. And we're going, but ... And they're going, no, no you're the expert. I think it was us going, oh. We had to hear that a few times before we believed it.'

(HTS provider, interview #12)

Getting across the operational systems used by the department was also commonly mentioned as an initial challenge, especially for the organisations that were new to government or departmental systems. This was less of an issue for providers who had previously used the system under another contract.

'As a brand-new provider who had not been a jobactive before, learning the system is ... was difficult, and I think there was a potentially ... what's the word I'm after ... inhibiting expectation that people would be aware of or have used the system before, so as a new user, the training systems and training available, I found quite cumbersome. It took a number of weeks for someone to actually walk us through most of the different bits and pieces.' (HTS provider, interview #13)

'So, the ESS web, we had many teething problems that we weren't able to utilise the system for twelve months. So, when we took it out over, we were sort of securing people, who we couldn't actually place them in positions as put into the system, due the fact that we just couldn't get into the system. And then that pushed us back, the training on the system.' (HTS provider, interview #16)

'I think we also had the advantage of having done Harvest Labour prior to that, so we had some experienced staff coming over into HTS as well, so along with our jobactive experience, our HLS [Harvest Labour Services] experience set us up well, I think.' (HTS provider, interview #14)

Those providers who were new to government systems or programs mentioned being offered additional resources by the department. Departmental staff involved in the program delivery expected that some providers might experience some challenges, and created resources to support those providers.

'From memory, when the providers were brought on board ... there were I think pretty expected teething issues with getting some systems accessed for the brand-new providers who hadn't been involved in delivering employment service programs before at all. But we did provide learning modules on the online learning centre and talking them through with IT system step-by-step processes ...' (Departmental roundtable #2)

Providers were positive about the ongoing reporting requirements of the program, and in general, found them straightforward.

‘The quarterly and annual reporting is not an issue. That’s fine. We now know what they want. So we know how detailed to go and that type of thing.’ (HTS provider, interview #12)

‘Oh, reporting requirements are fine. Yeah, I’ve never had a report pushed back. ‘Cause we have to obviously provide a quarterly report each quarter and then we have an annual report as part of one of those quarters, I’ve never had an issue.’ (HTS provider, interview #16)

A few providers felt that the administrative and reporting requirements were burdensome, and again mentioned that having their own systems in place had assisted with managing this.

‘Look, it is a significant administrative burden, there’s no two ways about it. However, we recognise the reason that the requirements are in place. And we have had time to put process in place ... we are continuously improving those processes to the point where we will be rolling out with [COMPANY] online app technology to provide greater communication, updates and reduce some of that administrative burden from our end.’ (HTS provider, interview #15)

Harvest outcome fee

Following changes made as part of the 2019–20 Budget, in addition to a placement fee, HTS providers are able to claim 4-week, 12-week and 26-week outcome fees for Australian job seekers receiving income support who are placed into an eligible harvest placement or a number of seasonal harvest placements.

Qualitatively, HTS providers who mentioned this change said that they welcomed the introduction of outcome payments to assist them with their focus on employing Australian workers, especially those on income support payments, as a timely and necessary addition to the contract.

‘I think one area that has been really beneficial for us has been the outcome claims for Australian workers on a Centrelink payment; I think that’s been a great introduction, especially for other harvest providers who have always pushed to backpackers or seasonal workers; I think that really has changed people’s focus a little bit.’ (HTS provider, interview #11)

‘I think the addition of the outcomes portion, which was a major change to the contract, has certainly – we can see in the statistics across [HTS PROVIDER] as a provider, and I assume that they’re similar across the country with other providers – that because the placements are much lower with a worker shortage, I think that that was timely. It was appropriate, and it was ahead of the game to focus what we needed to do in employing a local workforce. So, I think they were very necessary changes to the contract. And given that it was, as I understand, the majority was written before Covid, there was some excellent foresight seen there. So that’s been a welcome addition to the contract.’ (HTS provider, interview #15)

5.2 High number of applicants as an ongoing challenge

One of the biggest issues with ongoing program management mentioned by HTS providers during the qualitative interviews was the volume of applicants. Many providers mentioned the high volume of individuals they had to register in ESS Web as a key challenge, particularly early on in the program implementation. As anyone can apply for a harvest job through HTS, it is likely that the applicants HTS providers were referring to are those who were not on income support, or 'direct registrants' – that is, other Australian citizens or permanent residents or WHMs looking for work. Before referring individuals to harvest jobs or claiming outcome payments, the provider must register them in the system and create a job seeker ID.

Many providers mentioned they had implemented their own systems to keep track of the high volume of candidates. Some mentioned that a useful improvement to the program management would be coordinating the systems on which individuals are registered or allowing job seekers to self-register.

'... we've automated the registrations and things like that as well, so we don't – we went from importing people into Excel spreadsheets to them actually just registering themselves and it's on the sheet. So, things like that, that saves a lot of time. Just because of the volume, it's so, so much.' (HTS provider, interview #12)

'... we created a database of people so we can go straight to them every time we have a job in.' (HTS provider, interview #12)

'Some job seekers are already set up in the system if they're already with an employment provider, but ... it would help all harvest trail providers that they could just go in and register themselves.' (HTS provider, interview #14)

Due to the nature of harvest work, many employers require harvest workers at short notice. Having their own available register or database of harvest workers helped some HTS providers to respond to employer requests for available workers and fill vacancies in timely manner. Providers who had set up their own systems mentioned using these to communicate with potential workers, enabling them to notify large groups of available roles.

'We've got a system, our own [HTS PROVIDER NAME] software system that we can send out a huge amount of bulk text messages at the same time; that's a real benefit. We've got all our job seekers registered, thousands of them, and if we all of a sudden need twenty people the next morning, we can send out a big text to, say, 200 people and get replies back automatically.' (HTS provider, interview #14)

'I think they've enjoyed – the new growers that have found us, they phone on a Friday and they're desperate for someone to start on a Monday. And because of our database and stuff, it's quite quick for us. We can literally go out to our whole database, and within ten minutes we can send them a list of people. And they're all really surprised at that. And I think they enjoy – and I think even the new ones, they trust us now and they like the fact they can phone – it's like a one-stop shop! So that's been good.' (HTS provider, interview #12)

Some HTS providers mentioned the difficulty of balancing the high volume of applicants to be processed when a limited number of these turn into placements, particularly early in the program implementation. This could be due to various factors – for example, candidates not being suitable for the work, applying to satisfy job search requirements but not intending to follow through with a placement, or deciding not to go ahead with their referred placement, or perhaps employers rejecting referred candidates because of suitability issues.

5.3 Engagement between HTS providers, harvest employers and other stakeholders

Collaboration between HTS providers, other employment services providers like jobactive, employers and other stakeholders plays a key role in delivering HTS and supplying harvest workers to employers. During the qualitative fieldwork, HTS providers mentioned that they were actively engaging with local employers. This included keeping in contact with existing growers who had previously used their services (for example, through Harvest Labour Services) as well as reaching out and establishing new relationships with prospective employers through various channels such as social media, calling farmers directly, and networking events and presentations.

‘There was already an employer relationship set up ... we had local employers, as well, that we already had a relationship; we extended out and explained that our services had changed a little bit.’ (HTS provider, interview #14)

‘I keep in touch with all the industry bodies ... So I attend all their grower meetings. And they invite me along. And I’ve done talks to them about Harvest Trail Services, that type of thing ... if I see growers that are advertising on Facebook and that for people, I will get in touch with them and inform them about us and that we can help them with it as well ...’ (HTS provider, interview #12)

‘We also have our own e-newsletter, which goes out to all members of [HTS PROVIDER NAME], and then this just get them to pick up the phone and to see who’s the grower, or we’ve had someone within [HTS PROVIDER NAME] who, pretty much knew all the growers around [STATE]. And we sort of picked his brain as to what they grew, who they were, see if they needed work, et cetera, et cetera. So, even in the last two weeks ... I’ve gained another four employers. And that’s just by word of mouth by growers or words within the business, speaking with growers.’ (HTS provider, interview #16)

HTS providers also spoke about developing their understanding of the needs of local growers, including operational requirements, timing of different harvests and the number of workers needed for each, and also keeping up to date on the harvest industry and employment trends/preferences in their areas.

‘... we’re on the ground because we’re here and we know what the farmers want, and we know where the workers are.’ (HTS provider, interview #11)

‘And we always do reverse marketing of job seekers, as well; we know our employers; we know what they want; we do visits with them. We’ve got a good

understanding of what their requirements are, so if we have a job seeker who came in – we go the other way around sometimes and say “this person is going to be perfect for you.” ‘Cause we know what the employer wants, we can just give them a call and say “we think this guy will be great for you; are you interested?”.’
(HTS provider, interview #14)

‘... we’ll go through phases where – last year – last year or the year before, I’m losing my years – everyone wanted to pick avocados. We put up an ad for avocados and just got smashed. Everyone wanted to pick avocados. This year – what was this year? There was something completely different they were excited about this year; I can’t remember. So it really does depend also on location and that type of thing as well.’ (HTS provider, interview #12)

According to HTS providers, many employers approached them directly seeking their assistance. Providers noted that COVID-19 restrictions had increased the amount of contact from employers. The restrictions, particularly those limiting movements of people into and throughout the country, significantly reduced the available labour supply. HTS providers felt that this pushed many more growers to seek alternative sources of workers, including through HTS.

‘With local employers, we attend networking events, and we are constantly promoting what Harvest Trai’ Services can do and how we’re a free service and how we can help them; we do that as normal in the industry, as well. I think COVID did come at a good time with that: it really opened doors for us there. They normally would maybe use contractors or backpackers and they’d had their own processes and now they couldn’t, so they were like “ok; we need your help,” so that’s opened up new relationships that we’ve been able to build.’ (HTS provider, interview #14)

‘... with numbers of backpackers being diminished, they [employers] had to think, “What else?” And they turned often to HTS, which is a positive for us, because the more demand, the more opportunities the providers would have to place people.’
(Departmental roundtable #1)

Harvest employer views on HTS provider engagement

Overall, harvest employers interviewed who described directly engaging with or hiring workers through HTS providers were positive about their experience. A number of these employers noted that providers were proactive in engaging with them and attempting to learn about their needs, for example by making efforts to visit them in person or running information/networking sessions for local growers and farmers.

‘They were local providers that were sometimes – from memory, they would get us together before the season and try and get a gauge of how the season was looking and how many workers they needed for the areas and at what time and things like that.’ (Harvest employer, interview #61)

‘The people we were dealing with were really good. We found all the people there were really proactive and easy to get along with and very – yeah; they were really good.’ (Harvest employer, interview #69)

Engagement with industry and other stakeholders

Most industry representatives in the qualitative research suggested they had extensive engagement with HTS providers spanning many years.

‘... We deal with a number of Harvest Trail Service providers, [HTS PROVIDER] being the biggest one. We deal with those guys on a regular basis, particularly during the pandemic.’ (Industry representative #26)

‘I’m very much – the way I work is generally to try and make the most of the services we’ve got before trying to do something different. So, I saw a great opportunity with having a new Harvest Trail office in our region. So, I basically hounded the new service provider [HTS PROVIDER NAME] and we had lots of meetings about what the difference might be – cos they operated a lot up in the [location] region already. But our region was new to them. So, I spent a lot of time talking with them, introducing them to the growers in our region.’ (Industry representative interview #28)

‘Yeah, pretty high, yeah, and I mean I guess at [INDUSTRY ORGANISATION] we worked quite closely with [HTS PROVIDER], I worked with them in a range of capacities and have for many years.’ (Industry representative interview #25)

‘So for probably close to ten years we’ve worked with [HTS PROVIDER]’ (Industry representative interview #23)

HTS providers also collaborate and interact with various stakeholders, including other employment services providers (for example, jobactive), horticulture industry organisations, and other HTS providers. Some HTS providers interviewed were also jobactive providers who had previously been contracted to provide employment services and therefore had direct and ongoing contact with jobactive providers within their larger organisation. However, most jobactive providers interviewed indicated that the interaction between them and HTS providers had been limited.

‘Our strategy is to reach out to employment providers; we know the majority of their job seekers are on payments, so we reach out to providers in more areas to let them know about us, and let their job seekers know about our positions, as well.’ (HTS provider, interview #14)

‘We’ve sort of had an ongoing relationship with them for, sort of, at least two years in terms of the Harvest trials. But in those two years we haven’t seen like huge volumes, it’s mainly in the area around the farm picking tomatoes, cucumbers, and I would say across that time we’ve had about 12 placements so not massive volume. And some of them independently sourced our candidates and then contacted us.’ (jobactive provider, interview #2)

'They will occasionally contact us and send through a flier, but it's mostly just when they're communicating about the clients that are already working there and getting these harvest positions themselves.' (jobactive provider, interview #8)

6. Promoting fair and safe work in Harvest Trail Services

Key points

- HTS providers noted that they assess potential harvest workers for their capacity to do the job, and many mentioned offering them some level of training and information on fair and safe work.
- Most harvest employers interviewed reported providing their own safety induction, including information on fair work and job-specific training to harvest workers.
- Over half (61.4%) of employers agreed that their HTS providers supported them in understanding fair and safe work practices, though those interviewed indicated that HTS providers were not their main source of information for fair work regulations in particular.
- Harvest workers surveyed were satisfied with the fair and safe work information provided by their HTS provider, with 80.4% rating the information provided as helpful.

6.1 HTS providers and fair and safe work practices

HTS providers are required to promote fair and safe work practices to harvest employers as per the HTS Deed 2020–2023. This work is monitored by the department as part of the key performance indicators for HTS providers through analysis of quarterly reports and evidence of engagement, promotion, networking and dissemination of information.

Providers expressed their concern for worker safety and discussed their efforts to equip workers as much as they could before sending them to an employer, while noting that worker safety was ultimately the responsibility of the employer. Many HTS providers interviewed mentioned screening workers for their capability to perform the role required and giving them some sort of induction (occasionally on behalf of employers), job-specific training and/or relevant information on fair and safe work before sending them to a harvest job.

‘We’re always very honest and upfront when we approach them (potential harvest workers) about work. We go out and say we’ve got this job, these apples. You’re going to need to be prepared to be up and down a ladder all day. You’re going to be in the sun, so you have to be prepared that you’re going to be in the heat for the day ... So just being really, brutally honest with them about it. Trying not to sugar coat it. And I think that happened a little but with some of the marketing that went out originally, like some of the wicker baskets and straw hats, picking fruit. So we were like, nah, we’ve just got to be really honest.’ (HTS provider, interview #12)

‘We provide inductions for all of our staff before we send them out. Sometimes that is our generic, general induction which covers work health and safety and also information about fair work and safe work practices. If we move to our client-specific inductions, they still have the same content, but they might have a training aspect or something site-specific that’s rolled into those as well.’ (HTS provider, interview #15)

‘We’ve got a screening checklist that provides some information as well; the first page of it gives a brief outline of what harvest work is; how it’s physically demanding: you bend over – some safety or general things about what the requirements of general harvest work are, even though it changes from job to job. We give information out about that and there’s also a questionnaire about what they can do and what they can’t do; what their abilities are. And then after that, we have a one-on-one conversation with each person to make sure that they’re suitable for a job, so we have to do that on both ends to make sure that we’re not putting somebody out into a job that they can fail in or hurt themselves in. And the other way as well: that we’re not providing job seekers who can’t do the work for employers. That’s a conversation that we have with every single job seeker.’ (HTS provider, interview #14)

HTS providers who participated in the qualitative fieldwork described working with employers to establish fair and safe work practices. Some providers mentioned vetting their employers, others said they provided training, and some mentioned sending regular updates of relevant information. Other providers described the processes they had in place to monitor and report issues of non-compliance and safety issues at employer sites.

‘Yeah; that’s part of our service as well. With new employers – existing employers, as well, we just make sure that they have all their induction and workplace processes in hand. If we hear that – we get feedback from job seekers or employees that something is wrong in the workplace, we provide that information to the employer and sometimes to the department, as well.’ (HTS provider, interview #14)

‘We also have a database that we use which is a third party database; in there is where we enter information about employers, so if there was an employer that we were going to blacklist for whatever reason, then that information would be in there; they would be sent a formal letter through QA department, but then there would be notes in there to say not to use that farmer again for whatever reason.’ (HTS provider, interview #11)

Some providers also mentioned checking on this during employer site visits, while also conceding that they are not trained safety auditors and were limited in the assessments they were able to do on employers’ application of safety requirements throughout the farm.

‘We go out to farms and – obviously I’m not an OH&S auditor, I’m not qualified. But when we go out to visit a farm, you’re looking around. If something’s dodgy, you’re going to get a little bit of an eye about it. But I don’t do full audits, because I’m not qualified to do full audits.’ (HTS provider, interview #12)

6.2 Employer views on fair and safe work

Most harvest employers interviewed in the qualitative research reported providing their own safety induction, including information on fair work and job-specific training, to harvest workers. However, one harvest employer mentioned that HTS providers conducted initial induction training and screening for them.

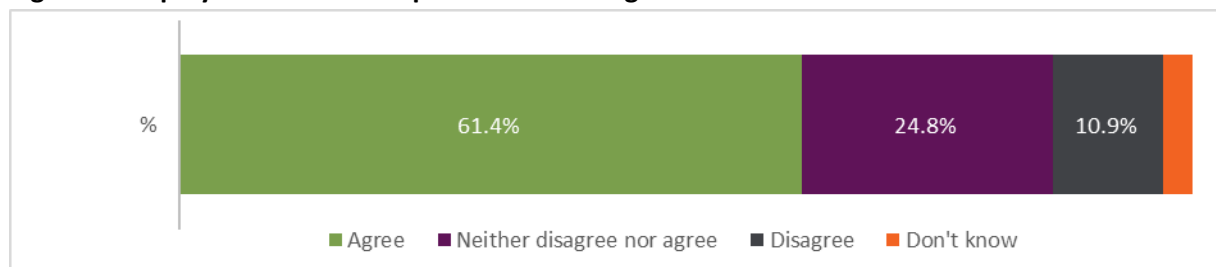
‘So, we have a full induction manual and process before they start. And then – yeah, and then we train them right up before they go and do the job. Nothing is just, “Go out and do that.” We can’t afford to. Like, the machinery they’re operating is half a million dollars’ worth. So, we can’t have them just doing whatever.’ (Harvest employer, interview #67)

‘I provide our workers, in their induction pack, I provide them with a Fair Work statement, with employee information.’ (Harvest employer, interview #60)

‘We have our own inductions here. But I believe that for the Harvest Trail workers, they have an initial induction. They do a safety induction. And they vet them to a certain degree. But they’re only just started asking them for the right to work in Australia, and whether they’ve got transport, et cetera, et cetera.’
(Harvest employer, interview #60)

In the employer survey, more than half of employers (61.4%) who had attempted to recruit through an HTS provider agreed or strongly agreed that HTS providers supported them in understanding fair and safe work practices relevant to harvest workers. This is compared to 10.9% of employers who disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 24.8% were not sure (‘neither disagree nor agree’). A small percentage (3.0%) said they did not know (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Employer views on HTS providers assisting them to understand fair and safe work



Source: Employer survey Q20A. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Harvest Trail Services provider supported your organisation in understanding fair and safe work practices relevant to harvest workers? (n=101).

Note: Labels under 5% have been removed.

It should be noted that in the qualitative fieldwork, harvest employers indicated that they took fair and safe work seriously and tended to turn to official sources to ensure compliance. In general, it appeared from interviews with employers that they did not rely on HTS providers as their main source of information regarding fair work. It should also be noted that the potential to face questions on fair and safe work could have prevented participation in the research; for example, employers who are not complying with fair and safe work might be less likely to agree to participate. These factors should be considered when interpreting the above results.

6.3 Worker views on fair and safe work information

HTS providers are not required under the Deed to promote fair and safe work requirements to harvest workers, though the HTS Guidelines do state that providers should advise workers to contact the relevant state or territory authority or the Fair Work Ombudsman for all pay and conditions enquiries. However, harvest workers surveyed were asked if their HTS provider had talked to them about their rights to fair and safe work.

A majority (62.2%) indicated that their provider had done so, while a quarter (25.2%) said ‘no’ and a further 13.6% could not recall (Table 14).

Table 14: Participants on whether their HTS provider talked to them about fair and safe work

Response	No. participants	%
Yes	820	62.2
No	319	24.2
Can’t recall	180	13.6
Total	1,319	100

Source: Worker survey Q17. Did your Harvest Trail Services provider talk to you about your rights to fair and safe work in harvest work? (e.g., minimum wages and conditions, work safety requirements).

Harvest workers who said their provider did talk to them about fair and safe work in the harvest industry were asked what information they recalled their HTS provider giving them. Harvest workers most commonly recalled receiving information about the recommended clothing or equipment (59.3%), pay rates (59.1%), employment conditions (47.7%) and the physical requirements of harvest work (41.8%) (Table 15).

Table 15: Harvest workers’ recall of information their HTS provider gave them

Response	No. responses	%
Recommended clothing or equipment	486	59.3
Information on pay rates	485	59.1
Employment conditions	391	47.7
The physical requirements of the work	343	41.8
Weather conditions in the area	227	27.7
Accommodation options in the area	210	25.6
Transport options in the area	176	21.5
National Customer Service Line number	90	11.0
Safety procedures/OH&S	74	9.0
Other induction/presentation	26	3.2
Who to contact for more information	14	1.7
Other	13	1.6
Don’t know	67	8.2

Source: Worker survey Q18. What do you recall your provider telling you about fair and safe work in the harvest industry? (base: those who reported that their HTS provider talked about fair and safe work, n=820) (MR).

Harvest workers surveyed were positive about the information provided to them by their HTS provider. They were asked to rate the helpfulness of information regarding fair and safe work

practices in the harvest industry given to them by their HTS provider. Four-fifths (80.4%) of these workers indicated that they found the information very helpful (36.7%) or helpful (43.7%), compared to just 7.2% who found it unhelpful (5.0%) or very unhelpful (2.2%) (Table 16).

Table 16: Harvest workers’ ratings of helpfulness of fair and safe work information

Rating	No. participants	%
Very helpful	301	36.7
Fairly helpful	358	43.7
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	76	9.3
Somewhat unhelpful	41	5.0
Not at all helpful	18	2.2
Can’t recall	26	3.2
Total	820	100

Source: Worker survey Q20. On a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being ‘Not at all likely’, and 10 being ‘Extremely likely’, how helpful would you rate the information you received regarding fair and safe work practices in the harvest industry by your HTS provider? (n=820).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 5-category scale (where ‘Not at all helpful’ = 0 and 1; ‘Somewhat helpful’ = 2 to 4; ‘Neither’ = 5; ‘Fairly helpful’ = 6 to 8; and ‘Very helpful’ = 9 and 10).

‘If we had any issues, go straight to management and there was someone in the high up in office if we had issues with pay. Health and safety information such as if you get spray in your eye, to go straight to the office and report it.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘It is the duty of the employer that you have got safe workplace and that it is everyone’s place to ensure a safe workplace. Equipment is all in good order, electrical stuff is tested.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘We did an induction and did some paperwork and they made sure we can work safely where we were working.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

Harvest workers surveyed were also asked what could have made the information they received about fair and safe work more helpful. While many responses indicated that the information they received was sufficient, those who did provide feedback tended to focus on the information being more relevant and specific. A few responses indicated that having the information provided in different languages would be helpful.

‘If they had provided with more in-depth details, background on the job I was going to be doing. And the sort of safety stuff I could expect from that job position.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘It was very broad. Understandably. In jobs I’ve had since, they’ve all been very different. Regionally, maybe there should be more specific regional information.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

Other than HTS providers, 33% of harvest workers surveyed indicated that they had received information about fair and safe work from their employers, 19.0% had heard about it through word of mouth, 17.3% had received information from jobactive providers, and 16.7% reported HTIS as a source of this information.

During the qualitative interviews with harvest workers, some participants recalled receiving some information on fair and safe work, either through HTS providers or their employers. Some workers also participated in HTS provider-run induction training.

‘It seems to be the only way it’s done now. You’ve got to have special inductions to work on farms and get like a little white card to say you’ve been trained, and a lot of farms won’t take you unless you’ve got your [HTS PROVIDER] induction cards. So it’s not like it used to be when I used to fruit pick, it’s not just a matter of turning up anymore.’ (Harvest worker, interview #60)

‘Yes; obviously, when you sign up with your provider, they – we do a bit like an online training thing, with what’s expected from harvest work; farm work; production work. Also, part of the package was they sent you out a sheet with your working conditions and all your working condition information, what your expected award was, all of that, as well.’ (Harvest worker, interview #62)

‘I can’t remember too much about the Harvest Trail Services component about it. The induction course went for about an hour, and they showed us a video ... they showed us a video about, you know, proper handling of, you know, stuff, and looking after yourself. What to do and what not to do ... We got some ... I can remember getting brochures when I went to this [HTS PROVIDER] place, [HTS PROVIDER]. And they had brochures all about legal rights and stuff like that.’
(Harvest worker, interview #70)

7. Employer satisfaction with Harvest Trail Services

Key points

- In the survey results, the majority (84.6%) of employers who said they had attempted to recruit workers through HTS indicated that they hired workers referred to them. Of surveyed employers who had attempted to recruit workers through HTS, 65.4% agreed that they would be likely to use HTS again, and 17.3% disagreed.
- Whether employers thought they had been referred enough workers depended on their labour needs; businesses that reported requiring more workers at peak harvest times were less likely to agree that HTS providers had referred enough workers for their needs.
- Employer peak labour needs also impacted total satisfaction levels: 59.1% of businesses that needed 20 workers or fewer reported being satisfied with the quality of candidates referred, compared to 31.6% of those needing 20 or more workers.
- Harvest employers noted that they relied primarily on word of mouth, social media advertising or labour-hire firms to find workers before the COVID-19 pandemic, and many had sought out HTS providers due to labour shortages during the pandemic.
- Employers who had recruited through HTS providers were particularly happy with the screening HTS providers conducted on potential candidates, that workers had all the required paperwork to start, and that the process was administratively easy for them.
- Most employers interviewed suggested that HTS providers could not fully meet their worker needs; however, many acknowledged that this was due to restrictions put in place because of COVID-19.

7.1 Hiring harvest workers through HTS

According to survey responses, 60.1% of employers had attempted to recruit through an HTS provider, with 89.4% of those employers hiring workers referred by an HTS provider. When employers were asked what proportion of HTS workers referred to them were hired, a total of 48.3% said they had **hired half, a majority or all of the workers referred to them**. Just under half (43.0%) said they had hired a minority of those referred (Table 17).

Table 17: Proportion of HTS workers referred who were hired

Proportion	No. participants	%
All	11	11.8
A majority	15	16.1
Around half	19	20.4
A minority	40	43.0
None	1	1.1
Don't know	6	6.5
Left blank	1	1.1
Total	93	100

Source: Employer survey Q15. Approximately what proportion of the workers referred by Harvest Trail Services providers have you hired? (n=93).

Employers had mixed views about whether the HTS provider they engaged had referred enough workers for their needs. About half (49.5%) of employers who had engaged with HTS providers to recruit harvest workers agreed that the HTS provider **referred fewer workers than they needed**, while a slightly smaller percentage (42.7%) reported that their HTS provider referred enough workers.

As shown in Table 18, employers who needed 20 or more workers (55.4%) were more likely to think HTS providers referred fewer workers than they needed, compared to 39.5% for those who needed 19 or fewer workers.

Table 18: Employers reporting that HTS providers referred fewer workers than they needed, by employer harvest labour needs at peak harvest

Response	Employers needing 19 or fewer workers (n=43)	Employers needing 20 or more workers (n=56)
Yes	39.5%	55.4%
No	58.1%	32.1%
Don't know	2.3%	12.5%

Source: Employer survey Q13. When you have attempted to recruit a harvest worker through a Harvest Trail Services provider, did the provider refer fewer workers than the number you required? (n=104).

During the qualitative research, most employers indicated that prior to COVID-19 restrictions, they relied on finding workers through word of mouth, social media advertising or labour hire firms. Often these employers reported not needing to use HTS providers. For employers who did mention using HTS (or previous iterations) prior to COVID-19 restrictions, it was in addition to other sources.

Many employers mentioned that since the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions and border closures they had faced significant challenges in getting enough workers through these previously used methods. Employers noted that they were now compelled to explore additional avenues for recruiting harvest workers, including establishing contact with local HTS providers as one of the few available sources of workers for their harvest.

‘We just explored options to hopefully try to address the labour shortage that we were finding at the time. And one of the steps that we took was to contact and engage and meet with [HTS PROVIDER].’ (Harvest employer, interview #64)

‘The main factors for us are that tightening in the job market. We used to get quite a lot of returning seasonal workers, and that has dropped off a bit ...’
(Harvest employer, interview #65)

Experiences hiring through HTS providers

Qualitatively many employers were positive about their experiences hiring candidates for harvest work through HTS providers. These employers commented on how HTS providers checked harvest workers’ right to work in Australia and made sure workers had the required documents to start (for example, a tax file number and bank account details) before referring them to employers.

‘I think we do have an easier, faster recruitment process ... We don’t have to vet the workers ourselves. They (HTS providers) do that for us. So that’s one benefit.’
(Harvest employer, interview #60)

‘We like the Harvest Trail cos they do a visa check; that’s important. We also do the visa checks, but they say if they have any issues. And I think to be part of the Harvest Trail they’d have to have a valid visa anyway. But they provide us with the visa checks.’ (Harvest employer, interview #61)

‘It was no different than hiring other workers. In actual fact, they came better prepared ... Because one of the challenges with employing people is being able to read their writing to document them on the payroll system, to get them the bank details, to pay them. That’s historically been a real problem. They know what we need. We get it. It’s not as big of a problem for us.’ (Harvest employer, interview #68)

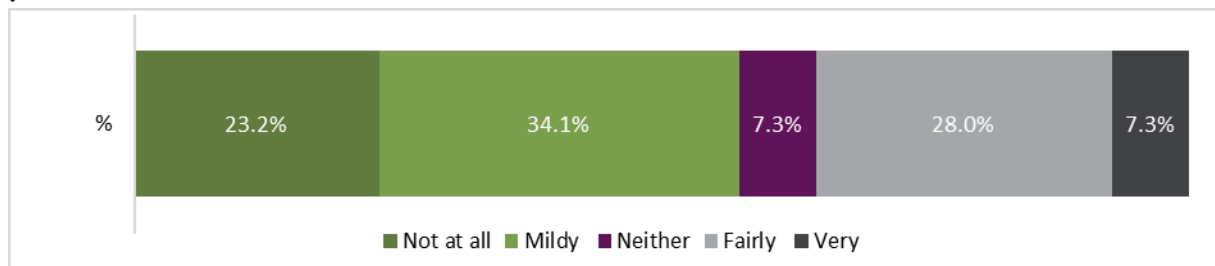
Employers who had hired through HTS generally remembered the administrative burden as being very low, with many describing it as ‘easy’.

‘All they ask me to do is provide, once a month, to provide payslips as proof of their employment.’ (Harvest employer, interview #60)

‘That (the administrative side of hiring through HTS) was real easy. ‘Cause they’ve been ringing me. I haven’t rung them once. So, that’s awesome. I’ve had – obviously, I’ve had to send them stuff, but, yeah, they keep ringing me to say, “Oh, look, can you do this for us?” “Yeah, no worries, I’m happy.” Yeah, so that side is unbelievable.’ (Harvest employer, interview #67)

Employers in the survey who indicated that they hired workers through an HTS provider were also asked how time consuming the administrative requirements were in comparison with other hiring channels. Among these employers, over half (57.4%) were positive about how time consuming this process was, with 23.2% giving a score of 0 or 1 (on an 11-point scale from 0 to 10) and 34.1% giving a score of 2 to 4. A similar proportion (28.0%) gave a score of 6 to 8, though only 7.3% indicated that the process was very time consuming (a score of 9 or 10) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Employer views on whether hiring workers through HTS providers is a time-consuming process



Source: Employer survey Q16. How time consuming were the administrative requirements for hiring a candidate through the Harvest Trail Services provider, compared with hiring through other channels? (n=93).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 5-category scale (where 'Not at all time consuming' = 0 and 1; 'Mildly time consuming' = 2 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; 'Somewhat time consuming' = 6 to 8; and 'Very time consuming' = 9 and 10).

Most employers who hired workers through HTS providers said that providers responded to enquiries in a timely manner, although some were not satisfied.

'I think it was actually good, because they say "do you need more people?" and go and find people, and they were good at keeping in contact and seeing what we needed and filling the spaces when they can.' (Harvest employer, interview #69)

'Oh, fine. If I ever had an inquiry, I always – the person that we dealt with ... was always easy to contact. If I didn't get him straight away, they always returned calls. It wasn't – yeah. It wasn't like chasing, like ... no, no, it was okay. I felt like dealing with them was fine. Unfortunately, they just didn't provide us with that many labour. But dealing with them was fine. No problem at all.' (Harvest employer, interview #64)

'... they're not very good communicators. And what I mean by that is I often don't receive an email reply for about three days. And that's not really okay.' (Harvest employer, interview #60)

HTS providers' understanding of employer needs

While HTS providers noted how they had developed a good understanding of harvest employer needs and made an effort to anticipate them, there were mixed views among harvest employers in terms of HTS providers' ability to do this. Some employers noted that HTS providers understood their particular labour demands and operational needs.

'They understand that we need so many people to get the job done. Like I've said, they've been out to see us. They know our operation quite well. They know when

we say we need two people, it's because we need two people. We would never say we need six people and hope that they send us two. We're straight down the line with them. If we need two, we say two.' (Harvest employer, interview #60)

'Yes, they (HTS provider) do let us know who they're looking at and what their thoughts are on the particular candidates, I guess you could call them. And they run it by my husband, and he always says, "Well, okay, that guy sounds good. Send him out." So when they do have work candidates, they're pretty good at asking questions and making sure we know exactly how they feel about their suitability for the work.' (Harvest employer, interview #60)

While most employers did note that HTS providers attempted to get to know their business or understand their requirements in general, some noted that providers did not fully understand growers' needs for workers, whether it was that providers were not able to anticipate when and how many workers they would need, did not fully prepare referred workers or did not refer workers with the right skills.

'They (harvest workers) didn't know all the details. I'm not sure whether vet is the right word, but they (HTS providers) didn't inform them of the detail of the requirements to work in this area.' (Harvest employer, interview #62)

'I think they're (HTS providers) very good other than the fact they don't attempt to predict. They're very reactive. And that might just be the natural – the volume [of workers] at that time.' (Harvest employer, interview #68)

Provider ability to source workers during COVID-19 restrictions

Most employers suggested that HTS providers struggled to meet their demands for harvest workers. However, many of these employers indicated their understanding of the challenges HTS providers faced given the shortages of harvest workers in Australia during COVID-19 restrictions.

'And they did provide us with some labour, but minimal. Absolutely minimal. We had to source our labour mainly from labour hire companies. Yeah, we didn't have much success with, uh ... with Harvest Trail.' (Harvest employer, interview #64)

'This is where it falls off a cliff. Because up until COVID, they'd provided a good service. I wouldn't say exceptional, but a very good service. Since COVID, it's been terrible. And that's not their fault. But they just can't get us workers.' (Harvest employer, interview #61)

Some HTS providers and industry representatives who were interviewed expressed how COVID-19 impacted their ability to source and supply workers, as well as affecting the relationship between the providers and growers. This had other flow-on effects – for example, the capacity for HTS providers to go and meet growers in person, and COVID vaccination mandates.

'The challenges of not having all the doors opened all the time in getting registrations – a process that we could do registrations online; that was a challenge: that we couldn't go out and speak to employers face to face during a

period; it kept on changing. The workforce kept on changing as well and employers' – farmers' needs kept on changing because of COVID, as well, whether they needed workers or not, 'cause they might have been hit with COVID and shut down. So all those things that were happening to the harvest employers were rolling on to us, so it's a very changing environment from day to day; they can want fifty people and then they can want one person, so that made it tricky and COVID made that a little bit worse for all employers.' (HTS provider, interview #14)

'... being a brand new provider in a brand new area, it has been quite difficult to establish ourselves as an offering to farmers in the area. With COVID being the way it is too, it has inhibited a lot of in-person visits, so a lot of our interactions have been via email and phone calls. When we've been able to, we've gone out and done in-person visits and that sort of thing, but I do think that has inhibited us and made it more difficult to establish ourselves in the region than it normally would have been.' (HTS provider, interview #13)

'... usually when you have ample backpackers and other forms of labour, it is a fairly reliable source. But last year and this year, it has been pretty tough. And I think growers were probably a little bit naïve about the extent of the labour shortages that were present. And I think at the same time, it's not [HTS PROVIDER]'s fault, but I think it's left a bit of a taste in some growers' mouths that these guys haven't delivered on what they presumed should have.' (Industry representative, interview #23)

'... part of our problem now is we had a contractor in [LOCATION] who needed about 30 people. And I think I sent him 92 people. But out of that 92 people, only four were vaccinated. And he needed vaccinated people with the mandate. So if there was no mandate, and there was accommodation, he would have filled it like that.' (HTS provider, interview #12)

While most HTS providers felt that they were able to source workers in many situations, they also mentioned that they had to be honest and upfront with growers on their ability to source workers in an environment of limited supply. One employer also mentioned that they appreciated their HTS provider being upfront about how many workers they could source.

'... if I have a grower who needs ten people, I will typically find them ten people. We haven't had many problems in filling the requirements that we're asked to fill.' (HTS provider, interview #12)

'... we're very realistic with our growers. All of our harvest office managers live in the communities in which they work. It is very important that we're real about what we can and can't do. And at the moment with the labour shortage, we have to be honest about what we see that we can do.' (HTS provider, interview #15)

'You could say that there haven't been jobs that we haven't been able to fill, so I think that goes to show the success in being able to engage with job seekers.' (HTS provider, interview #11)

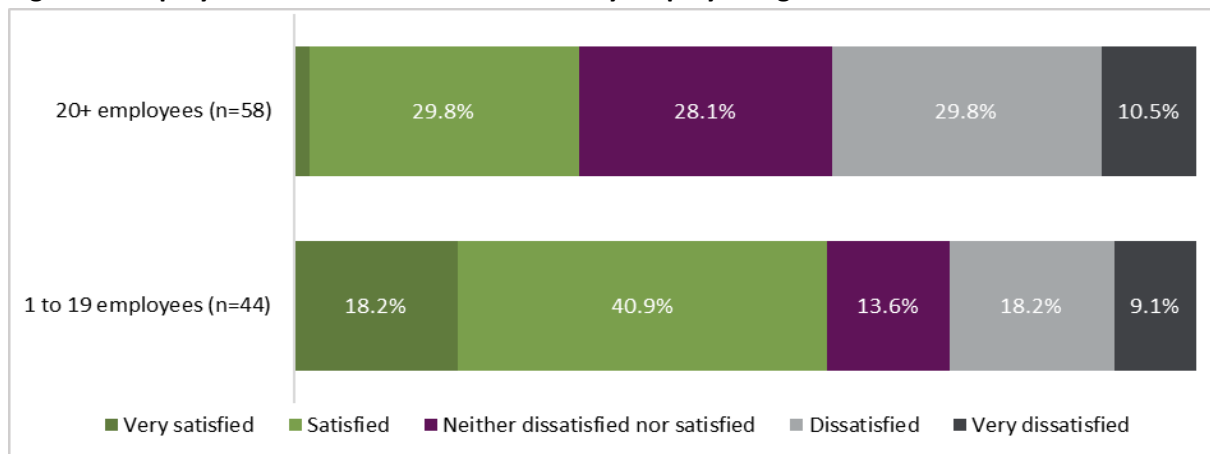
‘I did appreciate their honesty. ‘Cause they could have said to me, “Yes, thank you, I’ll get you names on Wednesday” and let me hang. And then I wouldn’t have got anyone. So they were upfront, which is very good. They were transparent.’
(Harvest employer, interview #68)

7.2 Employer views on quality of candidates referred by HTS providers

Employers were asked to rate their satisfaction with the quality of harvest workers referred by HTS providers. Just under half (45.6%) of employers reported that they were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the quality of candidates referred to them, while 32.0% were dissatisfied, and 21.4% were ‘neither dissatisfied nor satisfied’ (Table 27).

However, employers with different peak harvest labour needs recorded different levels of satisfaction with worker quality. Employers with a peak labour need of fewer than 20 reported more positive views of the quality of workers referred to them by HTS providers (with a total satisfaction level of 59.1%, compared to a 27.3% total dissatisfaction level). Employers who reported needing 20 or more workers at peak times recorded a total satisfaction rate of 31.6% and total dissatisfaction rate of 40.4% (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Employer satisfaction with candidates by employer organisation size



Source: Employer survey Q18. Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of candidates referred to you? (base n=102).

Harvest employers interviewed had mixed views of the quality of workers referred to them by HTS providers. Some employers mentioned that they were satisfied with the quality of harvest workers referred to them, whereas others felt that workers referred to them had a poor attitude, were not willing to do harvest work when they were put to the test, or were not reliable. Some said that they were not suited to the nature of work required of them or that they lacked the right skills.

‘They varied, depending on ... they do vary significantly. I must say, the group we had this year turned out a good core of people.’ (Harvest employer, interview #62)

‘Thank you. A thorough screening process that they sort of matched the people they sent to the requirements that we specified to them. So, yeah, they were pretty – they were pretty ... it wasn’t like a fact that, “Oh, why did you send me

this guy? He doesn't even know how to use a pair of secateurs or clippers." No. It was okay. It was okay.' (Harvest employer, interview #64)

'Well, I would have to say that 75 percent of them are quite suitable. The other 25 percent either don't have any proof of their ability to work in Australia, or they're – am I allowed to say they're physically not capable? ... We've had some that have come for half a day, and some that have come and worked two days. And then we don't see them for a week, and then they're back again.' (Harvest employer, interview #60)

'I would say probably 75 percent of them were suitable. I find that, as a generalisation, the Australian workers, before this year, have been unreliable. Overseas workers I find much more reliable. But their willingness to work, they all – there are people that could find it very difficult. Because it's such a basic job, it's actually not for anybody who actually has a higher qualification. Because it's pretty mundane. It's pretty hard and it's boring and it's demanding and not everyone is suited to it.' (Harvest employer, interview #68)

'Cause we're doing olive harvests, and we're using machinery, and not many of them that they supply are actually, you know ... they've driven much, or used much machinery.' (Harvest employer, interview #67)

When asked if referred harvest workers differed by suitability or quality from workers sourced elsewhere, many employers suggested that they did not generally notice any difference.

'Oh, pretty much the same. Yeah, pretty much the same. Yeah.' (Harvest employer, interview #64)

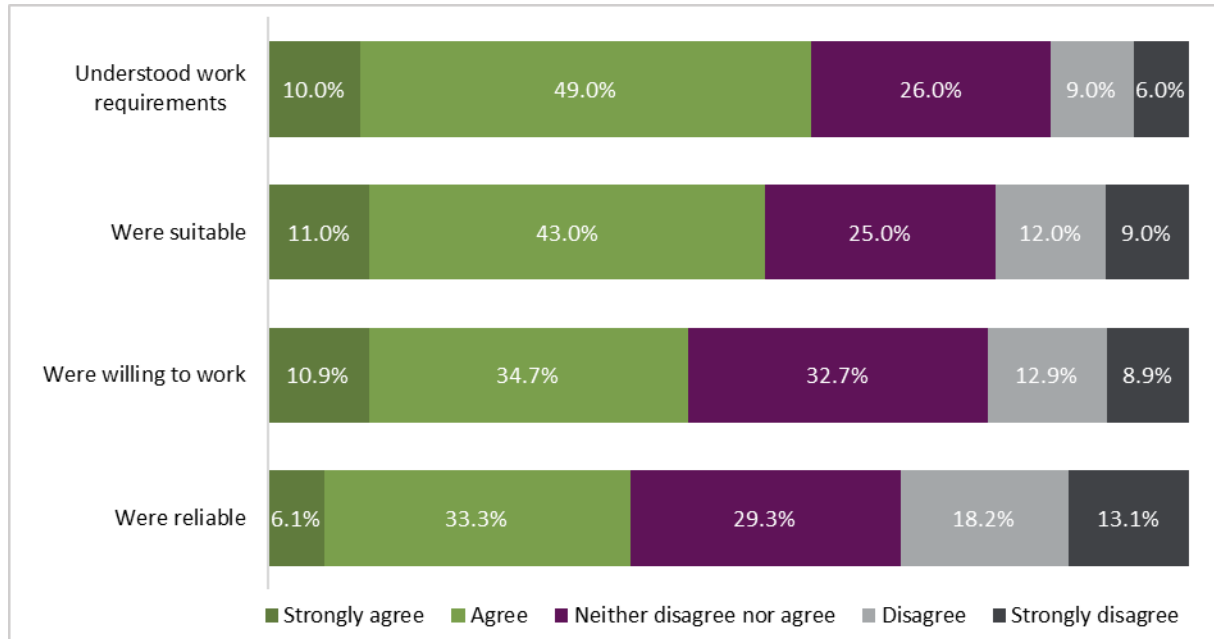
'I would say just about the same. Because it was still the same pool of people we were sourcing, but some aligned to other methods of employment agencies. But they were about the same. You give them a go. And most work out. Some don't.' (Harvest employer, interview #61)

Again, harvest employers stressed HTS providers' difficulty to supply suitable workers within a severely limited workforce. These employers acknowledged the difficulty of securing suitable workers when the pool of available workers from which to recruit had been so reduced.

'The Harvest Trail provider, they can only provide people who walk through their door looking for a job. And that really determines – the quality of the workers now, it's very difficult to get people who are very driven, who actually want to perform.' (Harvest employer, interview #60)

Employer survey results were similarly mixed on elements of worker quality but were generally positive about the suitability and quality of workers referred to them. Surveyed employers mostly agreed that the referred workers understood work requirements: 59.0% of employers agreed with this, compared to 15.0% disagreeing. Surveyed employers were least satisfied with worker reliability: 39.4% of employers agreed that workers were reliable, compared to 31.3% disagreeing with this statement (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Employer satisfaction with referred workers



Source: Employer survey Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Harvest Trail Services provider referred workers who ... (n=104).

Of the employers surveyed who indicated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with candidates referred by their HTS provider (n=33), the most provided reasons were that the candidates were not suitable (n=11) or that they did not turn up / were unreliable (n=10). This was followed by candidates being unwilling to work (n=9) and not staying long in the job (n=7) (Table 28). The perception that Australian workers had a poor attitude or were less driven than overseas workers was common in verbatim responses.

‘Lack of work ethic and unreliability to attend work on time everyday as required.’
(Harvest employer, survey verbatim response)

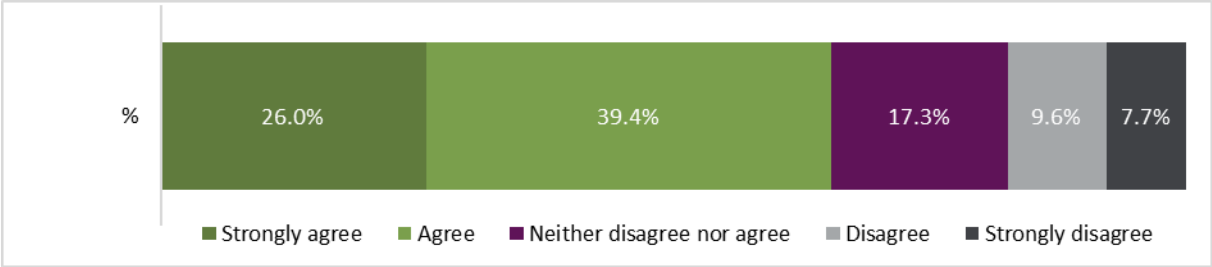
‘The provider did their best but unfortunately the motivation and work ethic from the candidates were not sufficient.’ (Harvest employer, survey verbatim response)

‘Due to COVID-19 we no longer have the overseas visa holders to fill in the gaps for seasonal work. We have found that locals are not willing to work as they have too many benefits. The local workers know all the benefits the government provides and use this to its full extent, when they have fulfilled the criteria to receive said benefit, they move on or quit. Overseas workers are far more reliable, and they want to work ...’ (Harvest employer, survey verbatim response)

7.3 Employers’ overall satisfaction with HTS

Employers who had attempted to recruit harvest workers through HTS were asked if they agreed or disagreed that their business was likely to use HTS again. Overall, 65.4% of these employers said they would be likely to use HTS again, compared to 17.3% who disagreed and 17.3% who neither agreed nor disagreed (Figure 9).

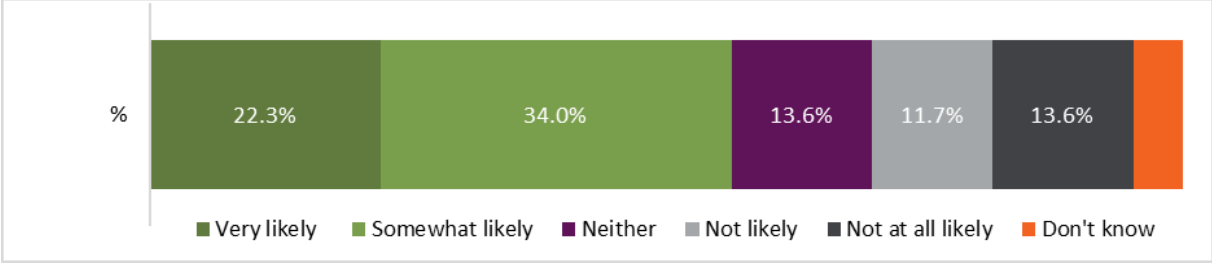
Figure 9: Harvest employers' likelihood to use HTS again



Source: Employer survey Q23. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your business is likely to seek assistance from a Harvest Trail Services provider to fill a harvest work vacancy? (n=104).

Employers indicated that they were less likely to recommend HTS to other employers needing harvest workers than they were to use the service again themselves. Just over half (56.3%) indicated that they were likely (indicating a rating of 6 to 10) and 25.2% indicated that they were unlikely to recommend HTS (a rating of 0 to 4) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Harvest employers' likelihood to recommend HTS to other employers



Source: Employer survey Q24. How likely are you to recommend Harvest Trail Services to other employers seeking to fill harvest work vacancies? (n=104).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. Labels for figures under 5% have been removed. Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 5-category scale (where 'Not at all likely' = 0 and 1; 'Not likely' = 2 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; 'Somewhat likely' = 6 to 8; and 'Very likely' = 9 and 10).

8. Worker satisfaction with and experiences of Harvest Trail Services

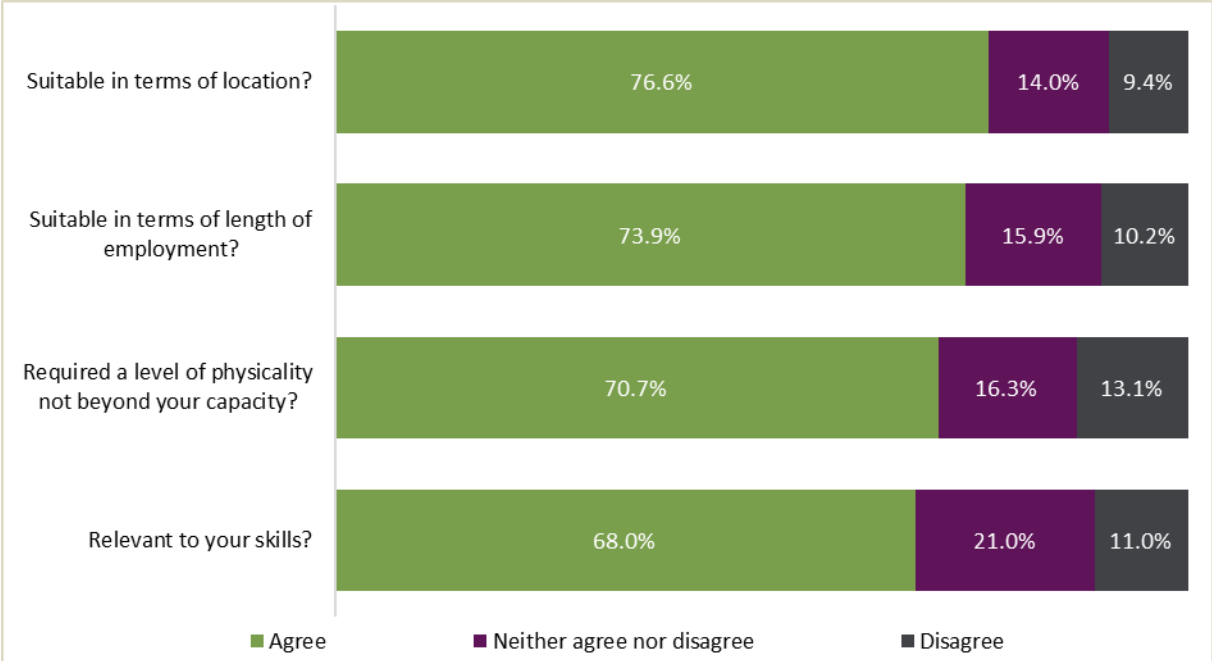
Key points

- Respondents to the harvest worker survey were generally very positive in their views about the suitability of jobs to which they were referred, with the majority agreeing that the job was suitable in terms of location, length of employment and level of physicality required, and relevant to their skills.
- Harvest workers interviewed were mixed about their interactions with HTS providers.
- More than half (59.6%) of workers surveyed indicated they were likely or very likely to use HTS again in the future, with visa holders reporting being more likely than Australian citizens / permanent residents.

8.1 Views on interaction with HTS providers

Respondents to the harvest worker survey were generally very positive in their views about the suitability of jobs to which they were referred, with the majority agreeing with each statement. Respondents were most satisfied with the location of the work arranged by their HTS provider: 76.7% agreed that the location was suitable, compared to 9.4% disagreeing. Almost three-quarters (73.9%) of respondents agreed that the length of employment was suitable, slightly fewer (70.7%) felt that the role did not require a level of skills beyond what they had, and 68.0% agreed that the work was relevant to their skills (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Agreement that the harvest work you were referred to was ...



Source: Harvest worker survey Q15. How strongly you agree or disagree that the work your Harvest Trail Services provider arranged was ... (n=1,319).

Note: Ratings were collected on a 5-point scale and have been recoded to a 3-category scale here for simplicity. For example, 'Agree' is a category of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses.

A small number of harvest workers interviewed talked about their experience of being referred by an HTS provider, expressing mixed views. Some specifically mentioned positive interactions with HTS providers. These workers commented that their HTS providers helped them find harvest work and were approachable and responsive to their requests or concerns.

‘Well, they were very supportive here in [STATE] in helping you access that work. And just supporting you through that process of getting those jobs.’ (Harvest worker, interview #33)

‘Yeah, the office in wherever we dealt with in [CITY] I think it was, maybe? They were ... they were awesome, they were so good. Everything I asked, they were back to me within a day or two, all were good information and, yeah, they were – so good.’ (Harvest worker, interview #34)

‘... it was good. I know people that weren’t happy working at orchards, and they went back to [HTS PROVIDER], and they placed them elsewhere. So, as far as I’m concerned, I was happy with everything.’ (Harvest worker, interview #70)

‘They (HTS providers) organised everything. They connected with the farmer, they gave us the phone number to contact the farm. They took out that middle man process of him having to relay things to us. He sort of vetted us through the paperwork we submitted, and then it was much easier to communicate with the farm, they were welcoming. The farm knew [NAME] pretty well. He’d obviously dealt with them for a number of years.’ (Harvest worker, interview #73)

Others were frustrated about not receiving enough or accurate information about the role they were being referred to, such as work and pay conditions (for example, hourly versus piece rates).

‘Honestly, that was the overall thing. I think there was a lot of transferring on the phone from one person to another and I’m not sure if there was a formal process about what to do with Harvest Trail or why there was so much transferring ... Yeah. And I’d be transferred back or I’d hear from someone else in an email. Like, I’d call them and would be transferred through but they’d be the one emailing me. So, it was just a little bit messy like that.’ (Harvest worker, interview #43)

‘... they couldn’t give me any information about the job itself. Like, they didn’t provide me anything about, look, it’s gonna be piece rate, usually that’s how many hours they’re offering, something that sometimes find people that give you that information ...’ (Harvest worker, interview #37)

‘Well, I went to [LOCATION] to – I was told I was going to be doing packing work, but when I got there, it turned out that was a lie and I – whilst I was waiting for some packing work to come up – it was at least one week, might have been two – I did a little bit of pear picking, but I would never do that ever again. I didn’t want to do that in the first place; I wanted to do packing.’ (Harvest worker, interview #71)

Some harvest workers interviewed noted that HTS being an Australian Government program made them feel safer and more confident when applying for harvest work. This was generally related to a perception that the work gained through HTS would be more legitimate and safer, or that they could raise any issues with their HTS provider.

‘The jobs are mostly verifiable; I would be able to trust that it’s not some dodgy farm ... I guess because HTS is government linked and I think farmers who have nothing to hide are more likely to apply with the government linked services.’
(Harvest worker, interview #64)

‘... my feeling was that if the farms are willing to sign up with a government agency and all that, that they would maybe be a safer place and ... and, you know, kind of a better place to work. So that was also a part along with the AgMove stuff, it also seemed like a good way to get a job because at least, you know, I think if you got a problem with the farm, you can talk to the Harvest Trail guys, and they’ll kinda help you out that way too.’ (Harvest worker, interview #34)

Harvest workers on income support

As HTS aimed to encourage more Australian job seekers on income support to take up harvest work, the evaluation team investigated whether there were any differences between views of those on income support and those not on income support.

Views on the suitability of their harvest role were similar between survey respondents on income support and those not on income support. The largest difference between the 2 groups was for suitability of location, with a 9.7% difference, followed by length of employment, on which there was an 8.6% difference. It should be noted, however, that the 2 groups were vastly different in size, and care should be taken when interpreting these results (Table 19).

Table 19: Total agree responses by respondent group

Group	Relevant to your skills	Level of physicality	Length of employment	Location
Not on income support	65.0%	68.0%	73.6%	76.7%
On income support (n=331)	61.0%	66.2%	65.0%	67.1%
Difference	4.0%	1.9%	8.6%	9.7%

Source: Harvest worker survey Q15. How strongly you agree or disagree that the work your Harvest Trail Services provider arranged was ... (base n=1,319).

Note: The difference in sample sizes for these 2 groups should be taken into consideration when interpreting these results. Ratings were collected on a 5-point scale. This table is reporting total agree response only – that is, the sum of ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ responses. Significance testing was not conducted.

Among harvest workers interviewed, about a third were on income support. The most common reasons among these participants for taking up harvest work were travel opportunities, a desire to help the industry, that harvest work was seen as easy to get, and, for some, out of necessity (not having other available work options).

Those who stated that they chose harvest work because of travel, to help the industry or as a job that was easy to obtain were more positive about their experiences with HTS and HTS providers than those who mentioned doing harvest work due to necessity. Among those interviewed, participants who chose to take up harvest work out of necessity mentioned that they did not have any prior harvest work experience.

‘Well, I’m semi-retired, so I still needed the income, but I wanted to explore new industries that I had no knowledge of. Wanted to find out a bit more, so needed something that was mentally stimulating as well as physically stimulating, ‘cos I really like to be active and outdoors. So, it ticked all the boxes in that regard, plus helping all the industries that were just screaming out for workers basically.’

(Harvest worker, interview #33)

‘Well, first – the reason I looked into it at the start was mainly because the media about crying out for workers in agriculture and all the negative media about Australians being too lazy to go and do that kind of work. So I thought, “well, rather than get upset about it, I’ll go and prove them wrong.”’ (Harvest worker, interview #65)

‘Pretty much there wasn’t much else going at the time. I didn’t really think about it at first, I was going for lots of other jobs up here and only got a couple of interviews out of a hundred applications. Out there they just straight away showed me round and they’re just happy to have you. I really enjoy it, I’m hoping to come back again this year.’ (Harvest worker, interview #33)

‘Last year I was on ... the JobSeeker payment. They always encourage you to go and you have to apply for so many jobs and I actually found a job I could actually get. So you know, a lot of jobs you apply for you, you just apply for and never hear from anybody. I found this on the jobactive website and more or less you turn up for an induction. And if you’re happy with the induction, you can start tomorrow.’ (Harvest worker, interview #38)

‘I’ve got horticultural qualifications. It’s a really difficult industry to get into. It’s one of those catch-22s where you can’t get a job without experience, and you can’t get experience without a job ... I thought the closest thing I could get was picking tomatoes. Has something to do with plants, vegetables, that’s the best I can do.’ (Harvest worker, interview #66)

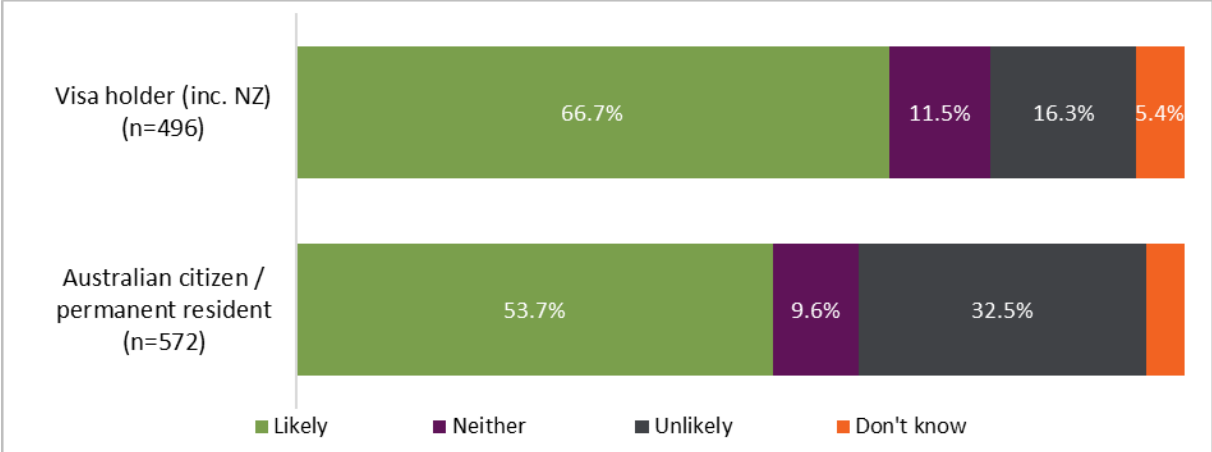
8.2 Overall harvest worker satisfaction with HTS

Harvest workers surveyed were asked how likely they were to seek assistance from HTS to find harvest work again in the future. Three in 5 (59.6%) of all respondents indicated that they were likely or very likely to do so. A quarter of all respondents (25.0%) indicated that they were unlikely or very unlikely to use HTS again.

Looking at likelihood by worker cohort, visa holders were more likely to report being likely to use HTS again than Australian citizens / permanent residents. A total of 66.7% of visa holders reported that they were likely to use HTS again, compared to 53.7% of Australian citizens. Conversely, Australian

citizens / permanent residents were more likely to say that they would not likely use HTS in the future, with 32.5% selecting 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely', compared to 16.3% of visa holders (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Harvest worker likelihood to use HTS again by cohort type

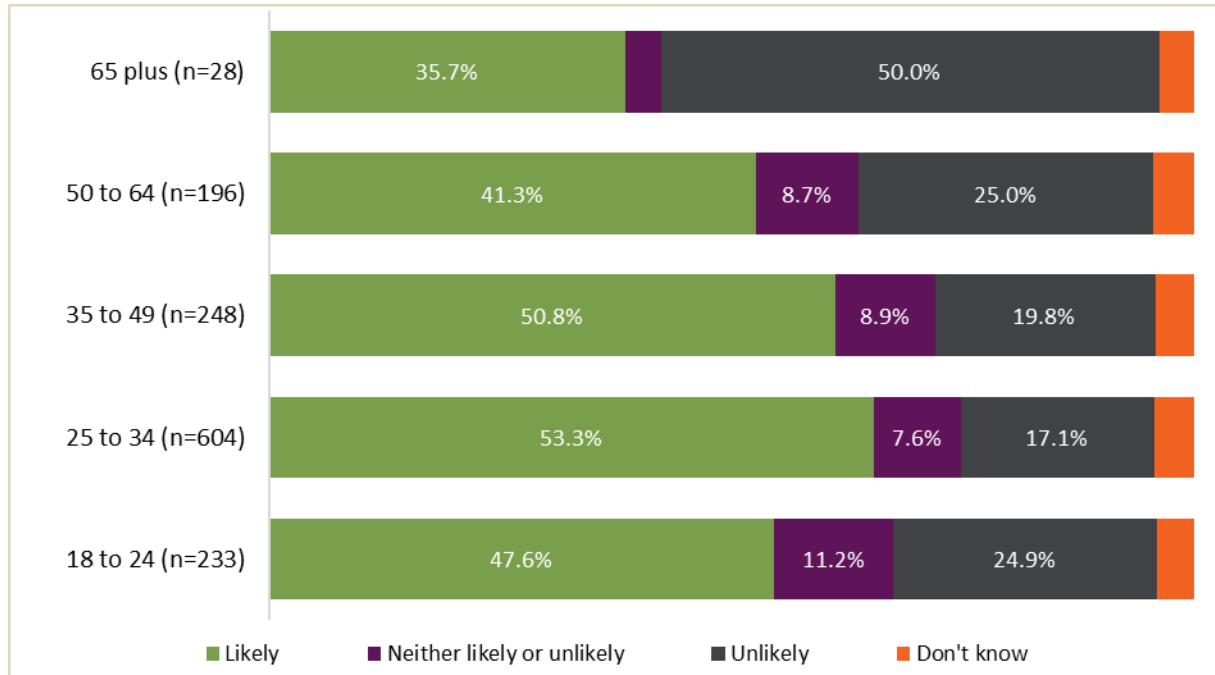


Source: Harvest worker survey Q16. On a scale from 0-to-10, with 0 being 'Not at all likely', and 10 being 'Extremely likely', how likely would you be to seek assistance from a Harvest Trail Service provider to find harvest work in the future? (base n=1,068).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 3-category scale here for simplicity (where 'Unlikely' = 0 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; and 'Likely' = 6 to 10). Labels for figures under 5% have been removed.

Looking at likelihood by age group, those aged between 25 and 49 were the most likely to indicate that they would use HTS in the future: 53.3% of those aged 25 to 34, and 50.8% of those aged 35 to 49 stated that they were likely or very likely to use HTS again. Those aged 18 to 24 were only slightly less likely, at 47.6% total likelihood. Older workers were less likely: 41.3% for those aged 50 to 64, and 36.7% for those aged 65 and over (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Harvest worker likelihood to use HTS again by age group

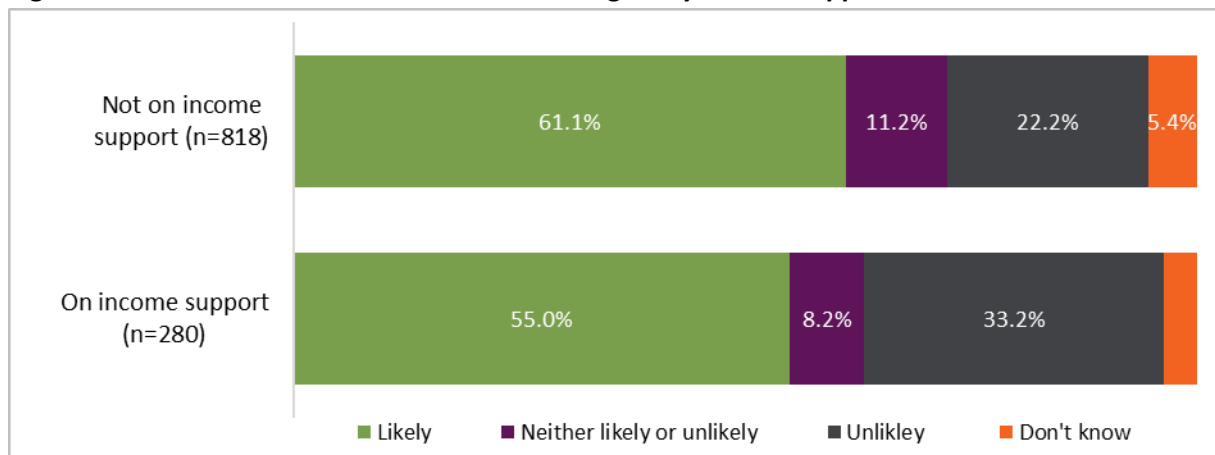


Source: Harvest worker survey Q16. On a scale from 0-to-10, with 0 being 'Not at all likely', and 10 being 'Extremely likely', how likely would you be to seek assistance from a Harvest Trail Service provider to find harvest work in the future? (base n=1,319).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 3-category scale here for simplicity (where 'Unlikely' = 0 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; and 'Likely' = 6 to 10). Labels for figures under 5% have been removed.

The evaluation team examined survey responses to see if any differences existed between those who were on income support and those who were not. Slightly more harvest workers who were not on income support reported being likely to use HTS again (61.1% compared to 55.0% for those on income support). Conversely, more of those on income support indicated that they were unlikely to use HTS again (33.2% compared to 22.2% for those not on income support) (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Harvest worker likelihood to use HTS again by income support status



Source: Harvest worker survey Q16. On a scale from 0-to-10, with 0 being 'Not at all likely', and 10 being 'Extremely likely', how likely would you be to seek assistance from a Harvest Trail Service provider to find harvest work in the future? (base n=1,098).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 5-category scale (where 'Not at all likely' = 0 and 1; 'Not likely' = 2 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; 'Somewhat likely' = 6 to 8; and 'Very likely' = 9 and 10). This is based on post-analysis of the survey results; all recipients received the same survey. Significance testing was not conducted. Labels for figures under 5% have been removed.

9. AgMove

Key points

- While perceived by all stakeholders as being helpful for those taking up a job requiring relocation, AgMove was generally seen as a supplementary factor in moving to take up harvest work (mainly helping those already planning to move). This indicates a degree of dead weight in the program.
- Other factors, such as a lack of accommodation and transport in harvest areas, were commonly mentioned as having a larger impact on the willingness of workers to move.
- Harvest workers who had applied for AgMove most commonly remarked on the time the reimbursement took to process, with many noting that deciphering the initiative's rules was difficult.
- From a providers perspective, the main issue with AgMove was the time it took to process claims (particularly at the start of the initiative), with some providers mentioning having to hire extra staff to cover the workload.

9.1 Awareness of AgMove

From 1 November 2020 to 31 May 2022, there were 9,430 AgMove agreements reported by HTS and HTIS providers. AgMove was fully subscribed as of 30 June 2022, reaching the maximum of 10,000 agreements funded.

Of those harvest workers who indicated in the survey that they had relocated or applied for a job that required relocation, 53.4% reported being aware of AgMove before taking the survey and a further 24.2% indicated that they were aware but did not know much about it. Under a quarter (22.4%) stated that they were not aware (Table 29).

Of OES job seekers surveyed, a majority (73.2%) indicated that they were not aware of AgMove, while 5.6% said they were aware and a further 21.2% indicated they were somewhat aware. This is not unexpected given that these job seekers are not generally looking to get into harvest work (Table 26, Appendix A).

Most harvest employers interviewed were aware of AgMove, though not all were familiar with the name.

9.2 Experiences of administering and claiming AgMove

Lengthy reimbursement timeframe

Both qualitative and quantitative fieldwork showed that the time to reimbursement after applying was the most common pain point among harvest workers who had claimed the AgMove reimbursement. Some participants mentioned needing to follow up with HTS providers on the progress of their claims on many occasions; others mentioned waiting many months for their claim to be processed. Some mentioned that a lack of understanding of the rules about claiming AgMove led to confusion and delays.

‘I’ve been trying to get [HTS PROVIDER] to submit my claim for 4 months now. Every time they complain about something I fix, wait 3 weeks ask for status and they raise a new thing. Fix, wait 3 weeks, repeat. They now insist on me providing every single payslip but initially said they weren’t needed, then not all were needed.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘The AgMove reimbursement was submitted in Feb, but after 3 months of waiting nothing has been progressed, and [HTS PROVIDER] in [LOCATION] just says it is still waiting to be processed – very frustrating as I returned and needed to service my vehicle due to the excessive [amount] [sic] of travel and wear and tear, and instead of being able to use my reimbursement to do this, I had to save for several weeks in my usual job to do this.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

Administrative burden

Among those who had experienced it, HTS providers generally described the administrative burden of processing large numbers of AgMove applications as resource intensive and disruptive to the administration of HTS, particularly when first introduced. A number of providers mentioned having to hire additional staff to cover the workload, and that it was not cost-effective for them.

‘I think it’s always challenging, embedding a new contract that’s quite different from the years that have been previous. We’ll get there, I’m sure. But AgMove being implemented quite quickly and being quite intense, in November, was an additional challenge we experienced. I think that all providers would also agree that a lot of the plans we had in place to implement the new contract were sidelined a little bit.’ (HTS provider, interview #15)

‘I guess it was (cost effective) initially, and then when AgMove – we did have to employ quite a number of new staff because it was so process heavy, so for a while there it wasn’t – in fact, we were losing money for quite a number of months; we’ve sort of turned it around.’ (HTS provider, interview #14)

Harvest workers who had sought reimbursement commented on how onerous the process was for them. This was also noted by some employers and industry representatives, who had heard about it from others.

‘Paperwork ... That’s my biggest – I think that is probably the biggest issue I’ve got with it. It’s this whole, you’re trying to get grey nomads in or you’re trying to get backpackers into it. They’ve all got iPhones, they’ve all got iPads, I just don’t understand the reason for printing out eight sheets of paper and then finding somewhere to scan them back.’ (Harvest worker, interview #61)

‘It was a little bit vague – a lot of different documents, it was just a little bit time-consuming. You had to sit down and make sure you went through each different document and made sure that everything was attached separately.’ (Harvest worker, interview #43)

‘But some of the feedback that I sent to them (HTS providers) was in regards to how onerous that paperwork (for AgMove) was. It was quite a lot, a lot of paperwork. I haven’t seen the new version, but apparently it has been reduced a bit to make it a little bit more streamlined and simpler to use.’ (Industry representative, interview #29)

Of those who applied for AgMove, about the same proportion of participants agreed and disagreed that applying for AgMove was straightforward (44.9% total disagree compared to 44.3% total agree). However, those who disagreed were more likely to hold strong views (27.0% strongly disagree) than those who agreed (10.6% strongly agree) (Table 20).

Table 20: Views on whether the AgMove application process was straightforward.

Response	No. participants	%
Strongly agree	36	10.6
Agree	115	33.7
Neither disagree nor agree	36	10.6
Disagree	61	17.9
Strongly disagree	92	27.0
Don’t know	1	0.3

Source: Harvest worker survey Q26. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following ... c) The AgMove application and administrative process was straightforward (base: those who had applied for AgMove, n=341).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 5-category scale (where ‘Not at all likely’ = 0 and 1; ‘Not likely’ = 2 to 4; ‘Neither’ = 5; ‘Somewhat likely’ = 6 to 8; and ‘Very likely’ = 9 and 10).

Confusion over AgMove rules and application process

Many fieldwork participants noted their confusion over various aspects of AgMove, including what could and could not be claimed and what was needed to seek reimbursement. For example, there was confusion about reimbursing fuel costs – fuel costs for relocating to the new location could be claimed, but travel to and from the place of work at the new location (daily commute) could not be claimed.

‘I didn’t keep all the receipts so that is my problem. I paid house rent in cash so I have no receipt or record so I [couldn’t] apply for this.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘I was told that the farmer will find me a relocated accommodation, but the farmer didn’t provide one, so I found a cheap backpackers in [LOCATION]. I almost spent 2 hours every day [driving] my car from relocated accommodation to farm and back, I was disappointed that the cost of fuel was not accepted when I applied for AgMove relocation assistance.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

'[the process could have been improved by giving us] a bit of information about what was covered i.e. what we could be reimbursed for. We did not know petrol [for the drive to new location] could be reimbursed so we did not keep petrol receipts.' (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

'Well, we've come a long way. We've gone through five versions of AgMove. And I think that our contracts managers have been phenomenal in acting quickly and being able to provide responses to us so that we can then move quickly. However, I think that initially the perception from a lot of the participants was that it was a grant. And the reality was that it is a reimbursement model. And again, we've come a long way. I noticed the promotion now is focussed on a reimbursement model.' (HTS provider, interview #15)

9.3 AgMove as a motivator to relocate

Providers are generally supportive of the intent of AgMove

Despite the difficulties in managing the initiative, HTS providers were generally supportive of AgMove as an incentive for those who needed extra assistance to relocate to take up short-term harvest and agricultural work, and some credited it as a key driver of getting more Australian job seekers into harvest work. However, some HTS and jobactive providers thought that AgMove was mainly benefiting those harvest workers who were already interested in or committed to relocating to take up harvest work, indicating a degree of dead weight in the program.

'I think part of the success is also more for the Australians has been the introduction of AgMove. That has made a difference, giving them a bit of funding to get to where they need to, like it's a bit of enticement, I suppose. And for those that want to try and it and see if they – so that was a good introduction. And we've seen our numbers go up in Australians that are taking it up since AgMove's been introduced.' (HTS provider, interview #12)

'I think it probably influences job seekers on payments to do harvest work, because they're probably in a bit of a harder financial situation to begin with, so that's an incentive to them or a real need for them, so I think they would look at that and go "ok; let's give it a go." The visa holders or the people not so much on payment, they're just doing it maybe – I think they're just doing it – it's a great extra bonus for them. They were probably going to do that anyway, and it's just an extra bonus on top of it. But it definitely gets people moving, so that's good, and it opens up relationships, as well; so that's a great thing.' (HTS provider, interview #14)

'I don't think it's made a huge amount of difference, to be honest; I think a lot of these people would have done the work with or without AgMove, but it is good, because I suppose for people who are paying rent in a place and they've got to go away for work, they're really not making any money when they're paying rent at two places and there's two lots of expenses, so I think it definitely helps with that side of things, but me personally, I haven't found too many people who I don't

think would have done that if the AgMove wasn't available.' (HTS provider interview #11)

'[AgMove is] not [an incentive] for those who aren't already willing.' (jobactive provider, interview #2)

'... the likeliness of our clientele that are not migrant, there is very few and far of them that are likely to go next door and do picking, let alone take up six thousand dollars to go to the north of the state picking, if you know what I mean.'
(jobactive provider, interview #1)

Employers and industry views are mixed on whether AgMove incentivises relocation

Among harvest employers and industry representatives in the qualitative research, opinions were mixed about the degree to which relocation assistance influences workers to move to take up harvest work. Some were enthusiastic about the initiative, or relocation assistance in general, with most of these noting it could be helpful to those who needed extra funds to move.

'I think [relocation assistance] impacts their decision. I think in many cases it would. Certainly, from our point of view, quite a few of the people who move, move for their work. I think it helps mitigate that gap for them. They earn pretty much up until they leave the previous role, and once they're on the move for the next role, they would have a gap. I guess they'd have the costs of the relocation to cover out of their previous employment.' (Harvest employer, interview #65)

'Oh, I think [AgMove]'s a great idea, personally. Yeah. I really do ... I've had numerous – a number of backpackers that are that broke – Australians and international – who are that broke, "Oh, how are we going to get here?" And when they get here, they've literally got 20 cents to their name. I think if we can – if we can keep doing that, that'd be a fantastic idea.' (Harvest employers, interview #67)

Other employers and industry representatives viewed the relocation assistance as a very limited solution that does not fix the long-term issues of not having a sustainable source of harvest workers. They considered that the assistance had a little impact on motivating job seekers to relocate to take up harvest work or, as articulated by some fieldwork participants, didn't allow workers to stay for long periods.

'Like I say, we probably had four or five last year who genuinely came to the area that wouldn't have normally. Cos the moment the six weeks or whatever it was that they had to do for their second payment, they all just left. And then probably went to another region and got another round of AgMove, I'm not sure.' (Harvest employer, interview #61)

'I know that there were – I think we had a couple of crews that came, worked one day, right, got paid, and didn't work for the rest of the week. Because they got AgMove.' (Harvest employer, interview #64)

‘One of the challenges we’ve always had politically around the AgMove stuff is that it’s really, really good, but we’re seeing people go out there to do their six weeks, get the money, qualify for the money and then go home; that’s it. So it’s kind of we’ll take the workers – particularly during COVID – we’ll take the workers for six weeks ‘cos it’s better than nothing, but we don’t see that as a long-term solution for the industry; we’ve got to look for more sustained ways to get young people, or get whoever, anybody, really, out looking at horticulture as a proper career pathway and looking at addressing those.’ (Industry representative interview #26)

Employers surveyed were asked to what extent they thought that relocation assistance was essential in addressing harvest labour shortages. Almost half (44.4%) either agreed or strongly agreed. Just under a quarter (21.4%) did not agree (Table 21).

Table 21: Employer views on whether relocation assistance is essential in addressing labour shortage

Response	No. participants	%
Strongly agree	40	15.6
Agree	74	28.8
Neither disagree nor agree	68	26.5
Disagree	38	14.8
Strongly disagree	17	6.6
Don’t know	20	7.8

Source: Employer survey Q7. To what extent do you think offering relocation assistance for workers moving to harvest work is essential in addressing harvest labour shortages? (n=257).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 5-category scale (where ‘Not at all likely’ = 0 and 1; ‘Not likely’ = 2 to 4; ‘Neither’ = 5; ‘Somewhat likely’ = 6 to 8; and ‘Very likely’ = 9 and 10).

Other factors limiting the impact of AgMove

Quite a few stakeholders mentioned that it was the impact of other significant challenges, particularly a lack of affordable accommodation (or any accommodation), that influenced the effectiveness of AgMove.

‘That’s just not going to work at the moment. And we all know why. Even locals are flat out getting a rental, a room to rent. So unless they have their own dedicated accommodation where they’re going to move the people to and from, on a merry-go-round type thing, that’s not going to work.’ (Harvest employer, interview #60)

‘I think it’s good to relocate. I think the issue that we have is that you’re only – they say that they’re eligible for up to \$6,000. But they’re only allowed to claim

61 days of accommodation. So that really is all they would be claiming is accommodation, so 61 days doesn't get you anywhere close to the \$6,000. So that's what we're finding is that's all they're doing. They're only staying for those 61 days.' (HTS provider, interview #12)

'[AgMove] would be great if we had accommodation. That's our biggest barrier. Aside from moving into the low-capacity hostel accommodation, that's really a short-term fix, we don't have a huge amount of available accommodation for longer term moves. And I believe I could probably almost hand on heart say that would be across all the regions that accommodation is a big issue.' (Industry representative, interview #29)

Likelihood of harvest workers relocating

According to the harvest worker survey, just over half (54.7%) of survey participants had previously relocated for a harvest job. Another 5.5% had applied for harvest roles that required relocation but did not actually relocate. A total of 39.8% of participants had never applied for harvest work that required relocation (Table 30).

Of those who reported relocating for a harvest role previously, half (50.4%) indicated that they had moved somewhere within their existing state, while a slightly smaller number (48.6%) indicated that they had moved interstate. Very few (1.0%) survey participants indicated that they had moved overseas (Table 31).

During qualitative interviews, harvest workers were asked about their intention to relocate to take up harvest work. Overall, for most participants who did relocate for harvest work, AgMove was not a primary factor in their decision-making process. Workers who were committed to relocating for harvest work stated that they would do so with or without the relocation assistance. However, they appreciated the reimbursement to help cover some of their travel and accommodation expenses.

'Because I was actually had to do [harvest work] anyway, but when I saw the opportunity to like go to a place that I never been and be kind of paid, not paid, but not spending of my own pocket. Yeah, I said yeah, that would be great.'
(Harvest worker, interview #37)

Most harvest workers in the qualitative fieldwork who had claimed AgMove mentioned that they appreciated the financial help – especially those who were on low hourly or piece rates. While AgMove helped to influence some harvest workers' decision to take up harvest work and relocate, for many it was not a primary factor. Commonly cited factors in deciding to move to take up harvest work included being able to travel around the country (for instance, grey nomads) while earning some income, or a requirement to do harvest work to meet visa requirements (for instance, temporary visa holders).

'I don't think it (AgMove) influenced my decision, I think I would've done it (harvest work) anyway, but it helped a lot.' (Harvest worker, interview #47)

Some workers who had taken up harvest work and relocated with the help of AgMove mentioned having to plan and budget their travel and accommodation expenses based on the relocation assistance. For instance, several workers had committed to harvest work for only the minimum

required period to receive their entitlements for a reimbursement. Some were not able to move, even with AgMove, due to a lack of upfront finances.

‘... I think that was always the plan, just to do it for the minimum – the six weeks or seven weeks. I think – we got the accommodation reimbursed and I think we’d had enough after that; we had go back; I’ve got a family at home.’ (Harvest worker, interview #35)

‘The hard thing is, trying to keep people there. Surviving until you get the money can be hard. I couldn’t afford to stay in the caravan park, so I lived in the bush. I didn’t bother with AgMove. I thought that I’d get the money to move at the start, not at the end. They said that it can take two to three months.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘No, I left because I got the incentive that I wanted, that’s it.’ (Harvest worker, interview #41)

Some harvest workers indicated that the incentive was not worth it for them as they would or did have to pay for their permanent accommodation and expenses while travelling to undertake harvest work.

‘Was paying for my permanent accommodation and harvest accommodation at the same time and hasn’t yet been reimbursed, and the wear and tear in my vehicle isn’t reimbursable so makes for little more than breaking even. Costs less than a holiday for a unique adventure, but doing 6 weeks over two jobs, I could have been better off financially for working closer to home.’ (Harvest worker, survey verbatim response)

‘It would’ve been cheaper for us to stay at home, really. Not spend money on everything. We had to get into caravan parks and pay up front, everything we had to pay for up front. We were relying on a quick repayment of that stuff.’ (Harvest worker, interview #72)

When asked what other support was needed to assist with relocating for work but not currently available, 14.7% of participants (those who had relocated or applied for a role that required relocation but did not end up relocating) indicated more support around housing and accommodation, and 9.9% gave responses related to transport. Most (62%) gave no response to this question (Table 32).

Likelihood of OES job seekers to relocate

OES job seekers surveyed as part of this evaluation were asked how likely they would be to consider moving to undertake harvest work in the future if they were eligible for AgMove (and assuming they were looking to work in a harvest role). Just under a quarter (22.4%) indicated that they were likely (very or somewhat likely) to relocate if eligible for AgMove (Table 22), which is slightly higher than the total proportion of job seekers who indicated they were likely to consider harvest work (15.2%) at the beginning of the survey (Table 33). This might indicate that access to relocation assistance could have an influence on some who are considering moving to take up harvest work.

Among those who had indicated they were likely to consider taking up harvest work, the total likelihood of considering moving to do so is much higher. Among this group, a large majority (78.9%) indicated they were likely to consider moving if eligible for AgMove. However, it is important to note that the sample size for this question is very small: 38 job seekers (Table 34).

Table 22: Likelihood to relocate among all OES job seekers and OES job seekers who indicated they would consider taking up harvest work

Response	All (n=250)	Likely to consider harvest work (n=38)
Very likely	26.3%	4.8%
Somewhat likely	52.6%	17.6%
Neither	5.3%	11.6%
Not likely	2.6%	13.2%
Not at all likely	10.5%	46.0%
Don't know	2.6%	6.8%

Source: OES job seeker survey Q4. Assuming you were eligible for AgMove relocation assistance and wanted to work in a harvest job, how likely would you be to consider moving to undertake harvest work in the future? (base: n=250).
 Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 5-category scale (where 'Not at all likely' = 0 and 1; 'Not likely' = 2 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; 'Somewhat likely' = 6 to 8; and 'Very likely' = 9 and 10).

9.4 Harvest workers' likelihood to recommend AgMove

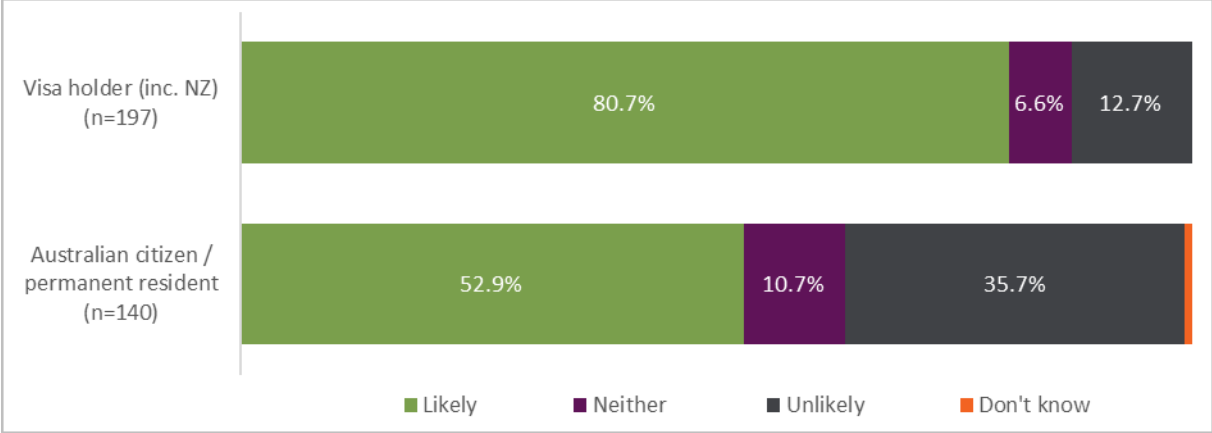
Harvest workers who indicated they had been aware of AgMove prior to taking the survey were asked if they had applied for AgMove, and 80.5% said they had. A further 7.3% indicated that they had relocated but were yet to seek reimbursement (Table 35).

More than half (56.8%) of surveyed participants who had applied for AgMove and been reimbursed agreed that they would not have been able to accept the job without AgMove (

Table 36).

There was a clear difference between Australian citizens / permanent residents and visa holders' reported likelihood to recommend AgMove. Just over half (52.9%) of Australian residents (including permanent residents) who had applied for AgMove indicated that they were likely or very likely to recommend AgMove, compared to a majority (80.7%) of visa holders who had applied. Conversely, about a third (35.7%) of Australian residents said that they were unlikely or very unlikely to recommend AgMove, while just over 1 in 8 (12.7%) visa holders said the same (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Likelihood of recommending AgMove by residency status



Source: Harvest worker survey Q28. On a scale of 0-to-10, where 0 is 'Not at all likely', and 10 is 'Extremely likely', how likely would you be to recommend AgMove or any other Australian Government relocation assistance to another person? (base: those who had applied for AgMove, n=337).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was not at all likely and 10 was extremely likely. These have been recoded to a 3-category scale here for simplicity (where 'Unlikely' = 0 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; and 'Likely' = 6 to 10). Labels for figures under 5% have been removed.

10. References

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11. Appendix A

Table 23: Major harvest areas in Australia

Region	Added in 2020*	State/s	Provider
Adelaide Barossa (previously Adelaide Hills)	✓	South Australia	MADEC
Far North Queensland (previously Tablelands)	✓	Queensland	Quality Innovation Training Employment
Gippsland	✗	Victoria	MADEC
Goulburn Valley	✗	Victoria	MADEC
Hunter/Central West	✗	New South Wales	Acclaimed Workforce Pty Ltd
Mid Murray	✗	Victoria	MADEC
Northern New South Wales Coast	✗	New South Wales	MADEC
Riverina	✓	New South Wales	MADEC
South East (previously Riverland)	✓	South Australia	MADEC
Southern Queensland, Queensland and New South Wales	✓	Queensland and New South Wales	BEST Employment Limited
South West	✗	Western Australia	Rural Enterprises Australia
Sunraysia	✗	Victoria and New South Wales	MADEC
Sunshine Moreton	✗	Queensland	MADEC
Tasmania	✗	Tasmania	MADEC
Top End (previously Kununurra and Top End)	✓	Northern Territory and Western Australia	NT Farmers Association
Wide Bay (previously North Burnett)	✓	Queensland	MADEC

*In the 2019–20 Budget, the Australian Government announced changes to HLS and NHLIS, including expanding the number of HTS areas from 11 to 16.

Table 24: HTS Industry Collaboration Trial projects

Organisation and description	Project description	Focus harvest area/s
<p>AUSVEG Limited – a peak industry body for the Australian vegetable and potato industries</p>	<p>This project aimed to produce and promote a series of videos to showcase occupations in the agriculture or horticulture sector and highlight day-to-day experiences in the occupation as well as career pathways and growing employment opportunities. The promotion campaigns included social media and relevant commercial and government stakeholders, such as employment service providers and educational institutions. For instance, these videos were showcased to primary, secondary and tertiary students to promote careers in horticulture. As at 16 May 2022, the videos reached more than 100,000 views on social media.</p>	<p>All 16 harvest areas</p>
<p>Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers Cooperative Limited – a membership-based, not-for-profit, non-trading cooperative based in Bundaberg, Queensland, representing commercial horticultural growers south to Gympie, north to Agnes Water and west to Gayndah/Mundubbera</p>	<p>The project engaged employers to design pre-employment support, identify job opportunities and support placement of Australians in the horticulture sector.</p> <p>Job seekers were provided with pre-employment and on-the-job support, including professional development and ongoing mentoring. The project supported employers to create best practice work environments and encourage recruitment and retention of workers. For instance, some participants participated in a 2-day on-farm experience and others completed training components.</p> <p>As part of the promotion, the organisation approached high schools, colleges and youth development organisations to inform and encourage uptake of work in horticulture. Social media was also used for the promotion.</p>	<p>Wide Bay (QLD) and Sunshine Moreton (QLD)</p>
<p>Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers Limited (GrowCom) – Queensland’s peak industry body representing fruit, vegetable and nut growers</p>	<p>This project focused on encouraging and supporting school leavers to participate in a horticulture gap year and gain employment in the harvest industry. Social media was a crucial tool to reach the target market and promote content relevant to the project and encourage participation. The campaign achieved over 600,000 views.</p>	<p>Southern Queensland (QLD and NSW) Wide Bay (QLD), Sunshine Moreton (QLD), Far North</p>

Organisation and description	Project description	Focus harvest area/s
		Queensland (QLD)
Fruit Growers Victoria Limited – the Victorian peak industry body for fruit growers, packers, and exporting businesses across Victoria	The project aimed to encourage recruitment and retention of local workforce. In addition, it provided pre-employment screening, a mentor program and on-the-job support. This project targeted secondary school leavers, migrant communities, refugees, young people and women.	Goulburn Valley (VIC)
Northern Territory Farmers Association Incorporated – the peak body for the plant industry in the Northern Territory	The aim of the project was to attract local a labour force to horticulture, by producing a series of videos to promote the Harvest Trail and encourage Australians to pursue a career in horticulture and assist employers/growers to employ more locals. NT Farmers promoted the videos through its members, show displays and social media.	Top End (NT and WA)

Source: Internal HTS Industry Collaboration Trial 2020–2022 final milestone reports.

Note: Fieldwork with HTS Industry Collaboration Trial participants was not conducted as part of this evaluation.

Table 25: Awareness of HTS and HTIS among harvest employers

Response	No. participants	%
Aware	127	51.0
Aware but don't know much about it	51	20.5
Not aware	71	28.5
Total	249	100

Source: Employer survey Q8. Prior to being contacted about this survey, were you aware of Harvest Trail Services or the National Harvest Trail Information Service? (n=249).

Table 26: Information provided to employers by HTS providers

Response	No. responses	%
What Harvest Trail Services is and how it works	71	75.5
Recruiting eligible harvest workers for your farm or in your harvest area	51	54.3
Strategies to recruit harvest workers and address shortages	29	30.9

Response	No. responses	%
Don't know	7	7.4
None of the above	4	4.3

Source: Employer survey Q11. Did the information you received from the Harvest Trail Services provider include information about ...

Note: This question was asked of employers (excluding labour hires) who answered 'yes' at Q10. Did you receive information from a Harvest Trail Services provider about Harvest Trail Services? (n=94) (MR).

Table 27: Overall employer satisfaction with the quality of referred workers

Response	No. participants	%
Very satisfied	10	9.7
Satisfied	37	35.9
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	22	21.4
Dissatisfied	25	24.3
Very dissatisfied	8	7.8
Don't know	1	1.0
Total	103	100

Source: Harvest employer survey Q18. Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of candidates referred to you? (n=103).

Table 28: Reported main reasons for not being satisfied with the quality of candidates among harvest employers

Reason	No. responses
Other non-suitability/poor quality	11
Didn't turn up / unreliable	10
Unwilling to do work / lack of work ethic	9
Didn't stay long in the job	7
Other	4
Lack of workers available/provided	3
Just fulfilling Centrelink obligations	3
Physically not able	0

Source: Harvest employer survey Q19. What is the main reason you were **not satisfied** with the quality of candidates referred to you by the Harvest Trail Services provider? (n=33).

Note: This question was asked of those participants who answered ‘Very dissatisfied’, ‘Dissatisfied’, or ‘Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’ at Q18.

Table 29: Awareness of AgMove among harvest workers interested in relocating for work and OES job seekers

Group	Aware (%)	Aware but didn't know much about it (%)	Not aware (%)
Harvest workers (n=794)	53.4	24.2	22.4
OES job seekers (n=250)	5.6	21.2	73.2

Source: Harvest worker survey Q26. Were you aware of AgMove before today? (base: those who had applied for relocation or did relocate, n=794). OES job seeker survey Q3. Had you heard of AgMove before today? (n=250).

Table 30: Applied for a harvest job that required relocation

Response	No. participants	%
Yes, I did relocate	721	54.7
Yes, I applied for a role requiring relocation, but I didn't relocate	73	5.5
No, no relocation required	525	39.8
Total	1,319	100

Source: Harvest worker survey Q22. Have you applied for a harvest job that you needed to relocate for? (n=1,319).

Table 31: Where harvest worker jobs required moving to

Response	No. participants	%
Moving elsewhere within the state you live (or lived in at the time)	400	50.4
Moving interstate	386	48.6
Moving overseas	8	1.0
Total	794	100

Source: Harvest worker survey Q23. Did/would this relocation involved/have involved ...

Note: This question was asked of participants who answered ‘Yes, I did relocate’ and ‘Yes, I applied for a role requiring relocation, but I did not relocate’ in Q22 of the harvest worker survey (n=794).

Table 32: Other supports for harvest workers

Response	No. responses	%
Nothing further to add	492	62.0
Housing/accommodation	117	14.7
Transport costs	79	9.9
Food costs	18	2.3
Clothes	20	2.5
Tools/equipment	15	1.9
Education/training	3	0.4
Better pay	5	0.6
Help with jobs/employment	13	1.6
Other problems with payments/reimbursements	52	6.5
Better / more detailed information	33	4.2
Easier / less bureaucratic	42	5.3
Other improved staffing	24	3.0
Other	15	1.9
Don't know	8	1.0

Source: Harvest worker survey Q27. What other support did you need that is not currently available to help with the costs of travel, accommodation and relocation for a harvest job? (n=794).

Note: Verbatim responses were coded and quantified into the above categories. Some open-ended responses fit into multiple categories, so this table is MR (multiple response). Total responses = 936.

Table 33 Likelihood of taking up harvest work among OES job seekers

Response	No. participants	%
Don't know	17	6.8
Neither	29	8.0
Not at all likely	115	54.8
Not likely	33	15.2
Somewhat likely	44	11.6
Very likely	12	3.6
Total	250	100

Source: OES job seeker survey Q1. On a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being 'Not at all likely', and 10 being 'Extremely likely', how likely would you be to consider taking up harvest work in the future? (n=250).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was 'Not at all likely' and 10 was 'Extremely likely'. These have been recoded to a 3-category scale here for simplicity (where 'Unlikely' = 0 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; and 'Likely' = 6 to 10).

Table 34: Likelihood of considering relocating for harvest work among OES job seekers

Response	No. participants	%
Don't know	1	2.6
Neither	2	5.3
Not at all likely	4	10.5
Not likely	1	2.6
Somewhat likely	20	52.6
Very likely	10	26.3
Total	38	100

Source: OES job seeker survey Q4. Assuming you were eligible for AgMove relocation assistance and wanted to work in a harvest job, how likely would you be to consider moving to undertake harvest work in the future? (n=38).

Note: Ratings were collected on an 11-point scale, where 0 was 'Not at all likely' and 10 was 'Extremely likely'. These have been recoded to a 3-category scale here for simplicity (where 'Unlikely' = 0 to 4; 'Neither' = 5; and 'Likely' = 6 to 10).

Table 35: Harvest workers' self-reported interaction with AgMove

Response	No. participants	%
Yes, applied and was reimbursed for my costs	222	52.4
Yes, applied but was not reimbursed	119	28.1
Relocated, but have not claimed reimbursement yet	31	7.3
Considered it but did not relocate	9	2.1
No, did not apply	34	8.0
Don't know	9	2.1
Total	424	100

Source: Harvest worker survey Q25. Did you apply for/think about applying for AgMove relocation assistance when you had to relocate/were thinking about relocating for your harvest job?

Note: This survey question was asked of those who answered 'Aware' of AgMove in Q24 (n=424).

Table 36: Whether AgMove was necessary for harvest workers to accept their harvest job

Response	No. participants	%
Strongly disagree	19	8.6
Disagree	31	14.0
Neither agree nor disagree	43	19.4
Agree	65	29.3
Strongly agree	61	27.5
Don't know	3	1.4
Total	222	100

Source: Harvest worker survey Q26D. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following ... If it wasn't for AgMove, I wouldn't have been able to accept the job (n=222).