

Media Release

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Union demands threaten thousands of jobs and a hike in food prices

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) says unions calling for a ban on seasonal workers from overseas either don't understand or don't care about the impact it would have on Australia's food prices, jobs and the economy.

"Migrant worker programs underpin 127,000 jobs in the fresh produce industry and supply chain, supporting rural and regional communities, and contributing \$13 billion to the national economy", said Michael Rogers, AFPA CEO.

"Backpacker workers have been essential to bringing in Australia's fruit and vegetable harvest for more than 20 years. If they are taken out of the system now, the availability of fresh Australian fruit and vegetables on supermarket shelves will dwindle", said Mr Rogers.

"Due to their regional location and seasonal nature of production, many farms rely on short term migrant labour. With international borders closed since March, fewer Working Holiday Maker (WHM) and Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) visa holders are in Australia".

"Claims of an industry determined to exploit foreign workers are absurd ranting from unions desperate to maintain membership as the COVID crisis creates a tough economic environment and makes workers think about the worth of what they get for their money – obviously fewer are spending it on union fees", said Mr Rogers.

"If the unions have evidence of exploitation of any workers in the horticulture industry, then they should provide this to the Fair Work Ombudsman and any other relevant authority, including the police and Department of Home Affairs".

"Farmers are subject to tight regulation and undertakings to employ people lawfully and ethically. AFPA will not tolerate illegal and unethical treatment of workers."

"It's the union movement that 'needs an overhaul from top to bottom'. As they try desperately to insert themselves into the produce industry, this risks resulting in thousands of lost jobs, dramatically higher prices that struggling families can't afford, and a loss of \$13 billion to an already devastated economy", said Mr Rogers.

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***About the AFPA** - The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is made up of Australia's key fresh produce growers and suppliers. The AFPA represents half the industry turnover of the Australian fresh produce sector - \$4.5 billion of the \$9.1 billion total; 1,000 plus growers through commercial arrangements and more than 15,000 direct employees through peak harvest, and up to 25,000 in the grower network.*