



## Harvest Trail eNews: Autumn 2010



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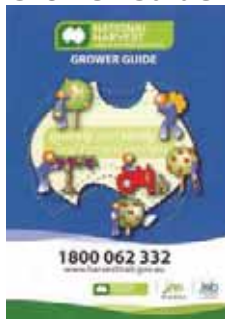
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### Industry update

#### **Almond crops set to increase**

The size of Australia's almond harvest is expected to jump another 25% this year, to just over 46,000 tonnes.

It's an industry that is rocketing ahead, largely due to huge plantings put in place by agribusiness companies like Timbercorp.

Growers such as Neale Bennett from Merbein, North West Victoria says that despite the growth in this industry, there is plenty of demand for the product.

"We're counter-seasonal to America, so there's an opportunity there," he says.

"We're also free of quite a few of the pests that other areas like America have, so that means we've got that reputation for good quality."

Almond producers such as Mr Bennett believe that there is still room for the smaller grower alongside the corporate farmers.

"It's all about figuring out your scale, and the economies of scale. You've got to work out how to make it work for you, but you can do it."



Another farm that is steaming ahead with this season's

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### Contact Us

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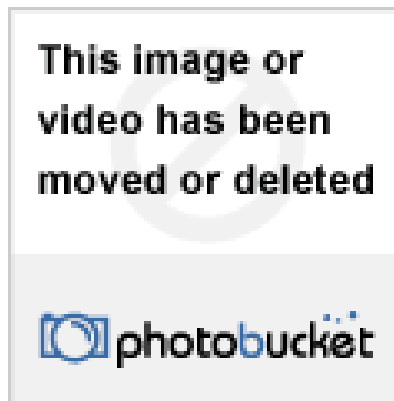
harvest is Robinvale, Victoria's Select Harvest. This property currently has a large army of harvest workers working around the clock; with some working up to six days per week, from 6am to 9pm.

The harvest is expected to take approximately six to eight weeks.

### A day in the life of a working backpacker

#### Heat, dirt, happiness...

UK backpacker Tom Knowles, shares his journal as he travels and works throughout Australia.



Bundaberg, Queensland isn't exactly thumping, but if your coming here it's probably for work so that won't really matter. I took a walk around the town today, and it seems nice enough. There is everything on the high street that you would expect from a large farming town such as this. There is also a new shopping complex a short walk off the main drag.

Unlike Brisbane there would appear to be little vanity here. As you walk around the place, 'practicality' is the word that springs to mind. Compared to the state capital, most people here look the same in dress and build. But I'm not an Australian so in many respects such observations are to be expected and perhaps ignored.

Its hot here, the air feels close, and the occasional breeze brings welcome relief. The working hat and gloves have been purchased in anticipation, but whether or not Bundaberg will be their christening is to be seen.

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Hostel recreation room

When everyone who has jobs returns from work they are covered in a fine red dust that makes them look as if they'd been on Mars rather than out in the fields. But at the moment, or should I say 'for the moment', I am not one of these dust coated labourers. Ever the optimist I hope that in a few days I will be out in the fields picking melons of some sort. But above all earning money, sweet colourful money.

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Hostel entertainment room

Until such a time, we play cards and talk about each other's adventures and future travel plans in Australia. Being the only English person has the added effect of becoming 'teacher' of sorts to my fellow backpackers. How good I am at said task remains to be seen.

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Sleeping quarters

There is quite a lot of tension here at this hostel as many

have been waiting weeks for work. But on a lighter note, I have been very lucky and have spent my first day of work picking sweet potatoes, hot and heavy work, but overall quite good fun.

To be continued.....

### **Grower's paddock**

#### **Australian tomatoes for the world**

Colbinabbin (population 187), a small town located between Rushworth and Elmore in central Victoria, is located just to the east of the camel ranges. The gently rolling countryside and large silos in the middle of town point to this being prime wheat and sheep country - which it is. However, thanks to vision, hard work and a friendly bank manager, Damian Ellis and his family have turned Colbinabbin into the location of a thriving new horticultural company that is exporting products worldwide.

How did this all happen? The answer lies in that magic ingredient - water. Colbinabbin is located on the Waranga western channel, which is part of a large stock and domestic water supply that was established in the early 1900's to supply water to dryland farms in central and northern Victoria. Recent upgrades to this system, particularly installation of hundreds of kilometres of pipelines have resulted in huge water savings, some of which are available for growers who are now using this water to grow crops such as olives, grapes and in the case of the Ellis family - tomatoes.



After enduring the prolonged drought that has affected much of south eastern Australia for the last decade, Damian Ellis decided that if there was going to be a future for him running the family farm he needed to diversify the business so that it was less dependant on rainfall, and in an ironic twist more dependant on sunshine! The answer was to grow irrigated tomatoes which would be value added by drying, to produce dried and semi-dried gourmet tomatoes.

So now, 160ha of tomatoes can be found growing among paddocks of wheat and canola. Not all the tomatoes are dried, with about 120ha being mechanically harvested and sent for processing into tomato paste at a nearby factory. The rest are hand harvested and are either dried or packed as fresh tomatoes. Picking, processing and packing tomatoes from such a large area requires a lot of labour with up to 60 people employed at peak times.



Being located in a reasonably remote location presents some challenges

when it comes to finding labour, but Damian has worked hard to overcome this problem and now uses the National Harvest Labour Information Service to source the workers he needs. "We mainly employ backpackers" said Damian "as they are generally well educated and are ideally suited to the processing jobs that require good levels of concentration and attention to detail". "Most of the backpackers are aiming to do three months of horticultural work to gain a 12 month extension to their working holiday visa. So that ensures they are motivated and we have even had some backpackers return the following year after their visas have been extended. A couple of old farm houses have been converted into hostels and the workers stay there so they can easily get to work each day.

Unfortunately if you would like to try one of Damian's gourmet dried tomatoes you're out of luck. As Damian says with a touch of irony "we would like to sell our tomatoes in Australia, however our major supermarkets prefer to stock imported products, so we export to countries that appreciate the quality that we can supply".

### **Staff profile**

**Mary-anne Maloney, NHLIS Project Manager**

#### **What led you to this position?**

My husband and I relocated to Mildura from Adelaide after he was offered a job working in the Australian agriculture industry. It was my first taste of living in the country and adjusting to speaking with a makeshift "Victorian accent". Upon arrival I was greeted with 45 degree temperatures and a wild dust storm but when the haze settled I found myself knocking on the door of MADEC

to register as a jobseeker. After 12 months working as a Marketing and Public Relations Manager for the Mildura Grand Hotel the right opportunity presented to return to MADEC as an employee of the company.

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#### **How long have you worked here?**

I commenced work with the National Harvest Labour Information Service in August 2004 as a State Manager for the service. I instantly embraced the opportunity to learn

about the horticulture industry, throw away the high heeled shoes and travel regional Australia to help growers and workers connect at harvest time. I have since worked as the NHLIS Manager and currently enjoy my new part time role as a Project Manager for the department.

**Life on the road can be fun and challenging at times can you share any of your personal experiences?**

Three that spring to mind:

Dressing in a banana costume to promote the Harvest Trail to jobseekers at the Sydney Adventure and Backpacker Expo .

Falling head over heels, backwards into inches of mud on the first day of AGFEST field days in Tasmania. It was a long day without a change of clothes but the incident certainly helped to draw attention to the NHLIS.

Fighting off a fierce plague of locusts as I ran erratically to deliver National Harvest Guides to the Information Centre in Narrabri (it takes some skill to run with your eyes and mouth closed).

**Are you tempted to take the Harvest Trail yourself one day?**

Sure, I would love to take to the Harvest Trail and send my husband out to pick mangoes, pumpkins, strawberries and citrus while I enjoy travelling and the proceeds of his hard labour.

**What are your goals for 2010?**

In recent years the NHLIS has been overwhelmed by the level of enquiry from Australian jobseekers and international backpackers regarding harvest work opportunities in Australia. The challenge is now to ensure we keep engaging growers so that all harvest vacancies are registered on the Harvest Trail website.

**Off the Beaten Track**

**The past few months**

The NHLIS maintains a busy schedule with State Managers visiting industry groups, attending field days, conferences and expos to ensure that our service is recognised Australia-wide. Our travel schedule over the past three months has included:



3 <sup>rd</sup> December	Visitation to Robinvale and Swan Hill
8 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> December	Centrelink Employment Expo, Townsville/Cairns
11 <sup>th</sup> December	Centrelink Employment Expo, Whittlesea
12 <sup>th</sup> – 15 <sup>th</sup> December	Visitation to Southern Tasmania
17 <sup>th</sup> – 18 <sup>th</sup> December	Visitation to Shepparton and Cobram
19 <sup>th</sup> February	Centrelink Employment Expo, Elizabeth
20 <sup>th</sup> – 21 <sup>st</sup> February	Melbourne Backpacker Expo
25 <sup>th</sup> February	Fruit Growers Tasmania End of Season De-brief

## Upcoming events

### The next few months

The NHLIS team attends many field days, events and conferences throughout the year and there is bound to be one close to you.

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Over the next three months we will be attending the following events and we welcome you to visit us to discuss your labour needs:

9 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup> March	Melbourne Caravan and Camping Supershow
7 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> May	AGFEST, Launceston
27 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> May	AUSVEG National Convention, Gold Coast

## We are now on Facebook!

### Come and visit us

The National Harvest Labour Information Service's Facebook Group continues to grow in



membership and members are now actively communicating with us and each other via this medium.

The NHLIS regularly posts information on forthcoming harvests and we invite you, as an industry representative, to forward any newsworthy topic to [nhlis@madec.edu.au](mailto:nhlis@madec.edu.au) for inclusion.

Although this site will be informative, it is not intended to replace our Call Centre or website that list specific harvest vacancies.

To become a member of the Harvest Trail Facebook Group, [click here](#) or search for "Harvest Trail" on Facebook.