

Harvest Trail eNews: Spring 2010



In This Issue

Industry update: The Geelong region

A day in the life of a working backpacker

Staff Profile: Nathan Trembath, Call Centre Supervisor

Growers paddock: Derek Clarke, Birdwood

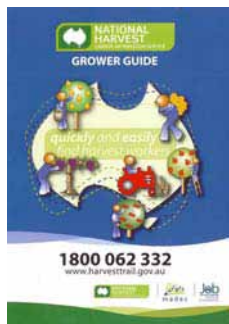
Industry update: Working visas

Off the beaten track: The past few months

Upcoming events: The next few months

Have you ordered your copy of the

Grower Guide?



Phone

1800 062 332

for your free copy today!

Quick Reference

Industry update

The Geelong Region - using innovative methods to deal with drought

Located about 80 kms south-west of Melbourne lies the rural city of Geelong. While many people might know Geelong as the home of the current AFL premiers, the Geelong Cats, or the nearby world renowned Bells Beach, not many people would know of the innovative horticultural industries. The surrounding regions of the Bellarine Peninsula, Surf Coast and Moorabool Valley produce a range of gourmet products.

Tucked around the shores of Corio and Port Philip Bay, the Bellarine Peninsula has a cool maritime climate that makes it ideal for growing a range of horticultural crops. The Surf Coast has the challenge of strong winds blown in from Bass Strait and the Moorabool Valley's continental climate make it ideal for growing grapes and vegetables.

Grapes are the predominant crop in the area and the Geelong wine region boasts historical roots dating back to the early 1800's when the planting of vines by Swiss settlers saw Geelong and its surrounding areas emerge as the largest grape growing region in Victoria. The unfortunate introduction of the devastating pest Phylloxera to the region in the late 1800's decimated the local industry with all vines being removed in an attempt to control the pest.

Wine enthusiasts and entrepreneurs, Daryl & Nini Sefton, appreciate the history of the Geelong wine region and realised the opportunity to re-establish it as a premium wine growing district. This led to the 1966 renaissance which today sees more than 60 vineyards across the Moorabool Valley, Bellarine and Surf Coast fulfilling the dreams of the early Swiss settlers.

Soils in the region vary from deep clays, to volcanic rock and sands, making it possible to grow a diverse range of crops including olives, strawberries, vegetables, tomatoes, herbs, flowers and turf. The only missing ingredient is plentiful water and this is where growers in this region have had to be innovative in order to not just survive, but to grow their businesses.

Guide

First time lodging a vacancy with us?

1. Ring
1800 062 332.
2. Register your contact details with your State Manager.
3. Complete a Vacancy Request Details form over the phone.
4. Your vacancy will be lodged and promoted on the Harvest Trail website.
5. Start receiving calls from our Call Centre Operators with interested workers.
6. Call us on
1800 062 332 when your labour requirements are met.
7. Ring back on
1800 062 332 if you need any more workers.



Contact Us

[Website](#)

[Email](#)

Phone: 1800 062 332

Fax: 03 5025 4040

Post: P O Box 5055, Mildura
Vic 3502

Quick Links

[Weather](#)

[FairWork Online](#)

[Australian Taxation Office](#)

[Department of Immigration
and Citizenship](#)

Join our list

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Harvest Guide 2010
out now!



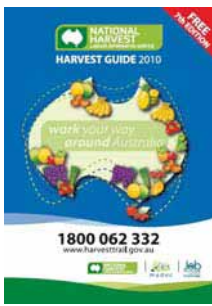
Type caption text here.

Once established, olives can be grown without irrigation on the Bellarine Peninsula

The prolonged drought affecting much of south eastern Australia has had a big impact on this region with rainfall reduced by about 30% as compared to long term averages. This has meant that many traditional sources for irrigating crops are no longer viable, leading producers such as Anco use recycled water on their Torquay Turf farm. The local water authority, Barwon Water assisted with installation of a 10 km pipeline from a nearby treatment plant which also services several other smaller growers. After making some minor changes to the irrigation schedule and training staff in the safe use of recycled water, the change has been a smooth process. The turf is thriving and the business is much more sustainable.

At the other end of the spectrum, premium wine producer Bannockburn have decided to tackle the issue of low water availability by ceasing irrigation of its vineyards and reverting to dry grown grapes. Vineyard manager Lucas Rigsby said that "the runoff dam that we used to rely on for irrigation water is more often than not dry these days and with a lot of tough old vines with deep root systems the decision was made to change the way they were pruned to reduce crop levels and turn the water off". The result has been less grapes, but of much higher quality, with intense flavours that attract a premium price in the market place. "Even if we had water available we would not go back to irrigating our grapes" he said.

Dry growing grapes was not an option for Pettavel Winery and vineyard owner Mike Fitzpatrick whose 75 ha of grapes are quite young and haven't got the well developed root systems to allow them to survive without irrigation. Mike solved the problem by upgrading the wastewater processing system at the winery to allow this water to be used to irrigate some of the vineyard, as well as the gardens and grounds of the winery. The rest of the vineyard uses water from a recently installed desalination plant that takes saline



Phone

1800 062 332

for your free copy

water from a bore on the property and removes the salt by passing the water through special membranes. "The vineyard has never looked better" said Mike, "and allows us to more accurately estimate crop yields and improve fruit quality".



Pettavel Winery is named after David Pettavel, a Swiss immigrant who planted the first vines in the Geelong area in 1842

A different approach has been taken by Lonsdale Hydroponics at Point Lonsdale who combated the problems of wind and water by growing hydroponic tomatoes in greenhouses. "The ideal tomato comes in a truss, either a Roma truss or a round truss and I'm looking for the perfect shape, colour and no blemishes" says owner Andrew Pearson.

A benefit of hydroponics, particularly tomatoes, is they use less of nearly every resource. "We use much less water and nutrients than if we were growing them in the paddock. Irrigation is delivered to the plants via a dripper and micro tube. Each plant is currently receiving approximately 100mls every half hour, and that is controlled by a computer. We can ensure they get exactly what they need at different stages of growth" said Andrew.

So the next time you're in the Geelong area, make time to travel to some of the surrounding areas and sample some of the great produce being produced by growers who have overcome ongoing drought to yield high quality products that are in demand both domestically and internationally.

A day in the life of a working backpacker

Ah yes, a day in the life of a watermelon picker

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

OK so normally when you're picking melons there is a tractor with a trailer. Now attached to this trailer out to one side is an elevator/boom whatever you want to call it. It's there so you can simply place the melons on it whilst the tractor crawls along at a slow walking pace, eliminating the need to throw the melons up to the trailer.



Now this 'boom' is moved from one trailer to another so that the bins you are filling can be unloaded onto big semi-trucks whilst you fill another trailer. In between trailers you detach the boom from one trailer, the tractor behind pulls his trailer up into position, you re-attach (often re-adjusting the height) and back to work you go! It sounds simple, and I guess in theory it is. But this is farm equipment that is heavy-duty gear and is designed to last. Again, in theory!

On the day in question, we had just change over between two trailers and were beginning to load the boom full of melons. Now the noise from the tractor is pretty loud so if I said that I heard the cable snap it would be a lie. It was my eyes that saw the movement first; and I'm sure more than anything, it was luck that saved me from serious injury. I jumped backwards a few feet, no easy task with mud-laden boots and an arm full of melons. Only to see my friend next to me be flung backwards as the boom struck him hard and fast in the chest, the same level at which my head had been only a second before. As it was, the blow from the boom hit me just above the kneecaps and then landed on top of my shins. You see a melon field is not like walking on a lawn; it's quite hard to walk through let alone dodge a 200kg chunk of machinery. So where I had jumped to was where I was going to stay. Luckily one cable stayed attached and the boom's full weight was not on top of me. My colleagues lifted the boom off me within a few moments and I was left with the worst dead leg I've ever experienced and a small cut to my left shin. Nothing serious, as it could have been a lot worse. But not something I would recommend!



Overall it's not a particularly dangerous occupation, and one incident in seven weeks should do nothing more than highlight this fact. But if you do find yourself pacing up and down a melon paddock, listen to the supervisors and keep your wits about you and I'm sure you will have the same great experience that I have had. If nothing more, you will learn that expletives are second nature, be able to spot a perfect melon from 30 paces, be able to dodge 200kg chunks of metal (almost!) and if nothing else, leave with great friends and memories for life.

To be continued...

Staff Profile

Nathan Trembath, Call Centre Supervisor

What led you to this position?

Prior to working for the NHLIS I had been in insurance for five years. Three and a half of those years were spent in a call centre in Melbourne. I have been in customer service for the last 10 years across various industries.

How long have you worked here?

I have worked here for four months.

Managing a busy call centre would be a pretty challenging job, how do you train the operators and keep them so happy and focused?

I guess the key to keeping them happy and motivated would be to keep everyone busy with a variety of tasks. Also consistently changing rosters keeps everyone alert so they don't get too used to the same thing day in and day out. If all else fails morning tea is always a good motivator.

Can you tell us about the most unusual request/phone call you've received in this job?

Just recently I had to reply to two emails which were sent by two people who were travelling together. What is even funnier is they both said exactly the same thing in the email just used different names and both were sent at exactly the same time



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

Maybe, however, with a two year old son and six month old daughter it will be a long way off.

You must know a lot about what is grown throughout Australia; are there any crops that are perhaps little known to others?

Before I came here I had never heard of Custard Apples so I am going to say Custard Apples.

What is the most remote place you have been asked to find some workers for?

At this stage probably Cloncurry in outback Queensland.

Growers Paddock

Derek Clarke, Birdwood

The town of Birdwood in the Adelaide Hills is mainly known for its German heritage and the National Motor Museum. Prior to WWI the name of the town was Blumberg, but due to political pressure during that conflict the German name of the town, like many others was changed.

When Derek Clarke and his parents started their Chrysanthemum growing operation at Birdwood in the mid 90's, they realised that Blumberg meant "Flowers on the Hill", so Blumberg Flowers was born. Around five years ago Derek took over the family business, and has continued to build it ever since. It might sound corny...but his business is definitely growing!

Derek's 'chryssies' (try typing Chrysanthemum 20 times!) grow under greenhouses with lighting and climate control. Day lengths are artificially varied to convince the Chrysanthemums to flower all year round, so the peaks of Mother's Day, Valentine's Day and Christmas can be supplied. The various array of different Chrysanthemums are often used as 'florist fillers' as they are relatively inexpensive.



Sixty percent of Derek's chrysanthemums go to the South Australian market with the remainder to Perth, Sydney and Brisbane, but his monoculture business, only growing Chrysanthemums, is a little unusual in the local context. In the eastern states single variety growers are more common as the bigger markets allow them to take advantage of economies of scale, whereas in the smaller state of SA most growers have to be diverse. Derek produces around 6,000 bunches of flowers per week, which is big enough to allow him to specialise.

The size of the operation requires Derek to employ some casual labour. He has sourced local workers himself at times and has also used the NHLIS to source extras. He has been impressed when he has taken on backpackers, with workers picking up skills very quickly. The fact they don't stay for the long periods is not a concern if they are up to a high level of productivity so quickly. He currently has two Germans and a Korean working with him.

Derek's partner Carla used to assist in the business, but her passion lies in the care of animals, and as she is a qualified veterinary nurse, she utilises her skills as the senior nurse in an Adelaide Hills veterinary clinic. Which begs the question: What does Derek give Carla on Valentine's Day...beautiful flowers or a cute puppy?

Industry Update

Do your workers have a valid Visa to work in Australia?

Growers hiring overseas workers are being encouraged to check a person's work entitlements to ensure they have a visa that allows them to work in Australia.

You can check work entitlements through internet and faxback services provided by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, has said that 'Checking work entitlements make good business sense. The last thing a farmer wants is to lose a worker because they do not have a valid visa to work in Australia'.

If you are convicted of these offenses you could face fines of up to \$13 200 and two years' imprisonment per illegal worker hired. Companies face fines of up to \$66 000 per illegal worker. You may also come under the scrutiny of other government agencies, such as the Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink that work with DIAC to reduce the incidence of illegal work.



To confirm a job applicant's Australian citizenship you would need to witness any of the following documents; an Australian Birth Certificate, an Australian passport, citizenship certificate or certificate of evidence of Australian citizenship. Experience shows that birth certificates are the most commonly held document from this group, but note that for those job applicants born after 20/8/1986, their birth certificate should show that at least one parent was born in Australia. Where both parents were born overseas, a prospective job applicant should provide further documentary evidence of:

his/her stated Australian citizenship; or

at least one parent's Australian citizenship or permanent residence at the time of birth.

It is easy to check the work entitlements of a prospective employee who is not an Australian citizen.

If you have internet access, you can check their work entitlements through DIAC's Visa Entitlement Verification Online (VEVO) website service. VEVO is a free service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, enabling you to determine whether someone has an entitlement to work within a matter of seconds. To register to use VEVO go to www.immi.gov.au/vevo.

If you don't have internet access, you can use DIAC's toll-free Visa Entitlement Verification Faxback Service to check work entitlements. Phone 1800 040 070 to find out more about using the service or log on to www.immi.gov.au/vevo and download the Faxback form.

Scenario

Albert engages a group of workers referred by a local backpacker hostel. The hostel claims to have checked the work entitlements of the workers, but one of the workers turns out to be an illegal worker. Would Albert have committed an offence under the employer sanctions legislation?

No he wouldn't. The department would not usually consider prosecuting Albert, if he could show documentation from the backpacker hostel which says that the hostel had checked that the workers had valid visas to work in Australia. For example Albert could ask the hostel to provide him with evidence that VEVO checks have been completed, either the faxback form or a print out of online checks.

In this situation the backpacker hostel may commit the offence of referring an illegal worker for work.

For more information about the faxback service, VEVO, or the legislation, call the Employers' Immigration Hotline on 1800 040 070, during 8.30am-4.30pm (AEST), Monday to Friday. Information is also at www.immi.gov.au/employer-obligations.

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:



June

9th – 15th June

Brisbane Caravan & Camping Show

July

15th – 16th July

20th – 22nd July

21st – 23rd July

25th – 27th July

TFGA Biennial Conference, Launceston
NSW Farmers' Association Conference
Backpacker Hostel Stakeholder Meeting, Bundaberg
Potato Industry Conference Geelong

August

10th – 12th August

23rd Aug – 1st Sept

Australian Cherry Industry Conference
Perth / Kununurra / Darwin Visitation

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.



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

September

5th – 7th Sept

NFF 2010 National Conference

October

31st Oct – 1st Nov

National Citrus Conference

November

6th – 7th Nov

Sydney Backpacker Expo