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Harvest Trail eNews: Autumn 2009



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Grower's paddock

Julie, Jim and John Hall, Strathmerton, Victoria

Julie, Jim and John Hall, from Strathmerton, Victoria not only enjoy the pursuits of being a major zucchini grower, but they have also expressed their passion for cacti by developing a cactus garden, aptly named Cactus Country. Tourists flock to the garden, which is the largest landscaped cacti and succulent garden in the Southern Hemisphere.



With the zucchini season now well under way, the Halls are now recruiting for the harvest. "Our location makes it ideal to use backpackers for harvest as we are only three hours by public transport from Melbourne, which has three services each way per day. We live only two kilometres from the bus stop and we have a farm house that we use for accommodation, so it's very convenient to pick people up and deliver them back to the bus stop when it's time for them to move on" reports Julie.

"We used to advertise in backpacker magazines to get enough workers for picking and packing zucchini and squash, however it was very expensive and it was annoying because we would get phone calls all year round, even when we didn't need any workers!" adds Julie. But the Halls divulge that now they simply call the National Harvest Labour Information Service and almost immediately the phone starts ringing, then when they have enough people, they just ring them back and the phone calls stop.

The Halls have benefited greatly from their international guests, "it's like travelling the world without leaving home, we have even visited in their home country" says Julie.

The Halls however believe that the benefits are mutual



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with a lot of backpackers being able to make some really good money here.



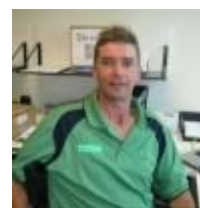
For an armchair tour of some magnificent succulents, visit [Cactus Country](#).

Staff profile

**Robert Hayes, State Co-ordinator,
 Victoria / Western Australia**

What led you to this position?

After having worked in the viticulture industry for over 20 years I was growing tired of being a very small part of a large international company with a profit driven focus. Working with the NH LIS gives me the opportunity to be part of a small, dynamic team which works by making it easier for growers to get workers and for workers to find jobs. I also get to see a lot of Australia, meet many growers and find out a lot about all sorts of different horticultural industries.



How long have you worked here?

I have only been with the NHLIS for six months and my position is a bit unusual because I am based in Geelong, making it easier for me to liaise with industry contacts in and around Melbourne. I can also get to WA quite easily which is the other state I look after.

Your job sees you on the road for a great deal of the time, how do you stay organised?

I find that there are two things that help me to stay organised and get the most out of my travels. The first is to plan well before I hit the road, this means that all my appointments are confirmed and my time is well managed. The second is to write up my notes at the end of each day while everything is still fresh in my mind. Time spent sitting at airports and on aeroplanes can be used to write up notes as well.

Can you tell us about your most unusual request received in this job?

During a work visit to a vineyard in Western Australia, I ended up helping the owner to round up a flock of sheep that had escaped from a nearby paddock, and were happily chewing on his succulent young grapevines. Getting sheep out of rows of grapevines is not a particularly easy task, but after much running, arm waving and copious amounts of swearing we managed to get all of the sheep back into their paddock and did a few quick running repairs on the fence to ensure it didn't all happen again.

Are you tempted to take the Harvest Trail yourself

one day?

Maybe. I have picked and pruned a lot of grapevines over the years so I have a fair idea of what is involved. The idea of taking six months or so to travel from Melbourne to Cairns, working on and off along the way sounds pretty good.

You must know a lot about what is grown throughout Australia; what is your favourite fruit or veg?

That's a tough question, especially at the moment when there is so much ripe, flavoursome fruit available. However, I have always been a sucker for a large bowl of peaches and ice cream, particularly on a warm summer evening.

Off the Beaten Track**The past few months**

The NHLIS maintains a busy schedule with State Co-ordinators 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:

**December**

4-5 December - Natures Fruit Company Conference, Qld
16 December - Melbourne, Vic visitation
19 December - Riverland, SA visitation

February

9-13 February - McLaren Vale / Adelaide visitation
20-23 February - Melbourne Backpacker Expo
16-17 February - Rutherglen/Ovens Valley visitation
16-27 February - Southern Queensland 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:

**March**

23-25 March - Tasmanian visitation
WA Farmers Federation Conference

May

4-6 May - AusVeg Conference, Werribee
6-11 May - Victorian Caravan and Camping Show, Melbourne
7-9 May - AGFEST, Launceston
15 May - Fruit Growers Tas Annual Conference
15-17 May - Canberra Retirement & Lifestyle Expo
25-28 May - Australian Mango Conference, Cairns

Industry update

East Gippsland, Victoria

The East Gippsland region of Victoria is located about 400km east of Melbourne and has a diverse range of industries, including a thriving horticulture sector. NHLIS State Coordinator Robert Hayes recently visited the region and found it a pretty good place to grow vegies and not a bad place to live either.



The East Gippsland region produces around 90% of Victoria's beans and sweet corn as well as significant quantities of carrots, broccoli, lettuce and asparagus from about 3,000ha of irrigated land. Other crops are grown to meet niche markets including; peas, potatoes, tomatoes, cauliflower, capsicum and onions.

Bairnsdale is the main service centre, but crops are spread from Maffra in the west to Orbost in the east; a distance of about 170km. Farm size has been steadily increasing while the number of growers is decreasing, leading to about 20 large corporate family farms dominating the industry. Some growers from southern Queensland have bought farms in the region to fill gaps in their production schedule.

As well as fertile river flat soils, the region is well placed by being able to access the Mitchell and McAllister rivers for irrigation, which have relatively few irrigation restrictions and offer the ability to fill on farm storages during winter.



Many vegetables are grown for processing with Vegco and Patties both based in Bairnsdale. Vegco produce pre-packaged vegetables for Coles and Woolworths and Patties produce pies and pasties.

Large quantities of labour are needed at peak times, with some large farms requiring up to 230 people some days and Vegco over 250. Despite problems with accommodation and transport, the NHLIS works with growers and backpacker hostels in the area to ensure

enough labour is available to harvest crops at peak times.

Many of the growers have relocated from other areas, but when you think that the coastal resort of Lakes Entrance is only about 35km away and the Mount Hotham ski fields can be reached in under two hours, it is no wonder most have stayed.

Pacific Seasonal Worker Scheme

Scheme update

The Australian Government is conducting a pilot to examine whether a seasonal worker program could contribute to economic development in home countries through Pacific seasonal workers' employment experience, remittances and training. Two labour hire companies have been selected by the Australian Government to employ and place the first 100 Pacific seasonal workers with growers for phase one of the Pilot.



The initial regions selected for the Pilot are the Swan Hill - Robinvale region in Victoria and Griffith region in New South Wales. Recruitment of Pacific seasonal workers has commenced and it is anticipated that they will arrive in the nominated regions later in February. The labour hire companies are currently in the process of identifying growers in their regions to participate.

For more information on this Scheme, you can visit www.workplace.gov.au.

Meet a backpacker

Jenoah Stynes, Ireland

Where are you from?

New Bridge County Kildares, Ireland.



What have you been up to?

I came to Australia in August 2007, starting in Cairns and then making my way down to Sydney. Then I went from Sydney to Mildura in February last year to work the harvest for three months. I am now living and working in Sydney in administration and I am hoping to be sponsored so that I can stay living here.

Is it easy getting work while travelling Australia?

Yes, very easy. You just can't be fussy!

Tell us about the best or worst job you've had during your stay?

Garlic peeling at Iraak, north west Victoria. It was hard work although it was fun being with around 20 other backpackers. We sat in the dirt to eat our lunch and came home absolutely stinking after peeling garlic in the Mildura heat.

What is one tip you would like to pass on to fellow

backpackers?

Make the most of the fruit picking because it turns out to be a really good experience.



Jenoah and some of her new friends.

The NHLIS welcomes feedback from the users of our service. We invite your input at Harvest Trail website, if you would like to comment, please [click here](#).

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