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Melbourne, Thursday 21 November 2019

Thursday 7 November 2019

VFF calls for Ag Visa to legalise workers

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Vice President Emma Germano has highlighted the extent of the labour challenges in the horticultural industry on the Channel 10 program *The Project* this evening.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison outlined the Government's commitment to an agricultural visa while presenting to the National Farmers Federation Congress in 2018. At the time, the Prime Minister requested data to help quantify the extent of the issue.

"It is of great concern that the current data driving the Government's workforce policy does not reflect the extent of the problem. The grave reality is that undocumented workers account for a large proportion of Australia's seasonal harvest workforce. Farmers cannot share information that reflects this reality for fear of reprisal from Government agencies," said Ms Emma Germano.

"The VFF was well placed to undertake anonymous research on behalf of the industry due to its independence from the Government and position of trust that allowed producers to share their understanding of the workforce," said Ms Germano.

The survey performed by the VFF found there to be a labour shortage across the selected growing region, even when accounting for the use of undocumented workers. 71 per cent of respondents believed they had undocumented workers on their property. Furthermore, undocumented workers may account for up to 28 per cent of the total workforce in the region.

"60 per cent of business operators indicated their intent to grow their business over the next five years, which will compound the labour shortfall if left unresolved," said Ms Germano.

Instead of the survey findings becoming a catalyst for farm inspections in the region, the VFF urges the Federal Government to use this opportunity to implement a solution to Government and industry's ongoing dilemma. Instead of persecuting undocumented workers and farmers alike, the VFF is calling for status resolution for workers and a fit-for-purpose visa solution to give farmers confidence to grow their businesses.

"The VFF has held up its end of the bargain and helped the government understand the extent of the issue. It is now up to them to provide industry with an agricultural visa and a meaningful solution to undocumented workers," said Ms Germano.

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About the VFF

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is dedicated to representing the interests of farmers and making a positive difference to their businesses and communities. We strive to create an environment for our members, our farmers, that enables profitable, safe, sustainable production to ensure an enduring social licence in a community that respects and values the sector.

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