



## Backpacker Operators Alliance of Victoria

# HARVEST WORK GUIDELINES FOR BACKPACKERS

### HARVEST JOB SEARCH METHODS

- Via Australia's National Harvest Labour Information Service. Visit [www.harvesttrail.gov.au](http://www.harvesttrail.gov.au) or call the National Harvest Telephone Information Service on 1800 062 332
- Some working hostels can assist travellers to secure jobs e.g. Working Hostels Mildura at [www.workinghostels.com.au](http://www.workinghostels.com.au)
- Some jobs can be secured through farmers directly.

### PAY

Pay rates and calculations vary from crop to crop and may include:

- Wages paid on a weekly basis.
- Casual work paid on an hourly basis.
- Piecework paid on a per unit harvested basis (e.g. pay on quantity picked)
- Negotiation agreed on a start to finish basis.

Rates and conditions are based on registered awards which are binding on the farmer and the employee. Most horticulture work will be performed under conditions associated with the Horticulture Award 2010 which was implemented on 1 January 2010. This award contains provisions relating to:

- dispute resolution.
- piecework.
- minimum wages and casual loading.
- weekly working hours and overtime payments.

Some employers utilise separate enterprise agreements, and if this is the case, you should ensure that you receive a copy prior to commencing employment.

*It is extremely important that workers are aware of the particular award they are employed under – it is a legal requirement for a farmer to give you these details.*

Pay day is usually on a Thursday or Friday. They won't pay in advance so you must have enough money to last until then.

Average pay is between \$17-\$18 per hour, however this figure is a rough estimation ONLY, as pay ranges can vary .

### WORKING CONDITIONS

Harvesting of fruit and vegetables can involve working individually, in pairs or teams. The job can involve climbing ladders, standing, kneeling, laying or sitting while moving through the crop or undertaking a range of duties in a packing shed. Most jobs require a reasonable level of physical fitness.

Harvest work can be repetitious and tiring and in most cases is done outdoors with little or no protection from the weather. Many jobs are often undertaken in extremely hot conditions (e.g. 30 degrees and above) so you need to be reasonably strong, fit and active.

### WORK HOURS

A normal day is 8 hours, generally starting between 6-7am (when the temperature is cooler), finishing around 3.30pm.

When the crops are ready they must be harvested as quickly and efficiently as possible. Many harvesting jobs require working 6 days per week, with Saturday often being the "day-off" to meet market requirements. In the middle of the season work can be 7 days a week.

Some evening and night time work can be required, especially in the packing of produce harvested earlier in the day. Usually the long hours of summer daylight are used to advantage, to harvest the crop. Most crops and harvesting jobs are dependant on local weather conditions.

### CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

Recommended clothing includes a small brim hat (that protects your head and neck), as well as a long sleeve shirt, hard-wearing pants, solid boots or shoes. Sun screen (with a protection factor of at least 30+), sunglasses, water bottle and strong insect repellent are also highly recommended.

### HARVEST WORK EXPECTATIONS

Arriving to a harvest region at the right time is extremely important. Being early means limited work and unless you have money and wish to be a tourist for a while. Workers are advised not to arrive in a harvest region prior to the commencement of work. Late arrival of course, can mean that many of the jobs are taken.

Always contact the National Harvest Labour Information Service before moving to a harvest area to ensure work is available.

### OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY

Most matters of Occupational Health and Safety are regulated by law. Make sure that you are properly instructed in all aspects of the work before commencing your actual employment, particularly in matters of personal safety and safety of others in the workplace. Make sure that your mind is clear about what is required of you when working.

For further information and online service visit the Australian WorkPlace website at [www.workplace.gov.au](http://www.workplace.gov.au).

### WORKERS COMPENSATION INSURANCE

It is a requirement of law that all workers are covered for workplace injury by the employer. Talk to the farmer about any matters which you are unsure about particularly when working with, on, or around machinery. It is your responsibility to follow all health and safety instructions



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and to report any injury immediately to the farmer.

### **TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT**

Employment can be terminated by either the employee or employer under certain circumstances, which will be outlined in the relevant award that is applicable to the work being performed. The Horticulture Award 2010 contains this information.

### **ACCOMMODATION**

"On farm" accommodation in tents, caravans or a farm house can sometimes be provided, or you may have to stay at the closest caravan park, backpacker hostel or pub.

Accommodation standards vary between states and between council areas within states. If there are issues with the quality of accommodation, it is recommended to contact the local council who are responsible for health and safety aspects of the accommodation. Beware of illegal overcrowding in private houses in country towns.

### **TRANSPORT**

Several backpacker hostels can provide transport to local harvest work operators. Otherwise, if not staying on-site, you will need to arrange your own transport. Generally placement is easiest for job seekers that have their own transport (and accommodation) but both may be available at different locations, particularly during peak harvest times.

Few issues arise regarding transport as most bus, rail and train operators are appropriately licenced and professionally run. Some issues do arise where hostels or farmers transport workers to and from accommodation on a daily basis. Where a farmer transports you and there is no charge, the only requirement is that the

vehicle is appropriately registered and the driver is licenced. Where a hostel transports you and charges a fee for this service, they need to be appropriately licenced with a LR (Light Rigid), MR (Medium Rigid) or HR (Heavy Rigid) licence needed if the vehicle has more than 12 seats. The vehicle must be roadworthy and the driver must have a 0.0 blood alcohol level.

### **REGISTERING A COMPLAINT ABOUT THE HORTICULTURE AND HARVEST INDUSTRY.**

If you wish to provide feedback or lodge a complaint about an aspect of the Horticulture Industry including wages, working conditions and / or accommodation, you have 3 options:

- Complete a feedback form which is located on the front page of the Harvest Trail Website. Please note: responses to emails can take up to 5 working days.
- Send your feedback/complaint via email to the National Harvest Labour Information Service at [nhlis@madec.edu.au](mailto:nhlis@madec.edu.au)
- Contact the National Harvest Labour Information Service on FREECALL 1800 062 332

### **CONTACT NUMBERS FOR COMPLAINTS**

#### **Payment, termination, minimum conditions, employer problems - contact:**

Fair Work Ombudsman  
[www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au)  
131394

#### **Discrimination**

Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission  
[www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au)  
1300 292153

#### **Work Safety**

Worksafe Victoria  
[www.workcover.vic.gov.au](http://www.workcover.vic.gov.au)  
1800 136089

#### **Transport**

VICROADS on 131171 or at  
[www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au)  
(Opening hours: 8:30am to 5:00pm  
Mon - Fri, 8:30am to 2:00pm Sat)

#### **Accommodation**

Your local council or alternatively,  
Consumer Affairs Victoria on 1300  
558181 or [www.consumer.vic.gov.au/](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/)



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