

Australia to build agri workforce through added grants and schemes for 2024

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Agriculture sector is a vital source of employment in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia employing around 262,000 people.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Murray Watt said since the Jobs and Skills Summit in 2022, the Government has been working closely with the agriculture industry to find solutions that address workforce issues that had been ongoing for years.

“The Government has successfully worked with industry to identify opportunities to support ag careers through the Agriculture Workforce Working Group (AWWG), fee-free TAFE places, improving the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, and more,” Minister Watt said.

“The AWWG achieved agreement on principles that underpin labour hire licensing and contributed to key government processes including the Employment White Paper and Migration Review. It has also been pivotal in securing agreement to undertake a Food and Supply Chain Capacity Study that will help inform Australia’s training, higher education, and migration systems to best meet industry needs. Training Australians is key to building the agricultural workforce, which is why we have provided funding for more than 13,000 fee-free TAFE places for agriculture courses with more than 11,950 enrolments in 2023. Our Cultivating the Next Generation project, done in partnership with AgriFutures, has investigated ways to encourage young people to consider how agriculture can provide a rewarding career beyond the classroom. Whether it’s

at the cutting edge of technology or driving sustainability, working on the land, in a lab or from an office, agriculture has something for everyone â explains Minister Watt.

The PALM scheme

Government has also worked to further to expand and improve the PALM scheme. The PALM scheme is a temporary labour migration program between Australia and the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

âWe are responsibly growing the scheme, with better support for our Pacific neighbours and employers to participate in the scheme and improved conditions for workers. In 2023, we reached record numbers of PALM workers demonstrating the importance of this program to Australiaâs ag industry. There are more than 38,145 PALM workers in Australia, with the majority working in agriculture (25,889 workers) and the meat processing (10,041) sectors. Expanding and improving the PALM scheme continues to help employers across Australia engage the right workers where and when they need them. A sign of the of the continued success of the program is that the fact that more and more employers continue to sign up to participate. I am excited about the future of agriculture and as we go into 2024, I look forward to building on last yearâs momentum and seeing what new ideas the newly established Agricultural Workforce Forum can uncoverâ explains Minister Watt.