



# WORKING IN AGRICULTURE & HORTICULTURE

The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is the overarching identity for the Australian Government's Pacific labour mobility programs.

Through the PALM scheme, job seekers from 9 Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste can work in the Australian agriculture and horticulture industries for short-term contracts up to 9 months, or for longer term contracts between one and 4 years.

The agriculture and horticulture sector in Australia has unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled roles.

## Farming in Australia

Understanding the different crops, the types of work, and the weather will help you prepare mentally and physically for your time working on a farm in Australia.

## Farms and technology

The agriculture industry in Australia includes small, medium and very large-scale commercial farms. Most farms, regardless of size, use machinery to prepare the land, for planting, harvesting and in processing. This may include mechanical planters, tractors with GPS technology, automated irrigation systems and drones managed by computer.



# WORKING IN HORTICULTURE

Working on a farm in Australia can be physically challenging. Workers need to be physically fit and prepared to work outdoors in weather that may be very hot or very cold. Workers may also be indoors in refrigerated packing sheds where the temperature is around 3°C.

Australia can be roughly divided into 5 climate zones, each able to produce different types of fruit and vegetables.

Farms in **tropical** and **sub-tropical areas** typically grow sugarcane, bananas and mangoes – or produce vegetables on a large scale. The weather in these regions consists of 2 seasons: wet and dry.

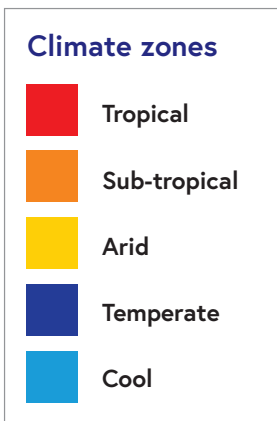
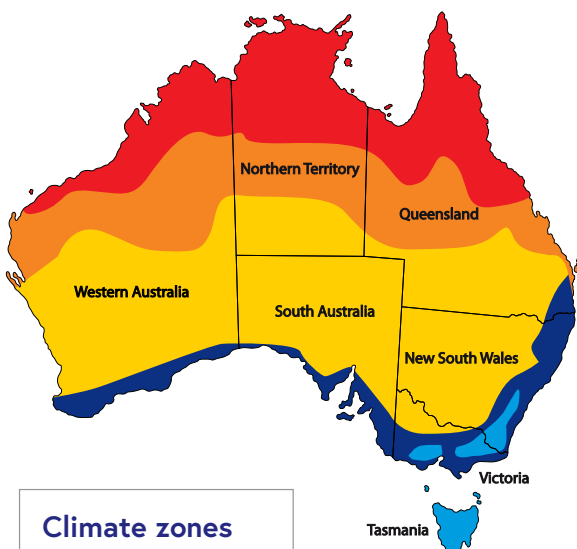
The wet season is humid, with monsoonal rains and storms and average temperatures of 25-35°C. In the dry season temperatures typically range from 21– 33°C.

Farms in **temperate climate** areas usually grow produce such as beans, spinach, lettuce, citrus, tomatoes, vine crops, stone fruit, berries, melons and capsicums.

**Cool climate** areas have 4 distinct seasons and typically grow apples, berries, salad, spinach, broccoli, citrus and stone fruit. Beef, sheep and dairy industries are also common in these areas.

The temperature in **cool climate** areas can range from 0-15°C in winter, while summer can reach 35°C.

Workers in the southern states of Australia will need warm clothing and be prepared to work outdoors in cold weather. **Indoor packing houses** may be refrigerated and 3-5°C.





## WORKER RESPONSIBILITIES

Worker responsibilities may include some or all of the below, depending on the role:

- planting crops by hand and/or using machinery
- building trellises for climbing vegetables and vines
- operating farm machines to cultivate, fertilise, spray and harvest
- spraying with chemicals to control weed growth, insects, fungus growth and diseases
- crop maintenance – thinning and weeding
- picking vegetables and fruit (either by hand or using machinery)
- grading and sorting produce into containers
- loading fruit and vegetable containers on trucks
- other farm work tasks as required.



## PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES REQUIRED

Working in agriculture can be physically demanding and may involve:

- heavy lifting, bending and walking long distances
- working at heights, climbing up and down ladders or machinery

- repetitive work and/or long periods standing (such as when working in a packing shed)
- working outdoors and indoors in very hot or very cold temperatures
- the ability to distinguish between red and green.



## PERSONAL SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

- a good work ethic, show commitment, initiative and motivation
- willingness to learn new skills and participate in training if needed
- strong attention to detail and a commitment to quality
- ability to listen and follow instructions
- ability to work independently as a team
- working level of English
- previous experience in a physical or labour-intensive job would be beneficial, but not essential.

# CONDITIONS FOR WORKERS

## Wages

All PALM scheme workers have the same rights and protections as Australian workers. There are in-built systems to protect the welfare and wellbeing of PALM scheme workers.

Workers are employed under Australian legislation, this may be under a modern award or an enterprise agreement. Both of these outline minimum payments that must be made to all workers. This will be detailed in a worker's offer of employment.

## Costs to work in Australia – deductions

The employer will pay most upfront costs for a worker, such as airfares, visa, pre-employment costs (e.g., vaccinations) and cash advances. These costs will need to be repaid to the employer through deductions from a worker's pay over a minimum of 12 weeks.

After these initial costs have been repaid, there will be some ongoing expenses that the employer will deduct from every pay. These may differ across

Australia, between employers and perhaps even among members of the same team, depending on the situation. Examples of ongoing deductions are accommodation, health insurance, transport and household bills.

## Working hours

- working hours will vary greatly from season to season
- On an ordinary day, you may work 8 hours a day. Employers may ask you to work more with your agreement but not exceeding 12 hours.
- hours of work will usually be between 5.00am and 6.00pm
- workers will work a minimum 30 hours per week.

## Leave & entitlements

### Paid annual leave

Full-time workers: 4 weeks per year (20 working days).

Part-time workers: 4 weeks per year (adjusted to part-time hours per week).

Casual workers: none.

### Paid sick leave

Full-time and part-time workers: 10 days per year.

Casual workers: none.

## Accommodation

The employer will find suitable accommodation for workers. This may include shared accommodation on the farm such as cabins or dongas, or accommodation may be offsite and workers will need to travel to the farm each day.

Workers will pay rent for their accommodation as a pay deduction each pay period. Alternatively, workers can find their own rental accommodation.

## Worker locations

Through the PALM scheme workers may be placed in a remote or regional part of Australia.

Depending on the location the weather may be very hot or very cold. Some examples of regions employing PALM scheme workers are shown below.



▲ Mildura, located in north west Victoria, is a major producer of citrus fruit and grapes. The area has a population of approximately 35,000 people, and a semi-arid climate with very hot summers and very cold winters.



▲ In the southern parts of Australia the weather can be very cold. In winter there may be overnight frosts and in some locations, snow.



▲ A banana farm in far north Queensland. This part of Australia has hot, humid and wet summers and mild, dry winters.

## Where can I find more information?

To find out more about the PALM scheme, please visit the website: [www.palmscheme.gov.au](http://www.palmscheme.gov.au)

You can find contact details for each country's labour sending unit at: [www.palmscheme.gov.au/how-apply](http://www.palmscheme.gov.au/how-apply)