



Industry communique: New arrangements to secure labour supply

At a glance

- Temporary visa changes in place to secure seasonal agricultural labour supply.
- Western Australian travel restrictions enable movement of agricultural workers with proof of employment.
- Additional safeguards in place to manage risk and maintain health and safety and support business continuity.
- Appropriate accommodation arrangements must be in place with adequate social distancing including a declaration that appropriate accommodation arrangements are in place.
- Businesses employing Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) must prepare a COVID-19 Risk Minimisation Work Plan as part of their occupation health and safety management responsibility.
- Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) to work with industry in coming weeks to determine finer details.

Following the recent announcement by the Commonwealth Government on temporary changes to Australian visa arrangements, the State Government has been working closely with the Commonwealth to help farmers to access the workforce they need to secure Western Australia's food and produce supply during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The temporary changes will allow **WHMs** and those within the **Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Worker Program** to continue to work in agriculture and food processing until the COVID-19 crisis has passed.

This coupled with Western Australia's current travel restrictions, which allow for the movement of agricultural workers with proof of employment within the State, will ensure that agricultural businesses reliant on WHMs for seasonal work will be able to access available labour in Western Australia.

In working through these arrangements, it is paramount to design practical measures that ensure the risk of COVID-19 transmission is effectively managed while also allowing workers to move to new employment.

The State Government has agreed to apply further safeguards for both WHMs and employers to address health risks and community concerns while WA agribusinesses are operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. DPIRD will commence working with industry to design and implement practical and reasonable safeguards.

Primary industry businesses that utilise WHM labour for seasonal work can find a summary of the Government's approach below.

Temporary visa changes

Working Holiday Makers who work in agriculture or food processing will be exempt from the six-month work limitation with the one employer and will be eligible to apply for a further visa to continue working in these critical sectors if their current visa is due to expire in the next six months.

There is no requirement for a 14-day isolation period related to movement within Western Australia. WHMs may move between regions provided they have secured an offer of employment.

COVID-19 safeguards for WHMs in Western Australia

Working Holiday Makers must adhere to the same COVID-19 risk mitigation measures and directives that apply to all other persons in Western Australia. Failure to do so will result in penalties and may put their visa at risk.

Working Holiday Makers will be expected to:

- Familiarise themselves with the safety measures in place in the workplace to minimise the risk of spread of the COVID-19 virus.
- Secure accommodation that meets the requirements for social distancing.
- Have appropriate transport arrangements to and from their place of work, in keeping with COVID-19 social distancing measures.
- Advise employers of the address of their accommodation, and
- Sign a declaration acknowledging they understand their obligations.

Employer provided accommodation requirement

If a WHM is offered employment that includes onsite accommodation provided by the employer, it is the employer's responsibility to ensure the accommodation meets the requirements for social distancing. Advice on social distancing can be found [here](#).

If a WHM accepts an offer of employment in the agriculture sector with onsite accommodation provided by the employer, it is the WHM's responsibility to practice social distancing at the accommodation, and in the workplace.

COVID-19 safeguards for employers of WHMs in Western Australia

COVID-19 Risk Minimisation Work Plans

Existing Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws require employers to look after the health and safety of their workers and others at the workplace. Employers must identify risks at the workplace and, where possible, eliminate or minimise those risks for general WHS compliance.

It is in the direct interest of all agricultural businesses to have documented processes for managing COVID-19 risks. Good social distancing practices will allow businesses to remain open in the event a worker fall ill with COVID-19. If plans are not in place this may not be the case.

Guidance for managing COVID-19 risk in the workplace in agriculture is available [here](#).

To assist in the transparency of workplace safety measures, the WA Government expects agricultural businesses to implement **COVID-19 risk minimisation work plans**

as part of their Occupational Health and Safety responsibility. These plans should clarify the obligations of both employer and employee in mitigating risk and outline what to do should a COVID-19 outbreak occur.

In developing a plan, consideration might be given to the following:

- Physical distancing
- Health checks and quarantine
- Premise hygiene
- Personal hygiene
- Deliveries to the workplace
- Consultation and communication with workers

The WA Department of Health has developed a primary guideline to assist WA employers developing work plans for their businesses. The 'Practices and Principles to reduce the risk of impacts of COVID-19 on a food business workplace' document is expected to be available soon.

Employer-WHM employee declaration of understanding

The WA Government expects employers and their WHM employees to sign a declaration confirming they understand and will follow the protocols in place in the *COVID-19 Risk Minimisation Work Plan* to meet the requirements of safe distancing.

DPIRD will provide a declaration form for employers to utilise, which will be made available on the DPIRD website.

Next steps

To ensure the measures can be implemented in a practical way that does not place undue burden on agricultural businesses, DPIRD will work in coming weeks with industry and employers of WHMs to determine the detailed requirements of the safeguards.

Established industry groups and networks will be consulted in the development of clear, simple and practical guidance around the new requirements and industry will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the draft document.

These safeguards in conjunction with Western Australia's border controls and travel restrictions will enable WA food and agriculture businesses to continue their operations during COVID-19 and critically, maintain WA's food supply and other available markets.

Support for WA employers and job seekers

While seasonal work requirements are less critical at this time, businesses are encouraged to be organised early for their upcoming recruitment needs.

As part of the DPIRD and FoodAllianceWA's collaborative initiative to support jobs and fill seasonal labour shortage issues across WA's agrifood sector, the new jobsinwafoodandag.com website is available to connect workers with regional employers, labour hire companies and recruitment businesses to ensure we have the right number of workers in the right regions to ensure food supply.

In addition, DPIRD, in partnership with WA tech start-up Studium, is providing support to regional employers seeking employees with the relevant skills and experience to meet

their needs, through a regional specific job matching service to help simplify the recruitment process.

Employers with opportunities on the horizon are encouraged to register at <https://studium.work/regions> to connect to job seekers in their region, ensure ongoing labour supply as required and receive free recruitment assistance.

For more information, visit jobsinwafoodandag.com or Facebook 'WA Jobs in Food & Ag'.