A NZ horticultural perspective on the same challenges. What has worked and what the future might hold
Richard Palmer
Chief Executive
Worker shortage forces farmers to consider automation, cutting long-term seasonal job opportunities

Seasonal workers arrive in Tasmania from the Pacific — but even numbering 650 there's still not enough to go around
Starting with facts

What was the industry situation?
- Crop
- Planted area
- Pickers needed

What had changed with Covid?
- How many migrants
- What was happening with visas
- Did NZers want to work seasonal jobs, especially at Christmas
- How many unemployed and would they move
NZ Summerfruit sector need

Secure sufficient labour for NZ summerfruit harvest

• Nearly 7000 seasonal workers, 5500 of those in Central Otago
What we did

National level actions
- Summerfruit NZ Board sub-committee with other regional players
- Sector CEOs and senior officials
- Engaged frequently with Ministers
- Media – National attraction campaign with MPI

To:
- Understand labour demand and supply
- Push for policy changes – agencies and Ministers
- Connect with national groups (Universities, Grey Nomads)
- National message about seasonal opportunities
- Branding
What we did

Regional actions
- Summerfruit NZ Board sub-committee leadership
- Seasonal Coordinator
- Other agencies on the ground

To:
- Collateral – videos/branding
- Understand situation on the ground
- Employment fairs
- Match growers and workers
- Provide worker support:
  - Provide a discount card for workers
  - sports events
RSE
Workers from the Pacific

• Repatriations – NZ’s biggest airlift in 25 years
• Managing onshore workforce
• Getting workers back to NZ
Telling our story

• To public
• To Government
• To potential employees

• Quick, adaptable message
• Genuine
• Didn’t try to counter all negatives, just the big ones
• Others tell our story too
What did we learn

- Strong relationships are crucial
  - government agencies
  - regional stakeholders
  - universities and worker cohorts
- Minimise the digital meeting points
- In Covid, Govt decisions changed fast
- New worker cohorts are accessible
What about the future

• Our traditional workforce is very productive
• The importance to the Pacific of work in NZ
• We have to lift wages but productivity must keep pace
• Trade labour for capital
Earn good money on a summerfruit orchard this summer.

work
You could be a stable picking delicious apricots, cherries, nectarines, peaches, or plums surrounded by stunning views of Hawke’s Bay, Marlborough or Central Otago. Or you could be inside sorting and packing fruit for sale.

play
When you’re not working there’s lots of things to do whether you’re after adrenalin and adventure or want to explore local wineries, culture and sights.

stay
Get your friends together and have fun earning good money and staying in on-orchard accommodation, hostels or campsites in one of New Zealand’s beautiful regions.

For more information check out the Work the Seasons website: www.worktheseasons.co.nz/horticulture