



Attracting and Retaining a Workforce



AUSVEG

We all know that farm employees are often difficult to attract, and once you have them it is important to keep them.

Retaining good staff increases productivity and reduces costs, with research showing that replacing workers can cost up to 50% of the salary. Reducing staff turnover is also linked to better employee satisfaction and higher workplace morale.

After interviewing a range of employers, recruitment personnel and other stakeholders we have put together some ideas to help you attract and retain a workforce.

Note that these suggestions complement your existing legislative requirements.

Publicise your credentials

Casual workers will take into consideration your compliance systems such as Fair Farms, GlobalG.A.P and SEDEX. Some cultures put a high level of trust in awards and industry recognition such as Farmer of the Year or Exporter of the Year. Apply for local awards that show you are a valued member of the community. Don't hesitate to put these on your social media pages, website, or in the employment office.

Update your social media

Let's face it – we all use Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn or Google to check out people or businesses – farm employees are no different. Make sure your sites communicate the positive assets of the job and workplace, particularly pre-harvest when you are looking for workers. Also make sure your search engines are optimised for those curious WHMs looking for work. Social media is also a place to build your brand and earn trust with both consumers and your potential workforce.

No social media? For the current tech-savvy generation this probably raises red flags immediately.

Your website should also include links to the regional community attractions and services.

Share your company's goals and visions

Make sure your induction training is more than just the pre-requisite safety and skills training. Bring your workforce on the journey and get them to aspire to the company's ethos. Being part of a bigger picture can be more fulfilling.

Creating a team

Casual workers can sometimes feel like they are outsiders – letting them know that they are important part of a team, and treating them as part of the team will improve workplace culture.

Define the job requirements

A clear position description which states the scope of the job is important, regardless of employment status. The position description should also include any supplementary work which may be undertaken when the core job for which they are being employed for if not operational. For example, a fork lift driver may not be required on days when the packing shed is not operating and therefore may be employed doing other jobs such as cleaning or maintenance.

Develop training methods and tools appropriate to your workforce

Training videos with subtitles, documentation in various languages, visual rather than written aids may all assist in engaging your workforce better. Cultural diversity across more permanent staff or supervisors can also help attract workers, and ensure that you have an on-site interpreter when required.

Clear organisational charts with lines of reporting and responsibility

Casual staff often find there are no clear lines of reporting if they have any questions or concerns. If they don't understand who to ask appropriate questions then in the confusion they don't ask at all – and this can be dangerous with respect to personal safety, food safety or other issues.

Career pathways

For those employers who are not transient, such as local staff, clearly define what success looks like and the future career pathways within your operation. Engage with staff about their potential for promotion and how they can continue to improve. Lack of career advancement opportunities is one of the top reasons employees leave their jobs.

Overcoming isolation and creating community

Attracting talented and skilled employees to the country can be difficult, especially when they have family. One of the key reasons employees leave regional jobs is to return to the city or more populated areas where there is access to schools and other services. Be prepared to tailor packages to suit the employee's family circumstance such as paying for boarding fees, finding employment for family members, or free agistment and feed for the family pony.

Provide a welcome pack

This could include things like:

- * public transport maps and timetables;

- * information about services and facilities in both the area they will live and work (banks, schools, medical centres, cinemas, shopping centres etc)

- * information about setting important facilities up (bank accounts, tax file numbers, Medicare, driving licences etc)

- * contact details about local services supporting various cultures (church groups, migrant resources, support groups, ethnic restaurants etc)

- * a list of links to useful websites (local news, entertainment sites, sporting groups etc).



Create a respectful environment

Any form of discrimination is unlawful. By actively creating a positive and respectful environment there are benefits to you and your business. Don't forget word of mouth can be a very powerful tool – both in your favour and against.

Demonstrate that you take safety seriously

Reinforce safety messaging – ensure your employees that their safety is your number one priority.

Be culturally aware of your employees heritage

Understanding the significance of cultural practices such as holidays and religious practices can ensure that employees feel valued. Some cultures don't mix well together, so be aware, empathetic and proactive in these situations.

Some ideas to promote cultural awareness in your workplace may include:

- * Put a map of the world in the tearoom or other space and get employees to mark their home town/city

- * Celebrate relevant events such as International Women's Day and Harmony Day

- * Create a wall where all cultures can write hello in their language

Recognise achievement

There are many ways of recognising good performance – whilst some may carry a monetary value the cheapest and often most effective way can be a simple "Thank you". A sausage sizzle, morning tea, or a round of icy poles on a hot day can also be well received.

Understand what is driving your workforce

Backpackers are likely to have different aims than some other casual workers – most are travelling for the experience and not necessarily the money (although they still want to be paid properly!). Other workers are motivated to earn money for their family. Giving backpackers access to outback experiences may get them to hang around for longer – think of some typical 'Australian' activities that will enrich their experience.

After hours activities

For those that have on-farm accommodation make sure that there are plenty of activities for employees during their spare time – volleyball, cricket, soccer, totem tennis, jigsaws, cards/ games, bike riding, bush walking, library – just to name a few.

Would you live there?

WHMs are normally used to some fairly basic living quarters as they move around the country but if you want workers to be happy and stay longer then it's worth trying to offer access to reasonable, affordable accommodation, with good transport options, or that on-farm accommodation meets a reasonable standard and is affordable.

Good shower blocks are often a key attraction – particularly with female WHMs.

The same guidelines apply for more permanent staff. On-farm accommodation can be one of the key attractions for employees, or can also be a major source of discontent.

Point of Difference

Regional Australia is desperate for workers across a range of industries, including hospitality, health and farming. Think about what will set you apart from your 'competitors'. Is it the best shower block in the district, best sunset views from your accommodation, mountain bike/bushwalking trails or supporting employees to join the local cricket or soccer club?

Team Chat

Starting an organisational chat group on a platform such as WhatsApp or Teams can also be a good mechanism to build team culture.

Make sure that you establish some rules around expected behaviour and that the chat is inclusive.

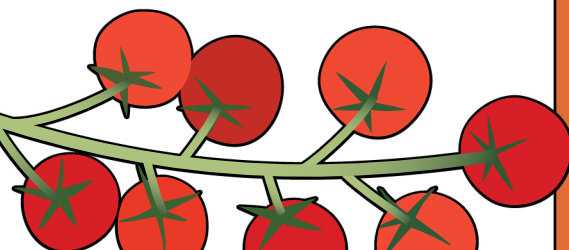
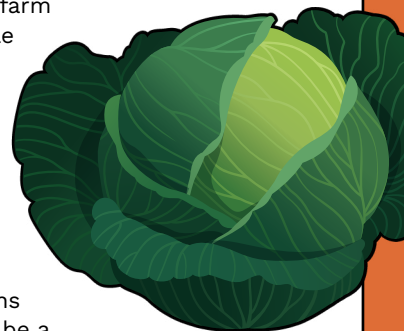
Sell the Job

If you are finding it hard to even get people to apply for jobs be a little more creative with your advertisements.

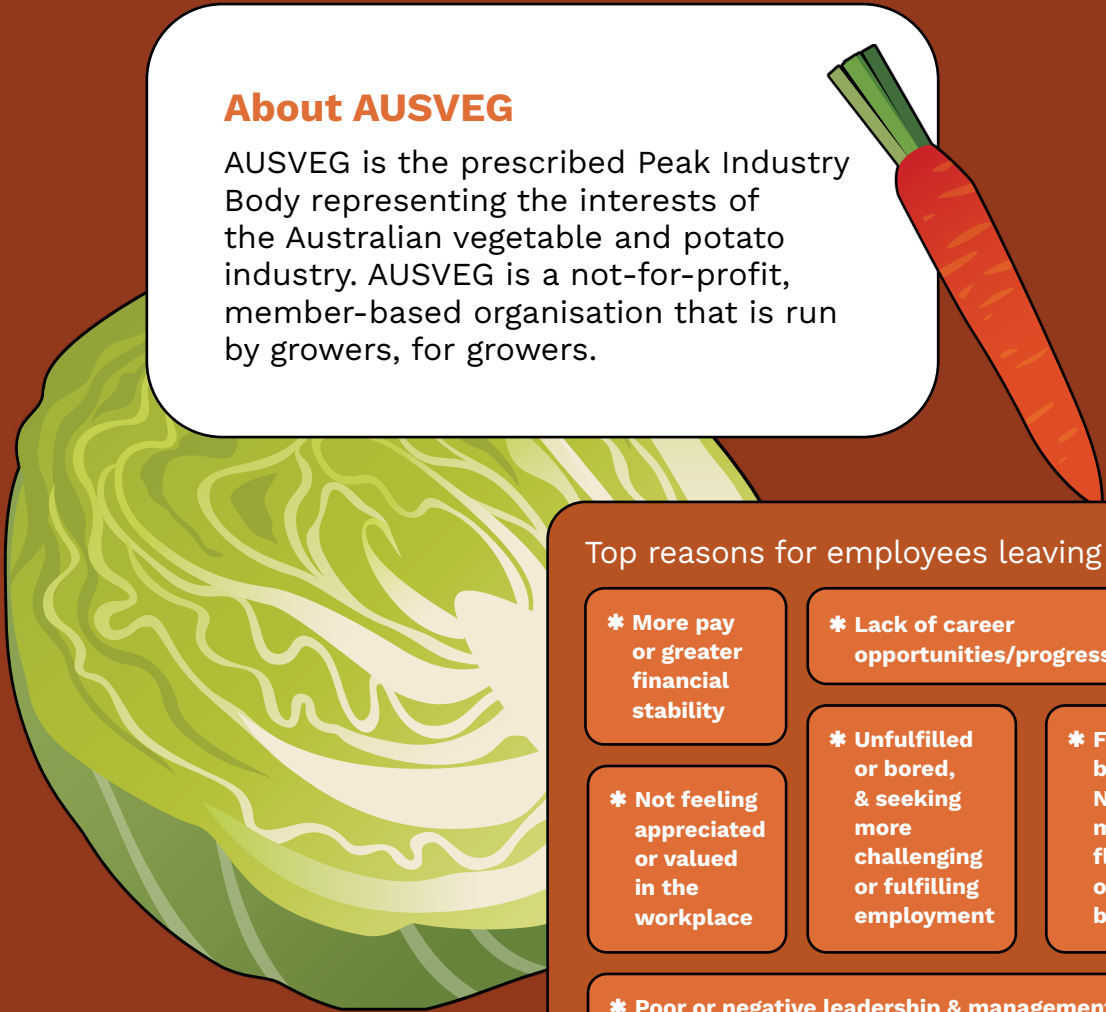
Appeal to the emotive side and promote the benefits of the job.

Dressed for Success

Some workers (such as PALM workers) may find some climates quite challenging due to the cooler weather. Providing second-hand jackets, jumpers, beanies, gloves or footwear to help them keep warm is a nice gesture. Some community groups will undertake specific drives for clothing items for these workers.



If you have any other suggestions or want to share your initiatives, please email publicaffairs@ausveg.com.au #horticulturalemployerofchoice



About AUSVEG

AUSVEG is the prescribed Peak Industry Body representing the interests of the Australian vegetable and potato industry. AUSVEG is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation that is run by growers, for growers.

Top reasons for employees leaving their jobs:

* More pay
or greater
financial
stability

* Lack of career
opportunities/progression

* Not feeling
appreciated
or valued
in the
workplace

* Unfulfilled
or bored,
& seeking
more
challenging
or fulfilling
employment

* Fatigue or
burnout.
Needing
more
flexibility,
or work/life
balance

* Poor or negative leadership & management

* Poor/disrespectful
workplace culture

* Wanting a career change
or new direction/purpose

* Lack of services
such as childcare or
transport

* Employee not aligned
to the ethos of the
organisation

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