

2013 - 2015
Queensland Production Horticulture

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN



Queensland Government



growcom

AN INDUSTRY DEVELOPED PLAN

This Plan was developed with funding support from the Queensland Government by Queensland's peak production horticulture industry body, Growcom Australia, in consultation with and on behalf of the Queensland production horticulture industry. Stakeholders involved in helping shape this industry Plan include individual producers, regional industry groups (Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers, Bowen Gumlu Growers Association and Mareeba District Fruit and Vegetables Growers Association), industry development officers, gateway school representatives, registered training organisations, labour hire companies, Primary Industries Education Foundation, Rural Skills Australia, Whitsunday Marketing and Development, AUSVEG, and representatives from key state government departments including Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF), and Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE).

GROWCOM CAPABILITY STATEMENT

As the peak representative body for the fruit and vegetable growing industry in Queensland Growcom is best placed to develop and deliver the Queensland Production Horticulture Workforce Development Plan 2013-2015. It is the only production horticulture organisation in Australia that undertakes lobbying and delivers services across the entire industry to businesses and organisations of all commodities, sizes and regions, as well as to associated industries in the supply chain.

Growcom's membership includes individual horticultural businesses as well as affiliate producer group members, covering commodities such as vegetables, bananas, mangoes, apples, macadamias, avocados, passionfruit, strawberries, ginger, pineapples, lychees, custard apples, table grapes and olives. It works in close collaboration with other industry organisations, local producer associations and corporate members.

Growcom has approximately 30 staff located in Brisbane, Bundaberg, Toowoomba, Townsville and Tully who provide a range of advocacy, research and industry development services. Through constant contact with producers and other horticultural business operators, Growcom understands the outlook, expectations and practical needs of the industry and works to bring these issues to the attention of government at local, state and federal levels. Growcom is a member of a number of state and national industry organisations – including the Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) - and uses these networks to promote our members' interests and to work on issues of common interest.



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CONTENTS

1.0	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2.0	PROJECT SCOPE	6
2.1	Methodology	6
2.2	Objectives	6
3.0	CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT	7
3.1	Overview of Queensland's production horticulture industry	7
4.0	CURRENT WORKFORCE PROFILE	9
4.1	Workforce market	9
4.2	Capability gaps and priority skills needs	9
4.3	Key issues currently affecting the industry	10
	• Issues in attracting workers	10
	• Issues in retaining and upskilling workers	11
	• Issues in upskilling workers in innovative practice and emerging technology	11
	• Issues influencing the need for formal, accredited training	11
	• Issues in data collection to support future planning	14
5.0	FUTURE TRENDS AND SKILLS NEEDS	15
5.1	Global food security needs will increase	15
5.2	Technology use will increase	15
5.3	Increasing farm consolidation – using fewer but better skilled workers	15
5.4	Greater understanding of the impact of climate variability	15
5.5	Increased pressure to win local shopper loyalty to Australian grown produce	16
5.6	Competition for natural resources	16
5.7	Restricted used of chemicals for control of weeds and diseases	16
5.8	More cost-saving, innovative measures will need to be adopted	16
5.9	Increased financial pressure for family members to find sources of revenue off farm	16
5.10	Ageing workforce – increasing retirement of baby boomers	16
6.0	QUEENSLAND HORTICULTURE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS	17
6.1	Optimise current skills: Recommended actions to ATTRACT skilled workers and new entrants to the industry	17
6.2	Instill an industry of choice image and ethic: Recommended actions to support industry to RETAIN workers	20
6.3	Skill for sustainability: Recommended actions to increase workforce development and UPSKILL workers	21
6.4	Plan for long-term prosperity: Recommended actions to improve data collection for PLANNING purposes	24
7.0	REFERENCES	25
8.0	BIBLIOGRAPHY	26
9.0	APPENDIX ONE: QUEENSLAND'S KEY PRODUCTION HORTICULTURE GROWING REGIONS	27
10.0	APPENDIX TWO: GROWCOM WORKFORCE SKILLS AND TRAINING SURVEY - GRAPHICAL SUMMARY	28
11.0	APPENDIX THREE: SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER ISSUES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS	34



MESSAGE FROM GROWCOM'S CEO

The Queensland Government's recognition of agriculture as one of the four key pillars of the Queensland economy and its \$500 000 commitment towards improving workforce development for the State's production horticulture industry is a welcome acknowledgment of the contribution the agriculture sector, and in particular production horticulture, makes to the State's economy. Australia's future food security depends on a strong agricultural sector, and the State Government's astute and timely support is for the benefit of all Australians.

Production horticulture is a highly labour-intensive industry and the largest employer in the Queensland agriculture sector. The State's commitment to enhancing awareness of careers in the sector, increasing engagement in training, and improving producers' ability to become employers of choice, is a tremendous boost for our \$2 billion a year industry.

Faced with ever-increasing competition and economic and climate volatility, our industry cannot afford to conduct "business as usual". Producers have to look at new ways to farm smarter, manage employees more efficiently and market more effectively. The training system has to explore delivery methods that better meet the needs of producers and consider how to make training more appealing and engaging for the sector, while key industry and government stakeholders need to work more collaboratively to reduce duplication of efforts and maximise workforce development outcomes.

From Growcom's consultations with industry it is clear that there can be no "one-size-fits" all approach to workforce planning. Each growing region has its own specific workforce issues and challenges that require tailored, regional solutions. The challenge in developing this Plan was to identify and address the industry-wide issues, and at the same time empower the regions. For this reason, one of the Plan's key recommendations is the provision of Workforce Development Officers in key growing areas, with placement in regional industry groups where they exist. This initiative is crucial to driving local workforce planning that has genuine benefits for both employers and employees.

It is intended that the recommendations outlined in the Plan will establish the framework for future government policies and funding initiatives, and lay the foundations to improve the profitability, global competitiveness and resilience of the production horticulture sector.

Acknowledgments

In compiling the Plan on behalf of industry, Growcom received much valuable and welcome input from a number of stakeholders. We would sincerely like to thank those who gave up their valuable time to provide information, advice and assistance in shaping the Plan, including individual producers, regional industry groups, industry development officers, gateway school representatives, registered training organisations, labour hire companies, Primary Industries Education Foundation, Rural Skills Australia, Whitsunday Marketing and Development, AUSVEG, and representatives from key state government departments including Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF), and Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE).

Growcom also would like to thank the State Government's Horticulture Industry Development Group, in particular members of the workforce reference group who have provided vital counsel in the development and refinement of the report and its recommendations.

I would also like to thank Michelle Templin for her work as the Growcom project officer assigned to develop the Plan, as well as Donna Mogg and David Putland for their invaluable contribution. Michelle would like to particularly acknowledge Greg Crossan (QDAFF) for his insightful and constructive feedback and assistance throughout the project.

Alex Livingstone
Growcom Chief Executive Officer

QUEENSLAND PRODUCTION HORTICULTURE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Engaging the Queensland production horticulture industry in workforce development today will help ensure it remains resilient and competitive well into the 21st century.

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Queensland production horticulture sector contributes over \$2.4 billion per annum to the state's economy, and supplies over 30 per cent of Australia's fruit and vegetable produce. Add the value of the entire supply chain and the contribution figure is exponentially higher. According to figures recently released by the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, production horticulture is Queensland's second biggest agricultural industry and is worth more than twice the value of sugar, almost twice the value of all grains and almost four times the value of cotton. For this reason it is critical that the state remains highly competitive in both domestic and international markets.

Recognising the valuable role that the Queensland production horticulture industry plays in both the local and national economy the state's peak production horticulture industry body, Growcom Australia, with funding support from the Queensland Government, has developed the Queensland Production Horticulture Workforce Development Plan in consultation with industry. The Plan aims to assist industry, government and the education and training sector to focus on improvements that will support the production horticulture sector meet present and future workforce development challenges and, consequently, help maximise opportunities to be profitable and competitive.

This document builds on Growcom's 2008 Workforce Development Plan and has involved industry consultation with peak and regional bodies, commodity representatives, individual producers, government agencies and registered training organisations. It outlines the production horticulture's key barriers to attraction, retention and upskilling and provides recommendations to address them. The methodology adopted was not simply to focus on the industry's immediate workforce development needs but also to address industry trends and likely needs over the next three years.

KEY WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

The following is a summary of the main workforce challenges faced by the production horticulture industry which, if not addressed, may result in worsening skill shortages in the future:

- **Limited attractiveness** - the industry is hampered by a poor public image, low awareness of career pathways, and a limited understanding of workplace relations laws and obligations often leading to poor human resource practices.
- **Seasonality implications** - the seasonal nature of the industry poses significant constraints in terms of attraction, career path development and continuity of skilled labour.
- **Deficient workforce planning** - limited human resources management and workforce planning capabilities in many enterprises continues to be an impediment to attracting, retaining and developing a skilled workforce.
- **Lure of labour by other sectors** - increasing competition for labour from the higher paying mining and coal seam gas sectors, particularly machinery operators, is a growing concern to producers.
- **Low attainment of qualifications** - there continues to be low participation in accredited training despite the demand for higher level skills increasing. Many producers are resorting to contract labour to fill the skills gaps. Where skills are attained it is generally through on-the-job training and specific skill sets that meet immediate needs. For many smaller producers the cost of training is prohibitive.
- **Increasing mechanisation** - increasing mechanisation is not only influencing the skills required (e.g. machinery operation and maintenance) and career pathway opportunities within the sector but it also means producers are likely to require fewer but greater skilled workers in the future. In many instances, the same machinery skills are also in high demand by the mining sector.
- **Ageing demographic** - the issue of an ageing workforce, combined with little formal succession planning, and poor attraction strategies means the industry may face major skill shortages in the future if not addressed now.
- **Fragmented efforts** - although many industry, government, training and education providers are attempting to address production horticulture workforce development issues at national, state and regional levels these efforts often seem to be duplicated, fragmented and uncoordinated.

FUTURE TRENDS

The trends that are driving changes in the types of skills that are needed include:

- **Increasing global food security needs** - require smarter farming to increase production profitably and sustainably.
- **Increasing use of mechanisation and robotics** - require skills in technology, specifically productivity and efficiency enhancing technologies.
- **Increasing farm consolidation** - require improved business and risk management skills.
- **Increasing international competition** - require improved skills in marketing, innovation and contract negotiation.
- **Increasing economic pressure** - require improved financial management skills and knowledge of cost-saving, innovative measures, diversification and value-adding.
- **Increasing understanding of climate variability** - require improved knowledge of diversification and more resilient crop varieties.
- **Increasing competition for natural resources** - require knowledge and skills in resource efficiency methods and technologies.
- **Increasing pressure to restrict use of chemicals** - require improved biosecurity knowledge and skills in alternative environmentally-responsible control methods.
- **Increasing pressure for family members to find sources of off-farm revenue to supplement farm income** - requires skills that are transferable and valued in other business sectors, such as agribusiness skills.

The ability to be competitive, resilient and responsive to future challenges is highly dependent on having the capacity and capability within the workforce.

As a result of an extensive consultation and data collection process, four areas have been identified for priority action to address the industry's immediate workforce development challenges and, at the same time, lay a foundation for sustainable growth and long-term prosperity.

In each of these priority areas we have highlighted a number of overarching aims that are supported by specific recommendations. See list of recommendations in Section 6, pages 17 – 24.

1. Optimise current skills: actions to ATTRACT skilled workers and new entrants to the industry

KEY AIMS
Support the development of robust regional development planning
Improve career pathway information and awareness
Improve ability of businesses to attract workers
Address problems associated with language barriers
Increase industry awareness of employment options available to secure a continuous supply of skilled / unskilled labour
Reduce induction costs and time burden for producers and improve farm readiness of new seasonal workers prior to commencement

2. Instill an industry of choice image and ethic: actions to support industry to RETAIN workers

KEY AIMS
Improve recognition and promotion of production horticulture as an industry of choice
Provide production horticulture businesses with support to become employers of choice

3. Skill for sustainability: actions to increase workforce development and UPSKILL workers

KEY AIMS
Increase uptake of training
Improve training to better meet the needs of industry
Improve language, literacy and numeracy levels
Improve "speed to market" and adoption of new knowledge, practices, and technology
Increase participation of rural women in skills development
Ensure producers have the skills to maximise efficient consumption of energy, water, and other resource inputs

4. Plan for long-term prosperity: actions to improve data collection for planning purposes

KEY AIMS
Improve statistical data reporting regarding production horticulture training enrolments and completions
Improve understanding of implications for industry of an ageing workforce
Improve understanding of the extent to which industry outsources specialist skills and the implication thereof



It is hoped that the information and recommendations contained in this Plan will not only help inform regional industry groups' decision-making on localised workforce development plans, but will also aid policy and funding decisions affecting the future direction and growth of the Queensland production horticulture industry, and provide a useful resource for registered training organisations.

To drive key priorities an Action Plan has been developed. It provides a mechanism for the Queensland Government to focus funding and resources on areas that will help industry maximise the opportunities to prosper. Some of the actions build on existing services and programs, while others will require an investment in staffing resources, information resource development, marketing and administration to ensure successful outcomes. Support through government funding, grants and sponsorship will be sought during the implementation phase.

The issues raised in the Plan are complex and cannot be resolved by one particular stakeholder. As such, it is imperative that strategic partnerships are formed and the priorities outlined in the Action Plan are addressed in a coordinated and collaborative manner across industry and government at national, state and regional levels.

The Action Plan is a dynamic, living document that will be updated and evaluated on an annual basis. Industry stakeholders are encouraged to continue to contribute their views to help drive the actions forward.

2.0 PROJECT SCOPE

2.1 METHODOLOGY

Our approach in developing this plan has been to identify key workforce development issues and opportunities through a combination of consultation and desktop research.

Throughout November and December 2012 Growcom collated information in a variety of ways to determine the main issues and capability gaps currently affecting industry. This included an online survey, one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders, in-depth telephone discussions and a series of consultation workshops held throughout Queensland's key growing areas.

In so doing, we involved a number of stakeholders, including but not limited to the following:

- Regional industry groups, namely Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers, Bowen Gumlu Growers Association
- Mareeba District Fruit and Vegetables Growers Association
- Queensland based Industry Development Officers
- Individual producers
- Registered Training Organisations
- National Harvest Labour Information Service representatives
- Gateway Schools representatives
- Primary Industries Education Foundation (PIEF)
- Whitsunday Marketing and Development
- Rural Skills Australia
- Key state government departments including Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF), and Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE).

We have also drawn strongly on data from existing regional strategic plans and documents including the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Skills Demand Report 2012; 2012 Agrifood Skills Environmental Scan; Farming Smarter, Not Harder: Securing our Agricultural Economy; Towards a National Food Plan for Australia: A Summary of the Green Paper; Workforce, Training and Skills Issues in Agriculture 2009; Horticulture 2020: An alliance for action; Scaling Up: Global Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture; and the 2004 Strategy to Attract Young People to Horticulture.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

The Queensland Production Horticulture Workforce Development Plan aims to optimise the supply and retention of appropriately skilled workers to ensure the production horticulture industry is equipped with the best possible knowledge and skills to sustainably increase productivity and profitability. With the support of the State Government and key industry stakeholders, the Plan seeks to grow a stronger production horticulture industry through specific actions that will result in:

- increased collaboration and decreased duplication
- a greater understanding of workforce development needs
- improved knowledge and understanding of workforce development requirements within the various segments of the industry
- key actions that will deliver real and measurable workforce development outcomes so that the production horticulture workforce can adapt, manage, innovate and prosper
- aim to provide a plan that acts as a blueprint to support locally-tailored workforce development planning at a regional level.



Some of the attendees at the Bundaberg Workforce Development Consultation Workshop, which included representatives from Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, AACC,

Widebay TAFE, Gateway Schools, Harvest Trail Labour Information Service, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Growcom, and a quality systems consultant

3.0 CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT

3.1 OVERVIEW OF QUEENSLAND'S PRODUCTION HORTICULTURE INDUSTRY

Queensland's production horticulture industry comprises fruit, vegetables and nut producers and consists of approximately 2 800 farms growing produce valued just over \$2.4 billion per year. Despite increasing pressures on individual businesses, the industry has continued to grow. Queensland fruit and vegetable industries have grown an average 6.7 per cent over the past eight years, from \$1.39 billion in 2002/03 to over \$2.14 billion in 2010/11 and this is expected to continue (Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, 2011).

AgTrends 2012/13 (formerly "Prospects") shows that:

- The gross value of production for fruit and nuts is eight per cent greater than the final estimate for 2011/12 and 20 per cent greater than the average in the past five years.
- The gross value of production for vegetables is predicted to be six per cent lower than forecast for 2011/12 however when looking at the five year average it is expected to be eight per cent higher.
- Fruit and nut production is worth more than all cereal grains combined (wheat, barley, maize and sorghum).

Australians increasingly rely on fruit and vegetables grown in Queensland, with the state producing the majority of Australia's bananas, pineapples, mandarins, avocados, mangoes, beetroot, fresh tomatoes and capsicums. In fact, Queensland's production horticulture industry grows one-third of the nation's produce. As Queensland's second largest primary industry, it is a major contributor to regional economies providing primary and secondary sources of income for many families.

The industry supplies local, interstate and overseas markets via a range of outlets including wholesalers, supermarkets, green-grocers, farmers' markets and direct to consumers. Horticulture is a resource base for significant value adding throughout the food, transport, wholesale and retail industries.

See Appendix One showing key production horticulture growing regions in Queensland.

The production horticulture industry is:

Diverse – Around 120 different crops are grown in a wide variety of locations and climates, using a range of production methods. In addition to mainstream crops, the industry includes a number of emerging industries including olives, Asian vegetables, exotic tropical fruits, culinary herbs, bush foods, functional foods and nutraceuticals. The large variety of crops and widely different farm production practices means there are unique challenges not only between the various commodities but also within each region. Every commodity group has different training / employment needs.



Varied in scale – The industry consists mainly of small-scale family farms, however there is an increasing trend towards medium to larger scale operations. Queensland's horticultural farms are located from Stanthorpe in the south to the Atherton Tablelands in the far north. There are 11 major Queensland horticultural regions with a total area of about 100 000 hectares under fruit and vegetable production (see Appendix One).

Extremely competitive and market driven – Competition among producers within and between horticultural production regions is intense. The industry is highly geared towards meeting customer requirements and market trends. Producers invest significant effort and money to deliver high standards of quality and food safety. As a result of economic pressures producers are resorting to cost-saving measures as ways to address declining profit margins, including diversification, value adding and increased mechanisation to reduce labour costs.

Labour intensive and seasonal – Horticulture is a highly labour-intensive industry, with many businesses operating seven days a week in peak periods. Queensland production horticulture currently employs around 25 000 permanent staff and many more casual workers. Labour costs represent as much as 60 per cent of overall operating costs for many businesses. The industry offers a diversity of skilled and unskilled, permanent and casual employment opportunities. It has significant links to the tourism industry, providing seasonal picking and packing work for thousands of travellers each year. According to research conducted by both QDAFF and AgForce the increasing trend towards the employment of on-hire (contract) workers will drive skilled employment in the future.



The intense use of a casual / seasonal workforce is a major factor inhibiting investment in training, particularly with respect to overseas workers who often only work part of a single season. The seasonal nature of the industry also poses significant constraints in terms of attraction, career path development and continuity of skilled and unskilled labour. Although production horticulture remains predominantly labour-intensive there is an increasing move towards automation and this is influencing changes in skill needs and opening up new career pathways.

Hampered by a poor public image and low awareness of career pathways – The lack of skilled workers looking for a career in production horticulture is an impediment to the industry's growth. Low student demand for agricultural education and training can be attributed to negative perceptions about the industry, poor awareness of career pathways and a training system that is not adequately aligned to the needs and preferences of the sector. Many in the community including students, parents, teachers and career advisors do not fully realise the extent of careers the industry has to offer, resulting in many young people overlooking the sector when it comes to choosing a career.

Characterised by low levels of engagement in accredited training and formally-qualified workers – The industry is typified by low levels of formally-qualified workers, low participation in accredited training, and limited workforce planning and human resource management capabilities. In Towards a better understanding of current and future human resource needs of Australian agriculture, Mick Keogh found that Australian production horticulture currently has a deficit of 8 300 full-time employees and that this will increase to 17 800 by 2018.

While there are vacancies across all categories of agricultural jobs, there is a distinct lack of agronomists. Despite research indicating that education and training leads to increased innovation, productivity and profitability, the production horticulture industry has traditionally been very difficult to engage in training. Key reasons for this may be because of a lack of understanding of the return of investment from training and a lack of investment by the training sector to adequately deliver to the needs of industry. The cost, and often inconvenient timing and location of training are also deterrents. Many of the smaller producers do not have the financial capacity to pay for employees to travel to larger towns or cities to access training facilities, nor can they afford to send employees off site for training, particularly during peak periods, as it means they will be short staffed. There is arguably a need for a substantial shift in culture. Transforming this will require vision and commitment by farm owners, management and the support of government and industry stakeholders. "Strong and innovative leadership and management within organisations play a key role, acting as both a 'trigger' and 'enabler' of skill utilisation" (Skills Australia, 2012). According to Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE), a mere 43 individuals completed Certificate level training courses for Production Horticulture between 2006/07 and 2011/12, the majority completing Certificate II. On a positive note, the number of completions was at its highest in 2011/12 with 29 graduating (10 in Cert II, 5 in Cert III, and 14 in Cert IV).

Developing skills through on-the-job training and skill sets – The methodologies and approaches that work for other agricultural sectors are not generally appropriate for horticulture due to the time constraints of producers and the seasonal nature of the workforce. While the provision of Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) has been beneficial in assisting workers to gain formal qualifications for skills they already have, production horticulture employers overwhelmingly prefer just-in-time training in specific skill sets because it involves shorter periods of training which impacts less on production, generally costs less and tends to address immediate skills needs. This building block approach seems to be the preferred

approach to gaining full qualifications; i.e. a number of skill sets and/or individual units of competency are completed over a period of time that fits in with workloads, eventually adding up to a full qualification.

Skill sets are defined as a grouping of one or more competencies that meet a client's specific skills need.

There are two kinds of skill sets: those that are endorsed in national training packages and those developed by registered training organisations in response to the needs of enterprises and individuals. Current funding policy does not recognise the latter. As at June 2012 there were 116 training package skills sets identified in the agrifood sector. This is a 100 per cent increase on the 2006 figures and clearly confirms that skill sets are a preferred vehicle for meeting emerging skills development needs (Mills et al., 2012). Skills Australia believes that there is merit to the argument that skill sets are "capable of meeting a range of needs, including a pathway to qualifications, as a tool for workforce development in enterprises, and as a mechanism to provide skill top-ups, particularly for existing workers."

Confronted by risk - Production horticulture is subject to a wide variety of risks in the form of climatic variation, pests, disease and price risks, as well as natural disasters such as droughts and floods. Rising costs for fuel, electricity, machinery, packaging, fertilisers and labour and compliance costs are increasing challenges for producers who operate in a price-taking environment. With limited scope to set their own price, or to recoup cost increases through consumers, producers are increasing and diversifying production, value-adding to product, investing in new technologies and machinery and simply working harder. While remote, the potential for the backpacker labour source to be negatively impacted by the rising Australian dollar, a major health scare (e.g. avian flu) or our own climatic circumstances leaves many small and medium growers constantly on a financial knife's edge.

Resource conscious - Compared to other agricultural industries, horticulture is a high value and efficient user of water and land resources. The industry occupies only three per cent of the State's total land under crops and uses only 10 per cent of the State's irrigation water but produces almost 40 per cent of the value of all irrigated products. Producers are increasingly adopting sustainable farm management practices and have earned a strong reputation for safe, clean and green food production.



4.0 CURRENT WORKFORCE PROFILE

4.1 WORKFORCE MARKET

A number of factors inhibit the industry in filling demand for workers, including competition for labour from the mining and coal seam gas sectors, poor promotion of the industry as an employer of choice, an ageing demographic and declining rural population. The lack of a readily-available, casual local workforce has resulted in industry drawing on an alternative pool of employees primarily backpackers, participants of the Seasonal Worker Program (previously Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme), older workers (grey nomads), female spouses and permanent migrants.

According to the Queensland Agricultural Industry Skills and Workforce Demand Report 2012 one third of businesses employ international labour. Most jobs are filled through word-of-mouth or through private arrangements with backpacker hostels. While the national Harvest Labour Scheme (HLS) seeks to assist producers to access sufficient labour to harvest crops, anecdotal evidence suggests that the effectiveness of this contracted service varies between grower regions and it has not been as effective as it could be. Harvest offices are located in regions with large areas of horticulture production and are run by a number of different contract organisations funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Their services are provided at no cost to producers.



4.2 CAPABILITY GAPS AND PRIORITY SKILLS NEEDS

The following were identified through skills needs surveys conducted by Growcom in 2011 and 2012, including an online Workforce Skills and Training Survey conducted in November/December 2012, which attracted 115 respondents.

- **Most common level of education:**

The most common level of education is completion of year 10 (31 per cent). An additional 18 per cent have completed secondary school, about 22 per cent have a certificate or diploma of some kind, 19 per cent have a degree, and about 11 per cent have completed a post-graduate degree.
- **Key skills needs:**
 - **Business owners/managers:** Business and financial management, Technology (IT, GPS etc), marketing, soil / nutrient management, integrated pest management, water management, leadership management, staff management, heavy machinery operation, workplace health and safety, vegetation and land management, clean energy and carbon farming, succession planning, chemical application, mechanical servicing and repairs.
 - **Family members:** Computer skills, business and financial management, team management, workshop machinery operation, heavy machinery operation, workplace health and safety, integrated pest management, machine maintenance, and succession planning.
- **Full/part time staff:** heavy machinery operation, chemical application, computer skills, team management, chainsaw operation, integrated pest management, workplace health and safety, welding, and workshop machinery operation.
- **Casual staff:** picking and packing, workshop machinery operation, workplace health and safety, machine maintenance, heavy machinery operation, and chemical application.
- **Main skills shortage areas:**

The most common areas where growers are experience shortages in skilled workers are machinery operations, office / personal management, machinery maintenance, picking and quality assurance.
- **Most popular methods of learning:**
 - field days
 - visits to local grower facilities
 - courses with practical information
 - workshops and networking sessions.

Courses that lead to formal qualifications were given low ratings, as were webinars and information delivered via the phone.
- **Main drivers for training and upskilling of growers or their staff:**
 - increasing profitability
 - adoption of the latest technology and practices
 - increasing operational efficiency
 - improving business planning and financial management.
- **Main benefits obtained from recent training:**
 - improved quality of the product and/or service
 - improved technical knowledge
 - increased production
 - improved business management.
- **Key factors deterring training:**

By far the most common factor discouraging training is cost. Other limitations include unsuitable locations or times of courses offered.
- **Key factors influencing the employment of trainees:**

73 per cent have never employed a trainee. The primary reason given was that the work was inconsistent and seasonal; however a lack of information on traineeships and potential business benefits is also a contributing factor.
- **Main type of training undertaken:**

Informal, on-the-job training is the most common form of training undertaken by staff.
- **Level of investment in training opportunities other than on-the-job training:**

49 per cent of businesses provide training opportunities to full-time permanent staff, while 29 per cent provide training opportunities to casual staff.
- **Most common form of technology used:**

Computers and laptops are the most common form of technology used in horticultural businesses, with smartphones also regularly

used. In contrast, most respondents indicated that they currently never use tablet computers or common internet communication services (e.g. Skype, webinars or teleconferencing) in their businesses.

See Appendix Two for a graphical snapshot of some of the key results from Growcom's December 2012 Skills and Training Needs Survey.



4.3 KEY ISSUES CURRENTLY AFFECTING THE INDUSTRY

Throughout November and December 2012 Growcom collated information in a variety of ways to determine the main currently affecting industry. This included one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders, in-depth telephone discussions and a series of 10 consultation workshops held throughout Queensland's key growing areas.

The following is a synopsis of the most commonly raised issues highlighted by stakeholders during the consultation process. See Appendix Three for a summary of stakeholder suggested solutions to address these.

Issues in attracting workers

- The image of the production horticulture industry needs improving to make it more attractive to new entrants and existing workers.
- The better businesses have few issues attracting staff as word of mouth networks are very effective and in most cases they are the farm of choice for permanent workers and casual workers. It is not always a case of lower salaries turning people off. Sometimes the deterrent is the business' reputation, how they treat people, or the perceived lack of career progression prospects.
- There is generally a lack of knowledge among career advisors, parents and students regarding the wide range of career pathways within the industry. This is largely due to ineffective promotion. In addition, many of the career advisors have no first-hand experience dealing with the production horticulture supply chain and are so are unable to offer valuable insight into the industry. Improvements are needed to increase motivation for school leavers to pursue careers in production horticulture.
- The seasonal nature of many of the enterprises means there is a lack of a stable, suitably skilled workforce particularly at a supervisory level. This poses a significant constraint to attraction, career path development and continuity of skills.

- There is a lack of knowledge regarding the various labour hire options other than backpackers; e.g. refugees, migrant workers, WWOOF (Willing Workers on Organic Farms), Seasonal Workers Program, employee sponsorship, traineeships etc. Much of the information required by producers is found on various government websites but unless one knows where to look it is difficult to access. A central information hub would make access much easier.
- There is ineffective dissemination of information regarding updates to worker schemes such as the Seasonal Worker Program and WWOOF.
- There is a general reluctance to employ a worker under the Seasonal Worker Program because of the costs involved (e.g. airfares) and the minimum work hours producers are obliged to provide. During slower periods some producers may not have sufficient work to provide them. Despite the benefits of good productivity and returning skills associated with employing workers under this scheme, producers believe it is easier and more cost-effective to employ backpackers instead.
- The availability of workers on farm has been made easier with the 417 Working Holiday Maker visa, however there are problems associated with language barriers especially in terms of inductions and filling out employer forms.
- If a backpacker is good, producers would like it to be legally possible to rehire them however this is not currently possible. Also, a six-month visa is not long enough as it takes the first few months to train them. Producers want a say on visa restrictions.
- It is sometimes difficult to get harvest workers when needed. Currently some of the Harvest Trail offices are not operating as efficiently as they should (lack of screening, recruitment turnaround times are sometimes not fast enough and some Harvest Trail representatives are not always accessible at times of need).
- Producers are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up to date with the various employment-related legal obligations.
- Given the high turnover of seasonal workers, the need to conduct regular, lengthy inductions is costly and time consuming for producers. In addition, there is a lack of consistency in terms of the quality of these inductions from business to business.
- Any statewide online induction training program that is developed needs to be easily accessed and well promoted.
- The inability to attract skilled local workers continues to be an issue, in particular machinery operators / licensed tractor and forklift drivers / managers / supervisors / agronomists. Several producers are therefore recruiting skilled workers from countries such as New Zealand, South African and Zimbabwe (similar culture, English speaking and good work ethic and farming expertise). The nature of the industry means that a high percentage of employees are casual by necessity. This lack of job security may discourage locals looking for full time work.
- Producers are also facing increased competition for skilled workers from the mining and coal seam gas industries. Wages have been pushed up as a result. Producers can't afford to match the salaries offered by mining companies. The good workers are being lost to the mines as a result. In some cases those locals who are interested in working on the farms want high salaries but don't have the skills to justify them.

Issues in retaining and upskilling workers

- Many producers lack knowledge of effective attraction, recruitment and retention strategies, which is crucial if the industry is to become the “industry of choice” and individual producers are to become “employers of choice”.
- Many producers do not have formally documented HR processes; e.g. performance reviews, grievance process, documented workplace health and safety training etc.
- In general there is a lack of a workforce development / training culture. With many producers having slim profit margins training tends to be viewed as an expense rather than an investment.
- There is a need for industry-experienced trainers. Some producers believe the lack of industry knowledge shown by trainers is a major deterrent as they often know more than the trainers do therefore they are not likely to learn anything new or of value. In addition, presenters need to tailor course content for the production horticulture industry to make learning more engaging and relevant. With no clear return of investment there is little incentive for them to attend formal training courses.
- Some employers are concerned that if they invest in training the trained employee may then seek an increase in salary or leave for the mines.
- There is a reluctance to invest in upskilling seasonal employees as most do not return so it is viewed as money wasted.
- Many seasonal enterprises find it difficult to get skilled supervisors who are willing to work for a short season and return the next year. This lack of readily available leadership / supervisory skills is hampering productivity.
- Basic language and literacy skills are barriers to training for some low-skill level workers.
- Many regard the cost of mandatory training (i.e. forklift licences) as being too high.
- Many women play a vital role in business operations but lack qualifications and are under-valued. An initiative is required to recognise and develop their skills.
- Many producers do not have risk management and contingency planning skills, decreasing their ability to cope in the event of a crisis (e.g. financial / climatic).
- There is generally a lack of understanding of the traineeship system and how it can help lift the skill levels within a business. Some have not employed trainees as they do not have qualified staff to train and mentor trainees/apprentices; e.g. mechanics. There is interest in the concept of sharing trainees with other commodity groups but little knowledge about what group training organisations offer.
- There is a concern regarding digital literacy levels among older workers and their ability to adapt and innovate as technology rapidly evolves. Producers need to be brought into the 21st century with technology and other innovations.
- Producers would like more information on how to reduce costs; how to improve efficiency; latest mechanisation available; new innovations and emerging best practice; current research outcomes; successful case studies from other industries; Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme, 457 and 417 visas; relevant legislation changes and the latest apps available.

- The financial viability of supplying training in the regions is challenged due to the small number of participants. This makes training courses expensive, which further lowers demand.
- The large supermarkets are increasing their quality assurance (QA) requirements, making it more difficult for producers, particularly the smaller players who cannot afford to meet the strict regulations. In addition, the various major supermarkets each require different QA systems, making it costly for producers, particularly the smaller ones.
- Current government funding policies are too restrictive. Policy makers’ insistence on full qualifications will not change the learning culture of the industry; instead the industry will gravitate away from the system towards informal learning. Lack of funding for skill sets and units of competency is a major deterrent. While National Workforce Development Funding includes Skill Sets it is limited to existing workers with Cert III or higher, which is an issue as most job roles within the industry sit below this level.
- The FarmReady Program was very popular but it ceased 30 June 2012. Producers would like it to be brought back as the support was vital in encouraging producers to invest in training.

Issues in upskilling workers in innovative practice and emerging technology

- Future prosperity will rely on the industry’s capacity to innovate. There is a need to improve “speed to market” of new knowledge, practices, and technology to industry.
- Workers need to be upskilled in new technologies and practices. The work of extension officers is vitally important. As opposed to private companies, there is no promotion for private gain. Instead extension officers can be relied on to provide unbiased information about the latest technology and best practice. The decrease in QDAFF extension officers has slowed the facilitation of information exchange at a time when it is most needed for producers to remain internationally competitive.

Issues influencing the need for formal, accredited training

During both the desktop studies and the consultation phase it became apparent that there are a number of factors currently influencing the need for accredited training, namely policy and legislation and various threats to the industry.

To assist producers plan future studies and alert RTOs to potential demand, skills needs have been mapped to formal units of competency where possible. These range from certificate III to diploma level units. While the list is fairly comprehensive, it is simply meant as a guide and does not cover the complete range of available units. Consultation with a registered training provider is advised.



■ Threats to industry

Economic volatility, low profit margins and high operating costs, extreme weather conditions, pests and environmental disasters are some of the industry's greatest threats.

What this means in terms of the skills needed: Risk management techniques and processes for preparedness and recovery will help mitigate or minimise the impact of these threats. Tailored training packages addressing these issues will empower industry to survive and/or thrive during these periods.

Other than those listed previously, some of the key skills required include:

Unit of competency	Qualification level
Monitor and manage small business operations	Cert IV
Manage small business finances	Cert IV
Identify risk and apply risk management processes	Cert IV
Manage risk	Diploma
Prepare and monitor budgets and financial reports	Diploma
Develop and review a business plan	Diploma

■ Policy and legislation:

Policy and legislation issues are of significant concern for the industry as they have major implications for skills needs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that producers are concerned that they can no longer "just focus on farming" as they are required to be skilled in multiple areas, including human resources, accounting and taxation, health and safety, immigration, carbon farming, pesticide use; etc. if they are to be compliant with the law.

With slim profit margins for most producers it is not viable to contract out many of these services, the result is growing pressure to ensure they have access to a multi-skilled employee base that can help meet their obligations or face non-compliance.

A recent ABC Rural report (Oct 2012) highlighted how various government policies and legislation are affecting producers such as Peter Buchanan from Sandowne Pineapple Co near Gympie. Buchanan is exiting the pineapple industry and listed "government red tape, compliance, workers compensation, and work place health and safety as things that effect the profitability of the crop" (Rogers, 2012).

While there are numerous laws impacting producers, the following have the most impact on skills needs.

Workplace Health and Safety (WHS):

The Queensland Work Health and Safety Act 2011 was passed by Parliament on 26 May 2011 and the Queensland Governor in Council approved the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 on 24 November 2011.

What this means in terms of the skills needed: To meet compliance requirements producers need to be more diligent in providing informal or formal training (where required) to ensure that workers are well equipped and competent to carry out the tasks they are allocated. This includes induction programs and adequate safety training for all workers.

Effective 1 January 2012, anyone carrying out high-risk work in the rural industry, such as operating a forklift, must hold a

high-risk work licence. Anybody wanting to obtain a licence has to receive formal training by a RTO and informal learning under a training plan while being supervised by someone who holds the appropriate high-risk work licence.

Some of the key skills required include:

Unit of competency	Qualification level
Contribute to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) processes	Cert III
Respond to emergencies	Cert III
Keeping records for a primary production business	Cert III
Prepare and apply chemicals	Cert III
Transport, handle and store chemicals	Cert III
Operate machinery and equipment	Cert III
Operate specialised machinery and equipment	Cert III
Operate chemical application machinery and equipment	Cert III
Maintain Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) processes	Cert IV
Plan and implement a chemical use program	Cert IV
Administer finance, insurance and legal requirements	Cert IV
Recruit, select and induct staff	Cert IV
Provide training through instruction and demonstration of work skills	Cert IV
Manage and develop a chemical use strategy	Diploma
Manage Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) processes	Diploma
Manage recruitment selection and induction processes	Diploma
Develop and manage a chemical risk strategy	Diploma



Biosecurity:

The new legislation is designed to assist the Australian Government to better control the risks of animal and plant pests and diseases entering, establishing, spreading and potentially causing harm to the Australian population, the environment and economy.

What this means in terms of the skills needed: Producers need to ensure that they have appropriate biosecurity plans and practices in place as well as efficient record keeping.

Some of the key skills required include:

Unit of competency	Qualification level
Keep records for a primary production business	Cert III
Work effectively in an emergency disease or plant pest response	Cert III
Identify and report unusual disease or plant pest signs	Cert III
Carry out emergency disease or plant pest control procedures at infected premises	Cert III
Prepare and apply chemicals	Cert III
Monitor and review biosecurity measures	Cert III
Plan and implement a chemical use program	Cert IV
Ensure compliance with pest legislation	Cert IV
Control weeds, pests and/or diseases	Cert IV
Implement pest management action plans	Cert IV
Implement and monitor quality assurance procedures	Cert IV
Develop a soil health and plant nutrition program	Cert IV
Identify risk and apply risk management processes	Cert IV
Administer finance, insurance and legal requirements	Cert IV
Diagnose plant health problems	Diploma
Develop a strategy for the management of target pests	Diploma
Develop a system for monitoring the pest management strategy	Diploma
Manage active operational emergency disease or plant pest sites	Diploma
Manage the implementation of an emergency disease or plant pest control program	Diploma
Manage a controlled growing environment	Diploma

Labour Relations:

Since 1 January 2010, all employers in Queensland's private sector have been covered by federal industrial laws. These laws lay down a set of ten minimum standards, called the National Employment Standards (NES), which apply to all employees as a minimum regardless of whether they are covered by an award or a workplace agreement.

As the production horticulture industry is labour intensive and engages a diverse workforce including permanent, casual, part-time, seasonal, migrant workers as well as contractors, there are a lot of labour regulations that they need to be aware of and compliant with.

What this means in terms of the skills needed: Employers need to have a good understanding of their obligations and responsibilities under the Fair Work Act, the NES, various industrial awards and agreements, work health and safety laws and immigration and visa requirements.

Some of the key skills required include:

Unit of competency	Qualification level
Keeping records for a primary production business	Cert III
Provide information on issues and policies	Cert IV
Supervise work routines and staff performance	Cert IV
Provide training through instruction and demonstration of work skills	Cert IV
Administer finance, insurance and legal requirements	Cert IV
Manage staff	Diploma
Develop workplace policies and procedures for sustainability	Diploma
Manage OHS processes	Diploma



Food Safety and Quality Assurance:

In order to improve public health and safety, Australian Governments have agreed that food safety should be managed throughout the food supply chain. The Food Production (Safety) Act 2000 aims to ensure the production of primary produce is carried out in a way that makes the primary produce fit for human consumption and maintains food quality.

What this means in terms of the skills needed: Australia's horticulture industry has long enjoyed domestic and international consumer confidence in the quality of their produce, largely because of high standards across all stages of the food supply chain, from paddock to plate. To maintain this positive reputation, as well as a competitive advantage in international markets, it is vital for producers to ensure employees are trained to meet the stringent food safety and quality assurance requirements.

Some of the key skills required include:

Unit of competency	Qualification level
Comply with industry quality assurance requirements	Cert III
Implement and monitor quality assurance procedures	Cert IV
Monitor the implementation of quality and food safety programs	Cert IV
Participate in a HACCP team	Cert IV
Plan, implement and review a quality assurance program	Diploma

Issues in data collection to support future planning

- There are many different qualification pathways that lead to working in production horticulture and limited availability of detailed data to indicate which pathway is preferred. A key constraint continues to be the absence of clear statistical data on VET enrolment and completion rates for production horticulture qualifications. This lack of data is hindering industry in its ability to recognise or plan for skill shortages in critical job roles.
- A better understanding of the number of production horticulture owners / managers nearing retirement age and the succession plans in place is needed to plan and mitigate against looming skills and labour shortages.



5.0 FUTURE TRENDS AND SKILLS NEEDS

5.1 GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY NEEDS WILL INCREASE

"With the world's population expected to grow from 7 billion to 9 billion, a growth of 30 per cent, in the next four decades, the demand on our food and agriculture systems will be greater than ever." (Power et al., 2012)

Food and its supply chain are firmly on the agenda. At a political level there has been some traction to address this, with Australia's first ever National Food Plan under development and state governments prioritising agriculture and food security in recently released policy platforms, however at the community level a disconnect exists. We cannot afford to continue to do "business as usual" – early action is essential.

What this means in terms of the skills needed: By farming smarter Australia can create a lasting advantage. This means using research and adopting new practices, investing in innovation, and improving input efficiency to keep production horticulture at the forefront of production methods. Farming Smarter, Not Harder, released in November 2012, is a report from the Centre for Policy Development on the future of Australian agriculture in the context of rising global demand, resource scarcity, and environmental pressures. According to the report "Australia's challenge is to increase productivity per hectare, without raising farm input costs".

The report recommends increased government funding for research and development and effective extension programs that improve transfer of knowledge from scientists to farming communities to speed up the implementation of more efficient, productive and sustainable ways of farming. Strong farm finances are highlighted as being "essential to allow farmers to invest in new farming practices, and stewardship of natural capital." (Eadie and Stone, 2012)

5.2 TECHNOLOGY USE WILL INCREASE

"... a move to mechanisation and robotics will inevitably lead to a higher standard of agronomic practices and a better quality crop that will give a higher return." (Harslett, 2009)

What this means in terms of the skills needed: New technologies have the potential to substantially alter horticulture farming practices, the way business is conducted and the environment in which we work. Technological skills will be needed to increase the innovative capacity and adaptability of producers. The critical skills required include information technology (software and hardware), wireless data communication, man-machine communication, advanced robotics, packhouse and processing automation, crop sensors, GPS and GIS applications, chemical spraying; water management, packaging technology and genetic engineering. New and strategically important productivity and efficiency enhancing technologies need to be promoted to producers on a timely basis.

5.3 INCREASING FARM CONSOLIDATION – USING FEWER BUT BETTER SKILLED WORKERS

"The trend towards farm consolidation is projected to continue, with larger corporate-style family farms and declining rural town populations resulting in a shortage of labour for horticulture in some areas. This will be particularly evident during seasonal activities such as harvesting and pruning." (Victorian Department of Primary Industries, 2012)

"Labour availability and rising costs are going to become increasingly problematic... Employers need to be looking for the means to overcome this challenge. Mechanisation and robotics are the best option for decreasing the reliance on input... the remaining labour input is usually a more desirable job." (Harslett, 2009)

What this means in terms of the skills needed: With horticultural production expected to become increasingly reliant on mechanisation, remote sensing and automation producers are likely to require fewer but greater skilled workers. The desired skills are likely to revolve around science and technology. Increased skills in business and risk management will help better prepare producers to cope with increasing farm consolidation.

5.4 GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE VARIABILITY

"The risk of crop failures due to more variable/volatile growing conditions is also predicted to increase, affecting the industry's ability to meet increasingly specific and targeted quality assurance/market requirements." (Victorian Department of Primary Industries, 2012)

"The future will see an ever increasing range of species and cultivars explored, hybridised, trialled and introduced (or reintroduced) into cultivation." (Mason, 2012)

What this means in terms of the skills needed: The impact of changing weather patterns on production will depend, to a large extent, on a producer's ability to adapt. Those who are able to adapt production to variable weather will be best positioned to profit. As scientific understanding of weather conditions and longer-term climate risks continue to rapidly develop, this information will help inform strategic farm management practices. Among the skills needed to better cope with climate variability are improved water efficiency and storage, climate control systems, pest, weed and risk management. Producers will also need to become more knowledgeable about diversification and more resilient crop varieties to reduce reliance on a particular genetic crop.





5.5 INCREASED PRESSURE TO WIN LOCAL SHOPPER LOYALTY TO AUSTRALIAN GROWN PRODUCE

"Australia is a relatively small horticultural exporter, with most production targeted at a generally stable domestic market. Strong competition in international markets is expected to grow further, particularly from other southern hemisphere nations...A significant opportunity to differentiate Australian produce exists by way of developing new varieties (e.g. the pink lady apple) and new technologies (e.g. packaging technologies)." (Victorian Department of Primary Industries, 2012)

While many predict that Australia will become the food bowl of Asia, this is unlikely in the short-term. Coupled with the continued strong dollar and expected escalation of cheaper imports, there is likely to be an increasing focus on growing local shopper loyalty.

What this means in terms of the skills needed: Producers will need to secure local shopper loyalty by creating innovative and appealing new lines and developing novel and effective marketing strategies. This will require skills in marketing, innovation and contract negotiation.

5.6 COMPETITION FOR NATURAL RESOURCES

Australia is currently faced with the pressure of three fast-growing sources of competition for land: mining, coal-seam gas and new housing developments, resulting in strong competition for natural resources.

"The availability and quality of water, together with urban expansion pressures, are likely to pose challenges." (Victorian Department of Primary Industries, 2012)

What this means in terms of the skills needed: To mitigate risks and improve management of their water resources, producers will need knowledge of and skills in the latest water use efficiency methods and technologies, as well as water savings practices.

5.7 RESTRICTED USE OF CHEMICALS FOR CONTROL OF WEEDS AND DISEASES

"Social and environmental concerns are going to restrict the use of chemicals for control of weeds and diseases in vegetable production/agriculture. Farmers need to look at alternative methods of weed and disease control." (Harslett, 2009)

"The industry faces a number of challenges, including the withdrawal of some chemicals used in product disinfection, and pests and diseases becoming more resistant to some traditional chemicals." (Victorian Department of Primary Industries, 2012)

What this means in terms of the skills needed: Producers will need to investigate integrating various control methods to reduce reliance on chemicals. Best practice skills in transport, storage, handling, use of, and application technology will be required to ensure environmentally responsible practices are maintained. Additional skills in control traffic farming and on-farm biosecurity (containment of identifiable diseases and non transference) will be beneficial.

5.8 MORE COST-SAVING, INNOVATIVE MEASURES WILL NEED TO BE ADOPTED

"Australian agriculture will need to apply a wide range of innovations to expand production...matching agricultural products to variable soil and climate conditions could allow less productive land to be used for carbon storage or biodiversity plantings, with appropriate carbon price or payments for ecosystem services. Access to such payments is likely to be very valuable to farmers looking to diversify their incomes." (Eadie and Stone, 2012)

What this means in terms of the skills needed: As a result of increasing economic pressures, producers will need to seek out alternative market opportunities and investigate cost-saving, innovative measures, such as precision agriculture, diversification and value adding as ways to achieve healthy profit margins. Increasing automation will continue to significantly influence a change in skills needs and open up new career pathways.

5.9 INCREASED FINANCIAL PRESSURE FOR FAMILY MEMBERS TO FIND SOURCES OF REVENUE OFF FARM

Economic pressures are also likely to result in an increasing number of family members having to upskill in order to obtain jobs off farm to support their family business.

What this means in terms of the skills needed: Formal qualifications in agribusiness will not only be of significant value to their business but also provide family members with recognised skills that could secure them employment elsewhere in times of financial need.

5.10 AGEING WORKFORCE – INCREASING RETIREMENT OF BABY BOOMERS

"The looming crisis in workforce ageing and any hope of reversing the unsustainable demographic will need a coordinated, unified approach by industry. The impact of structural adjustment and ensuring industry builds its adaptive capacity for the long-term, will necessitate an unprecedented level of collaboration and shared vision." (Agrifood Skills, 2011)

What this means in terms of the skills needed: With the predicted retirement of many owner/managers over the next five to 10 years there is likely to be a major outflow of knowledge and skills. By improving succession planning skills, retiring producers will ensure that their business and successive management are adequately prepared.

6.0 QUEENSLAND HORTICULTURE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

“I see that the people who succeed in industry, all around the world, are those who have a greater amount of knowledge, a better capacity to communicate and solve problems, a capacity to organise themselves (and others) and a strong network of peers.”

(Mason, 2012)

The following are recommended actions to address the issues identified in the body of this report. To assist regional workforce development planning we have highlighted where recommendations can be implemented at both a state and regional level.

6.1 OPTIMISE CURRENT SKILLS: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ATTRACT SKILLED WORKERS AND NEW ENTRANTS TO THE INDUSTRY

Improved collaboration between industry and government is key to improving attraction. A partnership approach can help shift perception and encourage school-based traineeships by assisting students, teachers and careers advisers to better understand what production horticulture is all about. The rollout of the recent Ag Inspirations work experience pilot in the Scenic Rim and Logan regions is an excellent example of a quality collaborative initiative and future investment in the delivery of similar programs should be considered.

AG INSPIRATIONS – CHANGING PERCEPTIONS AND IMPROVING ATTRACTION

Ag Inspirations was developed as a pilot for Work Inspiration, a UK work experience model. The Scenic Rim pilot involved 16 students from six schools visiting eight employers across the agriculture supply chain over six days. Employers afforded the group a behind the scenes look at their business and each student was given a valuable opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with an employer, enabling them to have a meaningful conversation and an honest and personal insight into career choices and job pathways. As a career awareness initiative Ag Inspirations was a huge success. It helped change the students' perceptions of agriculture and, with a greater understanding of the breadth of the industry, it is inspiring them to make more informed decisions when considering their career options. But the value of the program went even further than inspiring students - it also exposed employers to potential employees and proved to be a successful model for cross industry collaboration. The Scenic Rim Pilot involved a partnership between industry, partnership brokers Worklinks Inc., Growcom, AgForce, Rural Skills Australia, Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. In light of its success, a number of regions have already expressed an interest in this dynamic model of student and industry engagement.



AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Support the development of robust regional workforce development planning	<p>6.1.1 Seek funding to appoint Regional Workforce Development Officers (RWDOs) in key growing areas to progress local initiatives complementary to the Queensland Production Horticulture Workforce Plan, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop regional strategies to raise the profile and improve the image of the production horticulture industry - initiate and drive sustainable region-based workforce development projects and activities - improve industry engagement in workforce development - raise awareness of career pathways - establish and steer a regional industry and educators' network. <p>RWDOs should be placed with regional industry groups where they exist. Where they do not exist, it is recommended that Queensland Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (QDAFF) investigate opportunities to assist with the development of tailored regional workforce development plans.</p>	Regions
	<p>6.1.2 Identify opportunities to form strategic partnerships to develop tailored local workforce development initiatives; e.g. with regional economic development agencies, councils etc.</p>	State & Regions

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve career pathway information and awareness	<p>6.1.3 Work with the Primary Industries Education Foundation (PIEF) to further build on their list of education providers and government agencies engaged in the promotion of careers in agriculture and assist in the wider promotion thereof.</p>	Regions
	<p>6.1.4 Establish a Queensland Production Horticulture Industry, Education and Training Network consisting of Growcom, RWDOs from regional industry groups (e.g. Bundaberg Fruit and Vegetable Growers, Bowen Gumlu Growers Association and Mareeba District Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association), industry development officers (IDOs), QDAFF extension officers, Rural Skills Australia and relevant training organisations with the aim of increasing collaboration and information sharing on workforce development issues, training initiatives and projects. Regular information sharing will result in reduced duplication of efforts, shared learning, joint problem solving, better promotion of research to producers and, importantly increased promotion of workforce development opportunities and grower uptake of training. Similar networks, such as the Bundaberg Agricultural Training Group, should be established at a regional level, providing feedback to the state network. Essentially, the aim of the networks should be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improve information sharing on innovative projects, education resources and gateway school programs - improve networking and collaboration between industry, government and the education and training sectors to achieve targeted outcomes and reduce duplication - ensure that available education and training programs meet the needs of students and industry - provide feedback to Agrifood Skills to support the continuous development of training packages - provide feedback to the Horticulture Industry Development Group. 	State & Regions
	<p>6.1.5 Investigate opportunities to further enhance the Ag Inspirations Program as a career awareness model to increase appreciation of and demand for the wide variety of careers in the supply chain, lift the image of the industry and re-position production horticulture as a career of choice in a high-tech, world-class industry; one that offers something for everyone, whether their interests lie in science, business, technology, engineering, marketing or the environment.</p>	State & Regions

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve career pathway information and awareness	6.1.6 Establish regional and cross-industry partnerships to deliver Ag Inspirations programs for students, career advisors and training providers in key agricultural areas.	State & Regions
	6.1.7 Develop Ag Inspirations guidelines for RWDOs and career advisors to enable them deliver the program independently.	State & Regions
	6.1.8 Explore opportunities to run Ag Inspirations program for a range of demographics including long-term unemployed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and migrants.	State & Regions
	6.1.9 Develop a one-stop, industry-owned, online Horticulture Hub with links and information about the various government and industry websites that provide workforce development information (eg education resources, training and career information, funding programs, human resource guidelines and templates, case studies etc). By creating a central hub that is tailored to the production horticulture industry it will improve ease of access and address producers' concern that information is scattered and often difficult to find.	State

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve ability of businesses to attract workers	6.1.10 Improve opportunities for production horticulture business owners to invest in business management and HR skills to help improve the work culture, lift the industry profile, and improve attraction to workers.	State & Regions
	6.1.11 Seek Federal Government and stakeholder support to review the 417 (Working Holiday Maker) visa to better meet the seasonal employment needs of industry.	State & Regions
	6.1.12 Investigate innovative solutions to attracting skilled workers, this may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing regional cross-industry workforce initiatives that aim to attract, develop and retain skilled workers in the regions using a collaborative approach; e.g. the Western Downs National Regional Initiative. - employment agencies developing programs where skilled workers can be rotated between different seasonal enterprises. 	State & Regions
	6.1.13 Investigate opportunities for QQDAFF to collaborate with key stakeholders to improve the image and branding of the agriculture sector as a whole.	State

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Increase industry awareness of employment options available to secure a continuous supply of skilled / unskilled labour	6.1.14. Facilitate information sessions, in partnership with government and key employment agencies, to increase the production horticulture industry's awareness of the various employment options available, the legalities involved and the procedures for engagement (e.g. Seasonal Worker Program, Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme, Temporary 457 visa, 417 Working Holiday Visa, traineeships etc.). Sessions should be offered in key growing areas throughout Queensland.	State & Regions
	6.1.15. Investigate and promote successful case studies of employers engaged in various employment programs (e.g. Seasonal Worker Program, Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme, traineeships etc.).	State & Regions
	6.1.16 Establish a working group consisting of Harvest Trail representatives (state and national), Growcom, regional industry groups, IDOs and interested stakeholders to fully assess and make recommendations on how the various contracted service providers can better meet the needs of the Queensland production horticulture industry and, in particular, ensure that sufficient seasonal workers are available at the right time in the right place.	National State Regional



AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Reduce induction costs and time burden for producers and improve farm readiness of new seasonal workers prior to commencement	6.1.17 Establish a working group consisting of Rural Skills Australia, Agrifood Skills, Growcom, IDOs, RWDOs and QQDAFF with the aim of reviewing current induction card models and determining agreed national induction standards for seasonal workers. It is suggested that a pilot be conducted in Queensland with the view to standardising induction training across all states so that the skills are transferable. Given the potential for the training to become endorsed at a national level, it is recommended that a national organisation such as Rural Skills Australia, which already has an online training presence, is considered to be the conduit for the Queensland pilot of online production horticulture induction training. Investigate opportunities to promote this online training to international employment agencies servicing working holiday makers and local labour hire companies.	State & Regions

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Address problems associated with language barriers	6.1.18 Investigate opportunities for producers to access affordable translation services for key workplace employment issues; e.g. employer on-farm workplace health and safety information, employment forms etc.	State & Regions

6.2 INSTIL AN INDUSTRY OF CHOICE IMAGE AND ETHIC: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO SUPPORT INDUSTRY TO RETAIN WORKERS

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve recognition and promotion of production horticulture as an industry of choice	6.2.1 Regularly seek opportunities to promote production horticulture as an industry of choice through initiatives such as media articles showcasing employers of choice within the industry, professional development field tours for career advisors, Ag Inspirations Programs for students and production horticulture employers of choice awards to acknowledge industry champions.	State & Regions
	6.2.2 Conduct study to identify employer of choice champions and use the findings to develop workforce planning and development models to assist both small and large producers to adopt best practice for attracting, retaining and developing employees.	State & Regions

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Provide production horticulture businesses with support to become employers of choice	6.2.3. Build on and expand regional access to Growcom's successful Workplace Essentials Program, which provides employers with useful tools to assist with better employee management, and aims to educate employers about their obligations and responsibilities to employees under various employment-related legislation. Investigate the potential to relay the workshops via webinars to increase accessibility.	State & Regions
	6.2.4. Relevant government agencies, in collaboration with Growcom and regional industry groups, should work with labour hire contractors to address employment compliance issues. While the majority of labour hire contractors and backpacker hostels are legitimate and reputable businesses, operating within the law and providing regular and stable employment, there remain a number of 'rogue' operators who do not and these are tarnishing the industry's image. Supporting them to do the right thing will help address this.	State & Regions

AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE – NOT JUST THROUGH SMART TECHNOLOGY

Stanley Mackay planted his first banana crop in North Queensland in 1945, beginning a family tradition that has lasted 65 years. Third and fourth generations are together managing Mackays, successfully growing it into Australia's largest and most significant banana producer. As a family business, all are directly involved in the overall strategy and management of the operation. Mackays also acknowledges that their success is built and sustained through the hard work of some 400 staff and their families who work on farm all year round. While set in a paradise of tropical beauty, the labour and logistics of banana growing operations often make the conditions trying and exhausting. The introduction of new 'smart' technology to their operations means that much work can be undertaken remotely with confidence. But smart technology is only as efficient as those who use it – equally important is how staff are acknowledged and supported as integral to better business performance. This recognition and a supportive and forward-thinking environment ensures that Mackays have no trouble recruiting and retaining their best employees.

6.3 SKILL FOR SUSTAINABILITY: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO INCREASE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND UPSKILL WORKERS

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Increase uptake of training	6.3.1 Improve industry's understanding of workforce development, how to access training and professional development opportunities that address their skills needs, as well as available funding. For key vehicles see recommendation 6.1.1. and 6.1.9.	State & Regions
	6.3.2 Promote the value of investing in training by conducting a training return of investment (ROI) study across a region, using small to large enterprises as case studies.	State & Regions
	6.3.3 Collaborate with relevant regional training providers to develop and promote an annual calendar linking skills needs (as identified through survey results) with relevant Skills Sets / units of competency.	State & Regions
	6.3.4 Seek support to increase the flexibility of training packages to better respond to the needs of the industry. In particular, seek support from State and Federal Governments to change current funding policies to include Skill Sets and individual units of competency with no prerequisite qualifications limiting eligibility.	State & Regions
	6.3.5 Seek funding assistance from the State Government for key Skill Sets / units of competency aligned to the needs highlighted in the Plan, with no prerequisite qualifications limiting eligibility.	State & Regions
	6.3.6 Seek support from Skills Queensland to change current funding policy to support skills sets that align with licensing requirements; e.g. forklift licence.	State & Regions
	6.3.7 Investigate opportunities to improve grower capacity to manage their businesses more efficiently, competitively and profitably, and enhance their resilience against economic and climatic volatility.	State & Regions
	6.3.8 Raise awareness among potential employees, recruiters and career advisors of the value of qualifications in machinery operations and maintenance; e.g. forklift and tractor.	State & Regions
	6.3.9 As per 6.1.4., establish state and regional Production Horticulture Industry, Education and Training Networks with the aim of increasing collaboration and information sharing on workforce development issues, training initiatives and projects. Regular information sharing will result in reduced duplication of efforts, shared learning, joint problem solving, better promotion of research and, importantly increased promotion of workforce development opportunities and grower uptake of training.	State & Regions

WORKFORCE PLANNING – WORTH THE INVESTMENT

At Austchilli it's recognised that great workers don't just happen – they are developed. With a clear organisational structure, a deep understanding of each and every job in the company, and good policies and processes, Austchilli provides long-term stable employment and is committed to enhancing the skills and expertise of its employees through training and skills development. Recruitment is managed with an external agent, and includes the agent undertaking all necessary paperwork (visa checking, tax and superannuation etc) as well as presenting a tailor-made online induction video. This means that employees come to the company 'work-ready'. An on-site induction and targeted training in specific jobs (including apprenticeships and traineeships) ensures that employees know their chillis! The majority of staff are provided with formal certificate level training in safe food handling. A culture of continuous learning and information-sharing around the latest technologies and practices ensure quality outcomes.



AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve training to better meet the needs of industry	6.3.10 Convene Production Horticulture Industry, Education and Training workshops to review relevancy of current training courses, provide feedback to RTOs on producer needs, and to gain an update on any new courses. Feedback from regional workshops should be communicated to the Queensland Production Horticulture Industry, Education and Training Network and, where changes to units of competency may be required, Agrifood Skills should be informed to ensure continuous improvement.	State & Regions
	6.3.11 Conduct annual training needs survey to identify training requirements, and promote outcomes to relevant regional training providers.	State & Regions
	6.3.12 Develop a Master Farmers Register aimed at identifying respected industry experts (both current and retired producers) interested in imparting their on-farm knowledge and expertise in any of the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as an industry trainer (formal qualifications will need to be undertaken) - as a guest speaker at training sessions - as a mentor. Those on the register could also be called on to provide input into policy issues.	State & Regions

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve language, literacy and numeracy levels	6.3.13. Promote language, literacy and numeracy training programs to increase the workforce's capacity to learn and gain higher level skills.	State & Regions
	6.3.14 Investigate opportunities to raise digital literacy levels to decrease vulnerability as technology rapidly evolves.	State & Regions

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve "speed to market" and adoption of new knowledge, practices, and technology	6.3.15 Hold annual workshop to raise awareness of research and development projects, the latest research outcomes, and new technology and practices. The workshop should be convened by the Queensland Production Horticulture Industry, Education and Training Network.	State & Regions
	6.3.16 Establish a mechanism to obtain regular and ongoing updates from key research bodies including HAL, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Nuffield Scholarships, Agrifood Skills, QQDAFF Science and universities.	State & Regions
	6.3.17 Promote new productivity and efficiency enhancing technologies and practices, and encourage uptake by identifying early adopters and promoting their successes.	State & Regions
	6.3.18 Provide timely promotion of VET courses incorporating new technology or practices and the potential return of investment.	State & Regions
	6.3.19 Encourage research studies into alternative methods for weed and disease control to reduce reliance on chemicals, and provide timely promotion of the outcomes.	State & Regions



AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Ensure producers have the skills to maximise efficient consumption of energy, water, and other resource inputs	6.3.20 Identify technology training requirements by conducting industry training needs surveys and promote outcomes to relevant RTOs to enhance their capacity to respond to industry's needs.	State & Regions
	6.3.21 Improve promotion of the latest efficiency practices, technologies and training courses.	State & Regions
	6.3.22 Work collaboratively with relevant government departments and RTOs to ensure that training programs incorporate the latest in innovative efficiency practices.	State & Regions

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Increase participation of rural women in skills development	6.3.23 Conduct information sessions on opportunities for women to complete Cert IV / Diploma in Agribusiness through a recognition of prior learning (RPL) process and gap training and continue to investigate funding opportunities for women to gain agribusiness qualifications.	State & Regions
	6.3.24 Promote women in production horticulture who are gaining recognised qualifications, to encourage others to follow suit.	State & Regions

FROM FARMER'S WIFE TO BUSINESS PARTNER

Melinda Brimblecombe of Moira Farming in southern Queensland may come across as a quiet farmer's wife, but in reality she is a dynamic, proactive and inspirational business woman who is working to inspire other women in production horticulture to gain the recognition they deserve for years on on-the-job experience in farm offices.

"All too often we hear of women with years of working in and on their farming business who undersell their role and their contribution to the business," said Melinda. "Using recognition of prior learning (RPL) approaches means that much of our expertise dealing with employment relations and payroll, Workplace Health and Safety obligations, pest and disease control, production planning, financial planning and management and marketing can be formally recognised. Where gaps in knowledge are identified, gap training can be undertaken to achieve full accreditation."

The additional skills and knowledge that women can gain from undertaking Agribusiness qualifications give them and their business a competitive edge. As an added bonus, the qualification increases their employability in hard times when working off-farm becomes a necessity. Melinda is working with Growcom and the Australian Agricultural College Corporation (AACC) to raise awareness about how to gain a Certificate IV or Diploma in Agribusiness by having experience and expertise credited through RPL.



6.4 PLAN FOR LONG-TERM PROSPERITY: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION FOR PLANNING PURPOSES

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve statistical data reporting regarding production horticulture training enrolments and completions	6.4.1 Government should develop a more accurate system to gather production horticulture specific data regarding VET enrolments and completions. This should include mandatory reporting of fee-for-service courses.	State

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve understanding of implications for industry of an ageing workforce	6.4.2 Conduct study to determine number of producers / managers retiring within next 5-10 years, the implications for industry, and succession planning in place.	State
	6.4.3 Investigate opportunities to apply for funding to upskill identified successors and enable ongoing prosperity of the industry.	State & Regions

AIM	RECOMMENDATIONS	REGION
Improve understanding of the extent to which industry outsources specialist skills and the implication thereof	6.4.4 QQDAFF should investigate the extent to which production horticulture, and agriculture enterprises in general, rely on outsourcing specialist activities rather than acquiring the required skills within their workforce, and the implication thereof.	State



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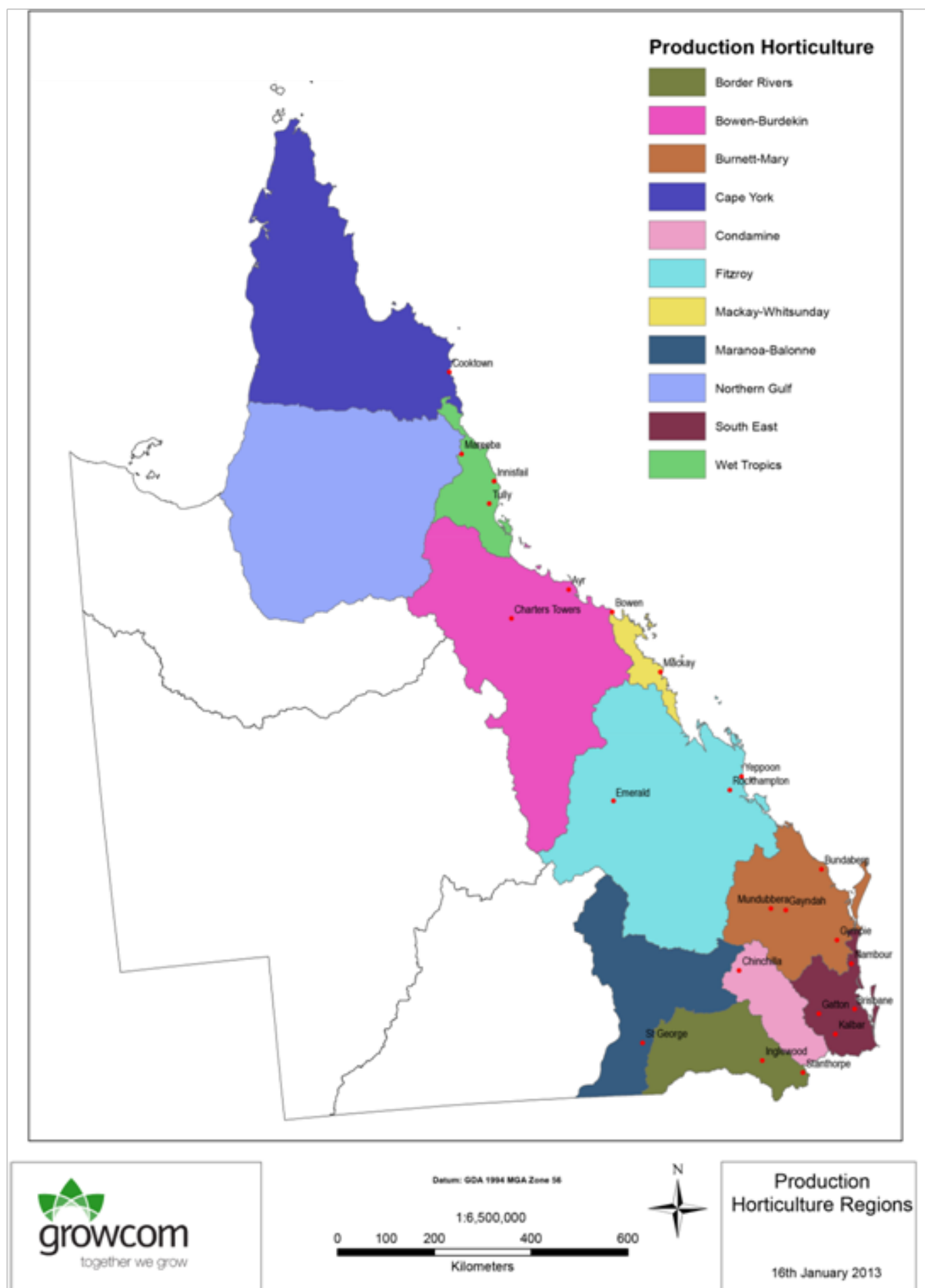
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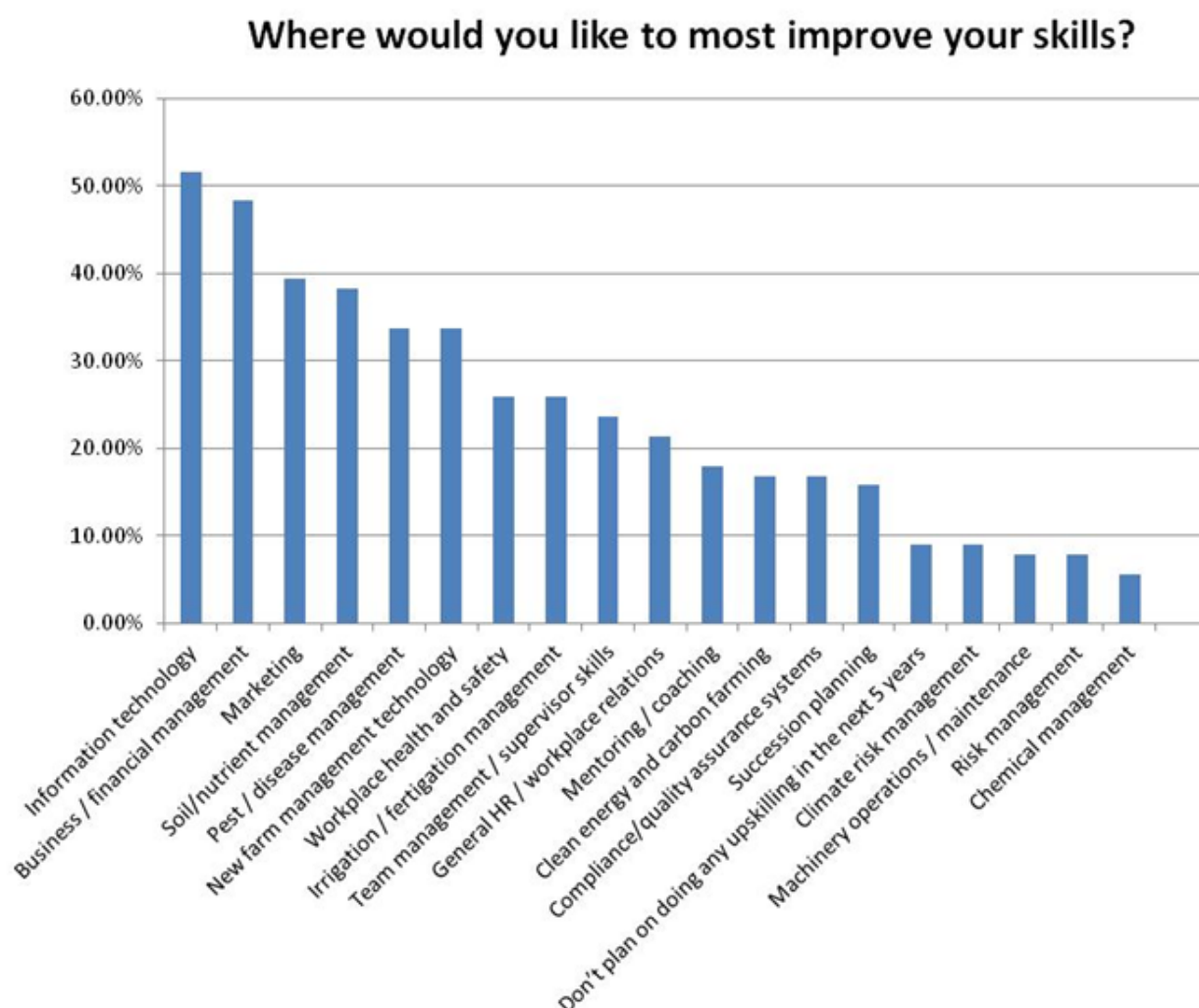
9.0 APPENDIX ONE: QUEENSLAND'S KEY PRODUCTION HORTICULTURE GROWING REGIONS



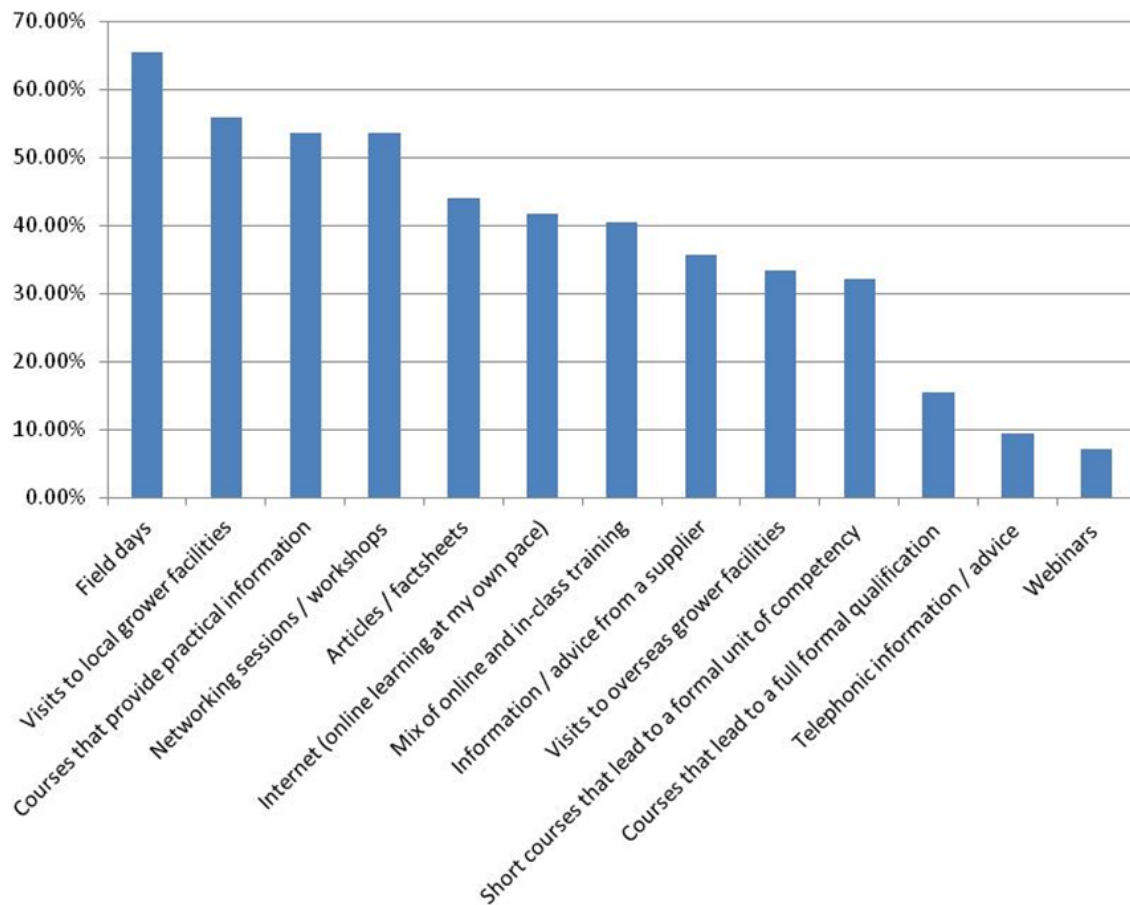
10.0 APPENDIX TWO: GROWCOM WORKFORCE SKILLS AND TRAINING SURVEY - GRAPHICAL SUMMARY

The following is a snapshot of the key results from Growcom's December 2012 Workforce Skills and Training Survey, which was made available online and in printed form on request.

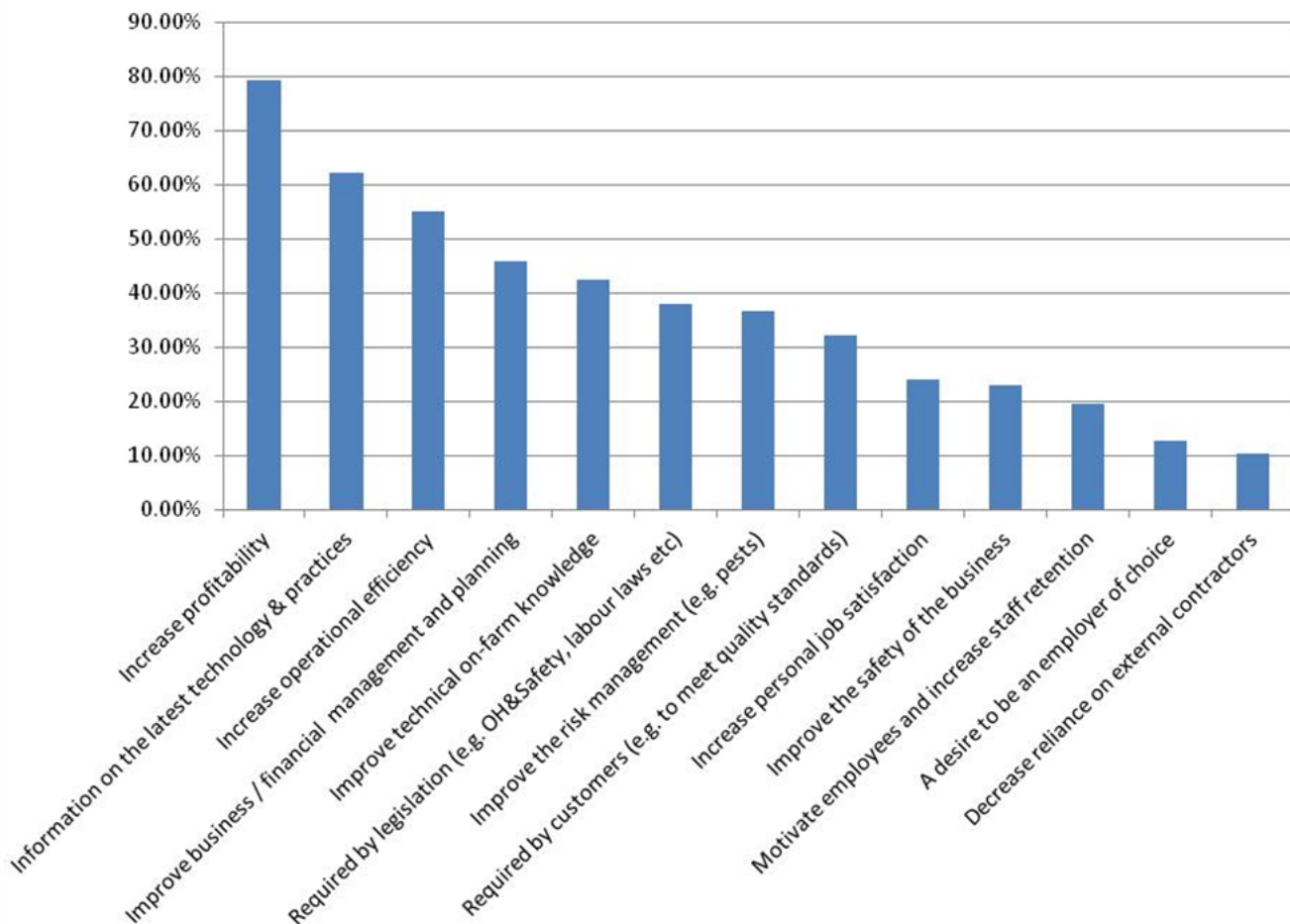
Many of the questions required ranked responses. Because it is difficult to present the complex nature of this response data in graphical form, these charts use a simplified index to indicate the relative level of priority assigned to responses. These charts display the percentage of respondents that indicated a particular response value was a priority issue, regardless of actual rank of that value.



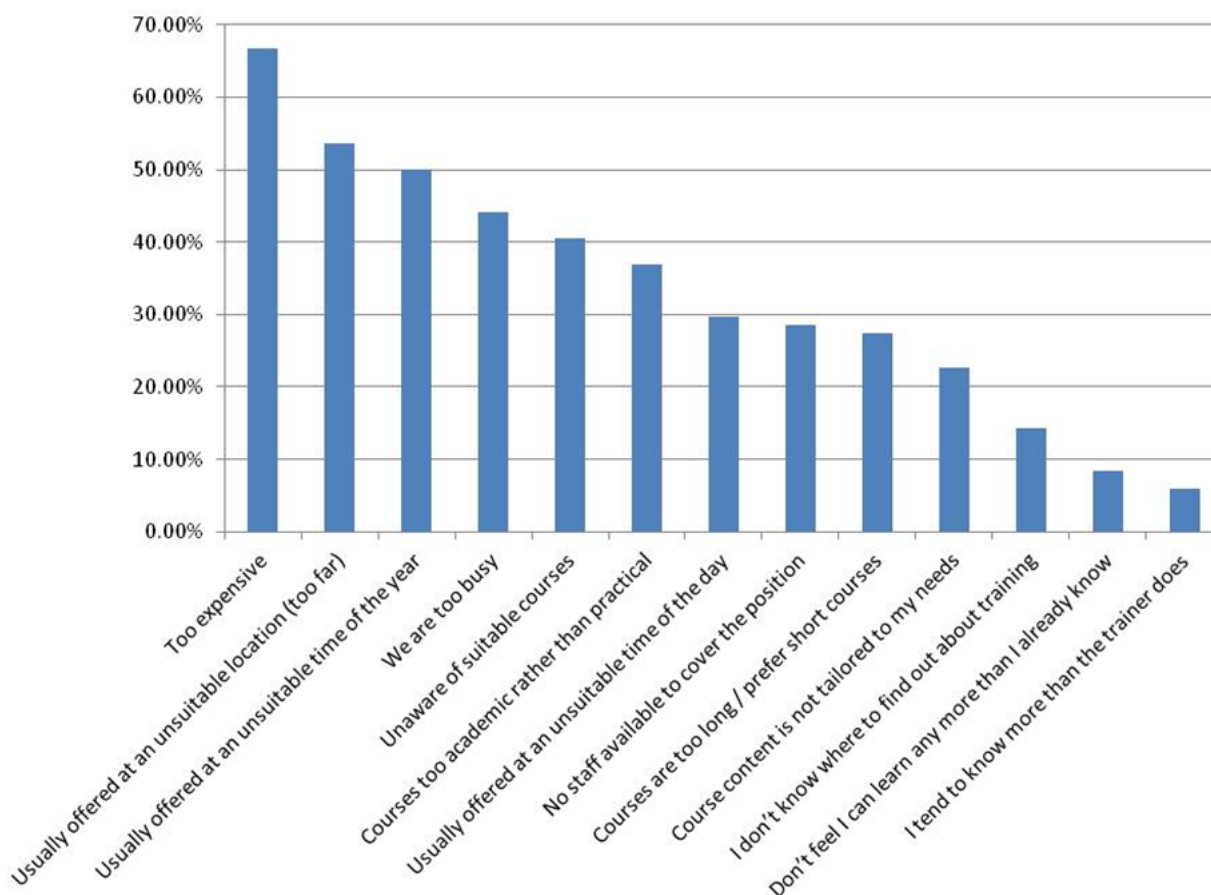
What are your preferred 5 methods of learning?



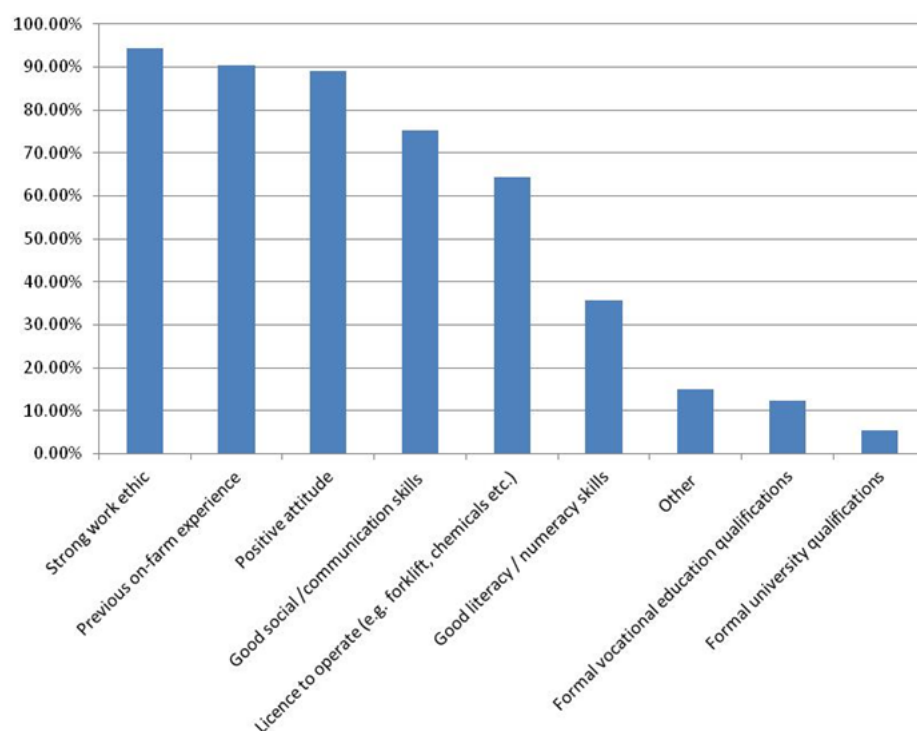
What are the top 5 factors that drive the uptake of training?



What are the top 5 factors that discourage you from participating in training?



What are the top 5 skills / attributes you look for when employing a permanent staff member?



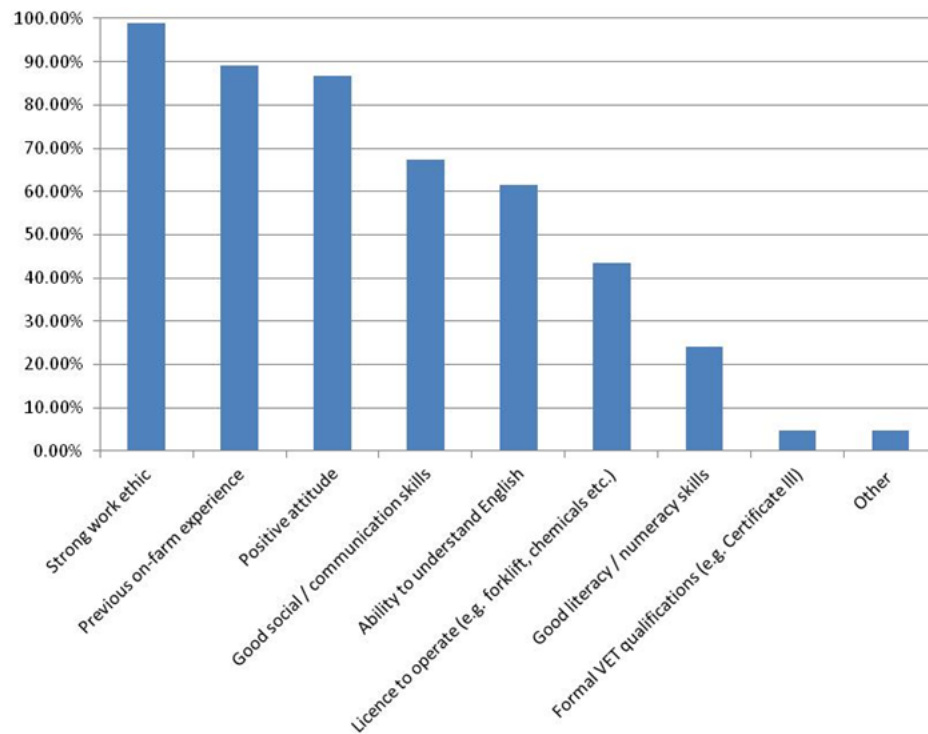
*Other:

Desire to do the job, not just coming to work to earn income.

Ability to be trained.
Hire for character and train for skills.

Flexible and able to see the big picture.

What are the top 5 skills / attributes you look for when employing a casual staff member?



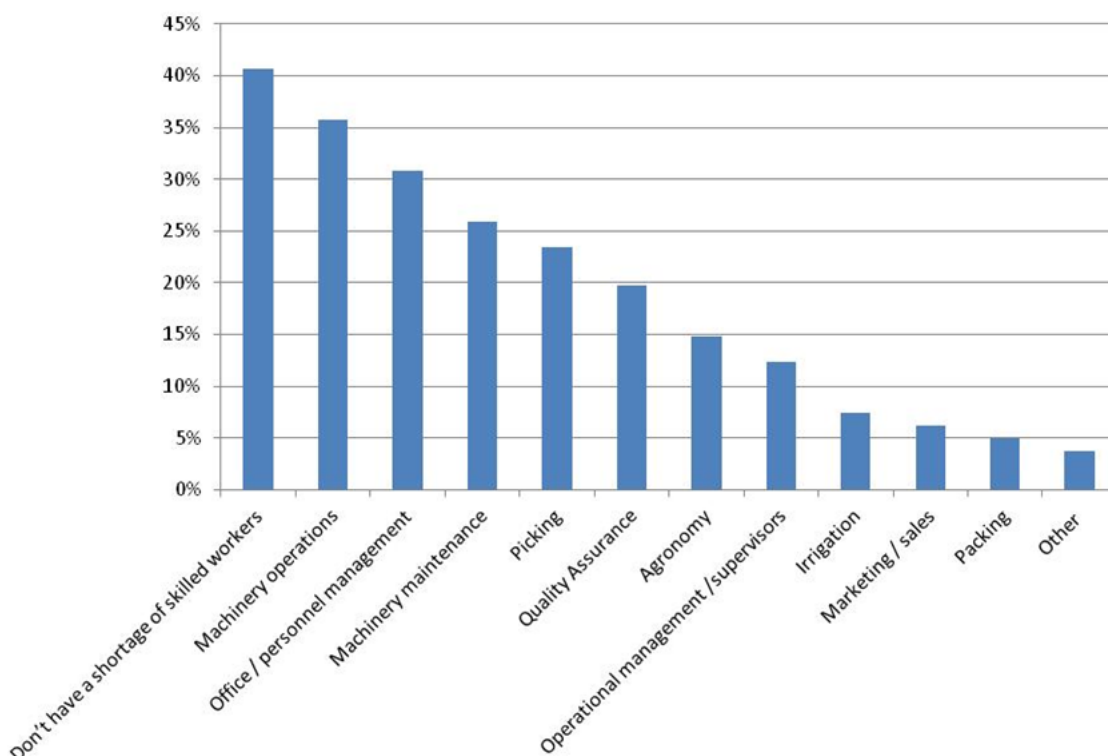
*Other:

Self sufficient and self starter

Availability

Integrity

In which of the following areas do you currently have a shortage of skilled workers?



*Other:

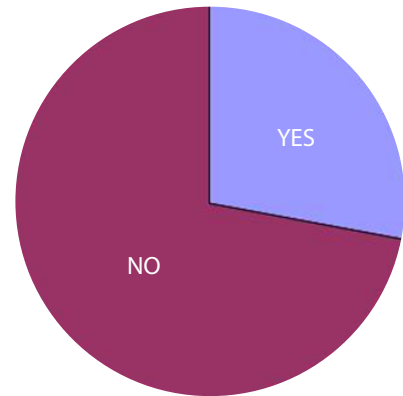
Staff need to be multi-skilled

Do all the work between my wife and myself

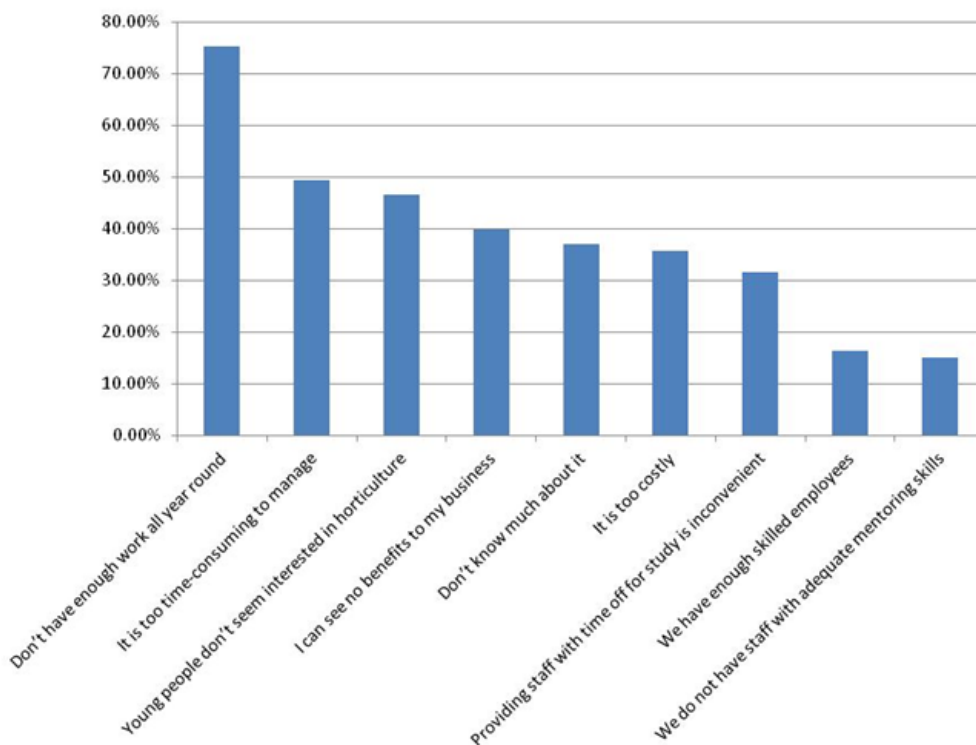
Have you ever employed a trainee / apprentice?

No 73 per cent

Yes 27 per cent



What are the top 5 factors preventing you from employing a trainee?



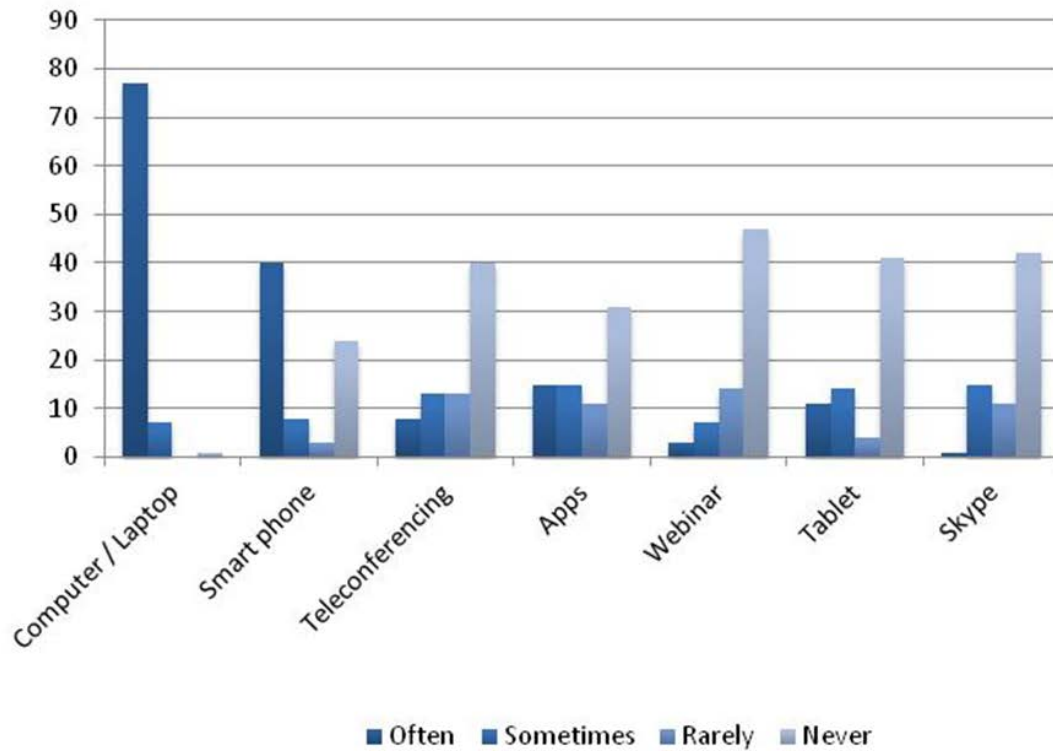
*Other:

Self sufficient and self starter

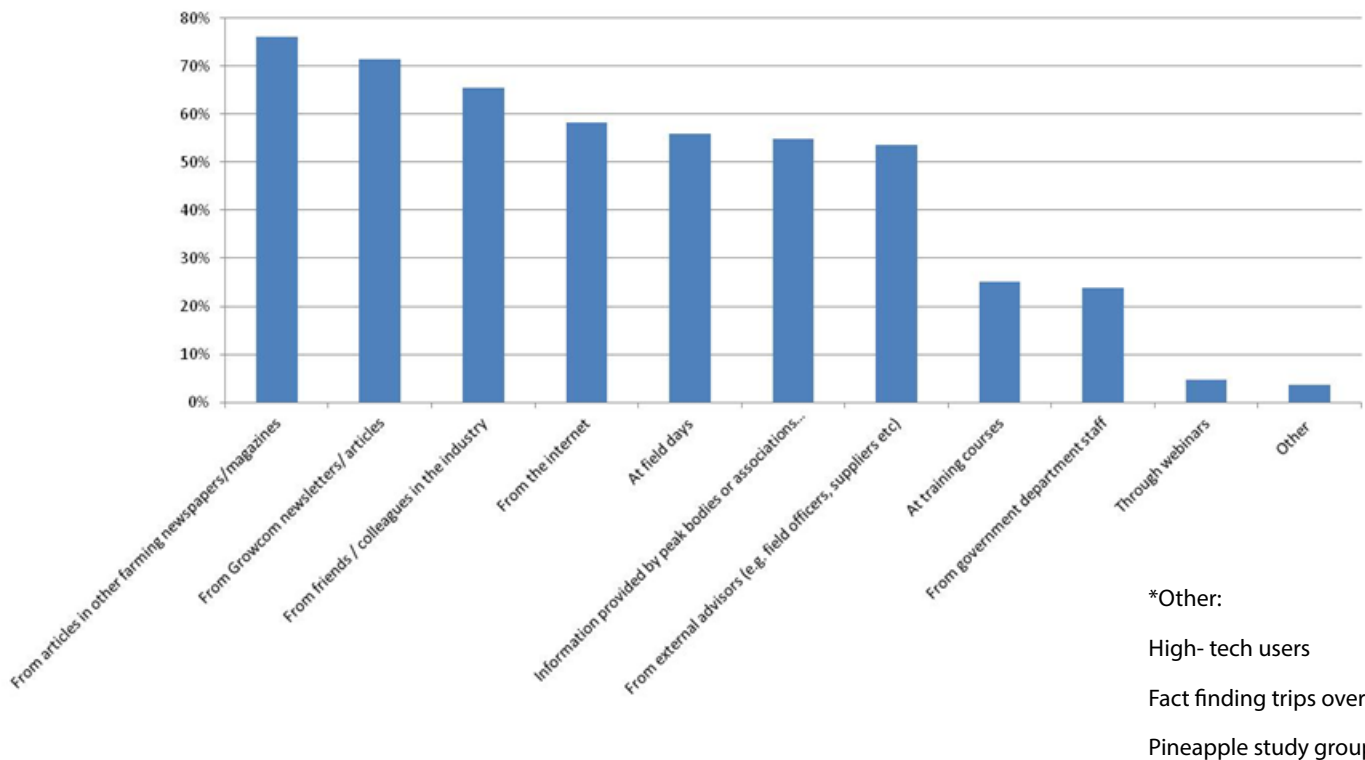
Availability

Integrity

How often do you use the following tools in your job?



How do you tend to find out about the latest innovations/ practices/ research outcomes?



11.0 APPENDIX THREE: SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER ISSUES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

ISSUES IN ATTRACTING WORKERS

KEY CHALLENGES	STAKEHOLDER SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS
The image of the production horticulture industry needs to be improved so that it is more attractive to new entrants and existing workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need for improved collaboration between industry and government to better promote the good news stories, the innovators, and the young farmers making a difference. • There needs to be a focus on production horticulture's ability to offer exciting and diverse business and career opportunities across the whole supply chain; i.e. science, marketing, graphic design, logistics, engineering, biosecurity, business management, agronomy etc.
The better businesses have few issues attracting staff as word of mouth networks are very effective and in most cases they are the farm of choice for permanent workers and casual workers. It is not always a case of lower salaries turning people off. Sometimes the deterrent is the business' reputation, how they treat people, or the perceived lack of career progression prospects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production Horticulture business owners should consider investing in people and business management skills to help improve the work culture, lift the industry profile, and improve attraction to workers.
There is generally a lack of knowledge among career advisors, parents and students regarding the wide range of career pathways within the industry. This is largely due to ineffective promotion. In addition, many of the career advisors have no first-hand experience dealing with the production horticulture supply chain and are so are unable to offer valuable insight into the industry. Improvements are needed to increase motivation for school leavers to pursue careers in production horticulture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry should provide professional development tours for career advisors to give them a greater understanding of the range of career options available. This will better position them to provide informed advice that will benefit all students, not just those who already have an interest in agriculture. • Run a program similar to the Ag Inspirations pilot to increase student and parent awareness of the various careers available throughout the supply chain. To increase engagement these should involve practical activities, not just information. RTOs should also be invited to discuss the various courses available.
New and potential employees need to be informed about the importance of good communication skills, work ethic and attitude.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career guidance teachers need to convey this to students, while recruitment consultancies should convey this to potential employees.
Seasonal enterprises find it difficult to get skilled supervisors who are willing to work for a short season and return the next year. This lack of readily available leadership / supervisory skills is hampering productivity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment consultancies need to investigate the potential to run a program where skilled workers are shared and rotated between various seasonal enterprises; e.g. between states and even between countries such as New Zealand.
There is a lack of knowledge regarding the various labour hire options other than backpackers; e.g. refugees, migrant workers, WWOOF (Willing Workers On Organic Farms), Seasonal Workers Program, employee sponsorship, traineeships etc. Much of the information required by producers is found on various government websites but unless one knows where to look it is difficult to access. A central information hub would make access much easier.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growcom should facilitate interactive labour information workshops with speakers from relevant government departments, local apprenticeships centres and group training organisations. These should be provided in key growing areas throughout Queensland. • Growcom should develop an online horticulture hub for Queensland producers with links to the relevant sites providing information about the various labour hire schemes / options, as well as Q&As regarding the various employment options. The Q&As would be particularly helpful to those who are unable to attend the information sessions.
There is also ineffective dissemination of information regarding updates to worker schemes such as Seasonal Worker Program and WWOOF.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More articles / case studies should be made available to promote the success stories of the various labour hire options.
There is a general reluctance to employ a worker under the Seasonal Worker Program because of the costs involved (e.g. airfares) and the minimum work hours producers are obliged to provide. During slower periods some producers may not have sufficient work to provide them. Despite the benefits of good productivity and returning skills associated with employing workers under this scheme, producers believe it is easier and more cost-effective to employ backpackers instead.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be greater consultation with producers regarding the scheme. • Growcom should facilitate Information workshops outlining the Seasonal Worker Program, and highlighting successful case studies. Representatives from the participating countries should also be involved.

ISSUES IN ATTRACTING WORKERS - CONTINUED

KEY CHALLENGES	STAKEHOLDER SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS
The availability of workers on farm has been made easier with the 417 Working Holiday Maker visa, however there are problems associated with language barriers especially in terms of inductions and filling out employer forms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government should provide assistance to access translated health and safety posters and employer forms (e.g. wages/ piecemeal rates). These should be available in languages such as Korean, Taiwanese, Mandarin and French. Alternatively, producers would like access to an affordable / subsidised translation service.
If a backpacker is good producers would like it to be legally possible to rehire them, however, this is not currently possible. Also, a six month visa is not long enough as it takes the first few months to train them. Producers want a say on visa restrictions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Details about immigration laws should be included in the information workshop on labour hire options. Federal Government should consult with producers regarding visa requirements for working backpackers.
Producers are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up to date with the various employment-related legal obligations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to conducting industrial relations information sessions, Growcom should investigate the possibility of conducting webinars with topics including monthly IR updates, business training and people management.
Given the high turnover of seasonal workers, the need to conduct regular, lengthy inductions is costly and time consuming for producers. In addition, there is a lack of consistency in terms of the quality of these inductions from business to business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To help reduce producers' costs and achieve safer rural workplaces a standard online induction training program should be designed specifically for seasonal workers. This would particularly assist the smaller producers who have smaller profit margins and find it difficult to meet health and safety obligations. The induction should include all the information workers need to conform to regulations, and should be available in various languages to ensure understanding (the English version could be subtitled). Once the training has been successfully completed an induction card should be supplied online for printing. The content of the training will require input from the whole of industry. Suggested topics include proof of visa and passport at the time of applying for a job, tax file number registration, superannuation fund membership, relevant workplace health and safety regulations, as well as clothing requirements, sun safety, liquid intake and work ethics. The training would provide industry with a means to identify workers who have completed accreditation in working safely on a farm and more farm ready.
Sometimes difficult to get harvest workers when needed. Currently some of the Harvest Trail offices are not operating as efficiently as they should (lack of screening, recruitment turnaround times are sometimes not fast enough and some Harvest Trail representatives are not always accessible at times of need).	<p>The Harvest Trail service needs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider operating seven days a week be operated in a consistently efficient manner statewide, with improved turnaround and screening.
Any statewide online induction training program that is developed needs to be easily accessed and well promoted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The online induction training should be centralised with a reputable statewide / nationwide agricultural body such as Rural Skills Australia, which already has an online training presence. The online induction should be the first step in the orientation process, with individual producers still responsible for developing their own, more comprehensive, personalised on-farm inductions. Suggestion that the online training is promoted to in-bound operators so they can get backpackers to complete it before they start work.
<p>The inability to attract skilled local workers continues to be an issue, in particular machinery operators / licensed tractor and forklift drivers / managers / supervisors / agronomists. Several producers are therefore recruiting skilled workers from countries such as New Zealand, South African and Zimbabwe (similar culture, English speaking and good work ethic and farming expertise). The nature of the industry means that a high percentage of employees are casual by necessity. This lack of job security may discourage locals looking for full time work.</p> <p>Producers are also facing increased competition for skilled workers from the mining and coal seam gas industries. Wages have been pushed up as a result. Producers can't afford to match mining salaries. The good workers are being lost to the mines as a result. In some cases locals who are interested in working on farms demand high salaries but don't have the skills to justify them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agrifood Skills should meet with regional industry groups to discuss the opportunities and challenges raised by the cross-industry skilling and employment strategy known as the Narrabri initiative and potential for the model to be replicated. Regional industry groups should investigate opportunities to develop a memorandum of understanding to share local skilled workers with the construction, local government, coal seam gas or mining sectors. Mature aged workers / migrants are an untapped resource. Successful case studies need to be promoted to highlight alternative labour hire opportunities.

ISSUES IN RETAINING AND UPSKILLING WORKERS

KEY CHALLENGES	STAKEHOLDER SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS
Many producers lack knowledge of effective attraction, recruitment and retention strategies, which is crucial if the industry is to become the “industry of choice” and individual producers are to become “employers of choice”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching / mentoring is needed. The best courses are often delivered by respected industry leaders rather than academics. An industry leader talking about best practice and how to be an employer of choice would be more persuasive. • Need to promote examples of employers of choice to motivate others to follow suit.
Many producers do not have formally documented HR processes; e.g. performance reviews, grievance process, documented WHS training etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funded workforce development planning would be beneficial but assistance with implementation is an even greater need.
Basic language and literacy skills are a barrier to training for some transient and low-skill level workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available language and literacy programs should be better promoted to producers.
<p>In general there is a lack of a workforce development / training culture. With many producers having slim profit margins training tends to be viewed as an expense rather than an investment.</p> <p>There is a reluctance to invest in upskilling seasonal employees as most do not return so it is viewed as money wasted.</p> <p>Some employers are concerned that if they invest in training the trainee may seek an increase in salary or leave for the mines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to bring about an attitudinal change by improving understanding and appreciation of the benefits of investing in training for employees (i.e. promote the return of investment). Women in horticulture should be targeted as they tend to manage the human resources side of the operations. Also enlist the support of younger farmers, as many would have completed further studies themselves and therefore are more likely to recognise the benefits. • Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) should be better championed and promoted as a means of increasing skill levels and the number of workers with accredited expertise. It is also a means of evaluating the skills of migrants who some suggest could be an untapped source of skilled labour.
<p>The FarmReady Program was very popular but it ceased 30 June 2012. It needs to be brought back as the support was vital in encouraging producers to invest in training.</p> <p>Two grants were available through the FarmReady program:</p> <p>FarmReady Reimbursement Grants - primary producers were able to claim up to \$1,500 each financial year to attend approved training courses, with funding also available to cover excess travel, accommodation and child care expenses.</p> <p>FarmReady Industry Grants – up to \$80,000 each financial year was provided to eligible industry, farming and natural resource management groups for projects that develop strategies to manage climate change impacts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With tightening profit margins making producers even more reluctant to invest in training an incentive such as FarmReady is needed. The State Government should consider offering a program similar to FarmReady to support and boost the uptake of training.

ISSUES IN RETAINING AND UPSKILLING WORKERS - CONTINUED

KEY CHALLENGES	STAKEHOLDER SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS
<p>There is generally a lack of understanding of the traineeship system and how it can help lift the skill levels within a business.</p> <p>Some have not employed trainees as they do not have qualified staff to train and mentor trainees/apprentices; e.g. mechanics. There is interest in the concept of sharing trainees with other commodity groups but little knowledge about what group training organisations can offer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include information about traineeships in an information session on various labour hire options. Speakers from local RTOs, Australian Apprenticeship Centres and Group Training Organisations should be included.
<p>Many women play a vital role in business operations but lack qualifications and are under-valued. An initiative is required to recognise and develop their skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growcom and regional industry groups should continue to investigate funding opportunities for women to gain qualifications; e.g. National Workforce Development Fund / Innovative Proposal funding for Cert IV / Certificate in Agribusiness
<p>Current government funding policies are too restrictive. Policy makers' insistence on full qualifications will not change the learning culture of the industry; instead the industry will gravitate away from the system towards informal learning. Lack of funding for skill sets and units of competency is a major deterrent. While National Workforce Development Funding includes Skill Sets it is limited to existing workers with Cert III or higher, which is an issue as most job roles within the industry sit below this level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growcom and regional industry groups should investigate the possibility of funded computer / internet / iphone / tablet training. • State government should consider offering a subsidy as an incentive to update and change to new technology. • Informal workshops or seminars should be offered to inform growers about the latest research and development outcomes
<p>Many producers do not have risk management and contingency planning skills decreasing their ability to cope in the event of a crisis (e.g. financial / climatic).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growcom and regional industry groups should investigate the possibility of funded risk management training.
<p>The financial viability of supplying training in the regions is challenged due to the small number of participants. This makes training courses expensive, which further lowers demand.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help increase demand, training in rural areas should be subsidised to make it more affordable and attractive.
<p>Many regard the cost of mandatory training (i.e. forklift licences) as being too high</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidised training for compulsory licences (e.g. forklift licence, chemical accreditation) and renewals would help employees and employers.
<p>The large supermarkets are increasing their quality assurance (QA) requirements, making it more difficult for producers, particularly the smaller players who cannot afford to meet the strict regulations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freshcare needs to be offered at two levels - basic and advanced. This will assist smaller producers who cannot afford to achieve and maintain the current high level of Freshcare requirements.
<p>The various major supermarkets each require different QA systems, making it costly for producers, particularly the smaller ones.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growcom and regional industry groups need to lobby for the development of one agreed QA standard.
<p>Skills /knowledge/Information needed most:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Office and computer skills - Workplace health and safety - Industrial relations - Human resources - Biosecurity - Marketing - Pest management - Financial management - How to reduce costs - How to improve efficiency - Latest mechanisation available - New innovations and emerging best practice - Current research outcomes - Successful case studies from other industries - Visas - Legislation changes - Latest apps available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preferred type of training would be in the form of practical information sessions or workshops, short courses or field days. Overseas visits are also highly popular but a more expensive option unless subsidised. When possible, courses need to be in held during non-peak production times. • Invite producers who are leaders in their field to be guest speakers as this is likely to attract more attendants; e.g. employers of choice; testimonials from producers using the latest technology / mechanisation. • Growcom's industrial relations workshops should be continued and extended to include best practice case studies. • Growcom should explore the option of holding a one-day annual seminar that includes talks on industrial relations; best practice, innovation etc. If possible, link it with a field trip. • Explore opportunities to use social media to share knowledge and expertise. • Invite banks to conduct financial information sessions. • Consider providing webinars featuring international experts. • Explore options to hold information sessions / field days showcasing new technology / mechanisation. • More networking opportunities should be provided so producers can learn from successful business people how to run their business more profitably.

ISSUES IN RETAINING AND UPSKILLING WORKERS - CONTINUED

KEY CHALLENGES	STAKEHOLDER SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS
Producers need assistance to show them the best ways to improve business efficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmarking examples should be provided to show the cost of production, forecasting of crop volumes, tracking sales and prices; etc. The avocado industry has this system in place and it is a great analyser for the industry.
There is a need for more industry-experienced trainers. Some producers believe the lack of industry knowledge shown by trainers is a major deterrent as they often know more than the trainers do therefore they are not likely to learn anything new or of value. With no clear return of investment there is little incentive for them to attend formal training courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate opportunities for subsidised Cert IV Training and Assessment training for producers. Training could become an alternative income stream for some. RTOs should consider trying to attract retiring growers as potential trainers. Growcom, in collaboration with regional industry groups and industry development officers should develop a register of producers interested in imparting some of their knowledge at training sessions as guest speakers.

ISSUES IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DISSEMINATION, AND UPSKILLING WORKERS IN INNOVATIVE PRACTICE AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

KEY CHALLENGES	STAKEHOLDER SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS
Future prosperity will rely on the industry's capacity to innovate. There is a need to improve "speed to market" of new knowledge, practices, and technology to industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growcom, regional industry groups and Industry development officers should strengthen links with relevant RTOs and research bodies to aid the extension of information to the industry. Growcom, regional industry groups and Industry development officers should continue to provide timely promotion of research outcomes, new technology and practices. QDAFF should consider increasing its number of extension officers to ensure more effective and timely dissemination of research.
Workers need to be upskilled in new technologies and practices. The work of extension officers is vitally important. As opposed to private companies, there is no promotion for private gain. Instead extension officers can be relied on to provide unbiased information about the latest technology and best practice. The decrease in QDAFF extension officers has slowed the facilitation of information exchange at a time when it is most needed for producers to remain internationally competitive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> QDAFF should consider increasing the number of extension officers. As more producers become internet savvy there will be an opportunity to employ cyber extension officers who can provide information pathways and link people with the information and experts through the Internet. However, at this time, personal contact is still the most preferred option. To encourage uptake of new technology and practices, industry should identify early adopters of new technology or successful producers embracing new practices, and better promote the successes.

