

The background of the entire page is a photograph of an orange orchard. On the left, a dense tree with green leaves and several ripe orange fruits is visible against a clear blue sky. On the right, a person wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and dark gloves is shown harvesting oranges. They are using a wooden tool to reach into the branches. A woven basket is partially visible, filled with harvested oranges. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a clear day.

Growing in Ag

Understanding and Responding to the Perceptions and Reality of a Gap Year in Agriculture

OLIVER FRIENDSHIP
Queensland Farmers' Federation



QUEENSLAND
FARMERS'
FEDERATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on how the proposition of working in the agriculture industry during a 'gap year' is perceived by individuals who are either currently undertaking, or have recently undertaken, a gap year. It identifies clear trends in how these individuals view the agriculture industry as a gap year employer, and analyses the key reasons for why many gap year takers shun casual agricultural employment. This report also scrutinises common perspectives of the industry in light of relevant data to determine whether they are formed based on an accurate understanding of the agriculture sector, or whether they are ill-informed and instead the result of some other factor. This analysis is done so that the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) and other relevant stakeholders can better design policies and approaches to encourage individuals taking a gap year in the future to consider, and ultimately choose agricultural employment.

This report found the agriculture industry does not face a substantial or insurmountable perception problem as a gap year employer, and it is perceived more favourably by men and individuals from regional centres than it is by women and those from the city. It also found that casual agriculture employees can earn more money during their gap year than individuals who worked in either retail or hospitality because they, on average, earn a similar or better hourly wage, and work more hours over the course of a working week. This report also identified the most common reason why individuals choose not to work in agriculture during their gap year

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is because they believe, often incorrectly so, that casual agricultural work is too far away from where they live and want to remain. A large number of current or recent gap year takers also cited the inability to find a viable agricultural employer as a key reason for not working in agriculture, even though the industry faces periodic labour shortages that have only been intensified by the coronavirus pandemic. Also prevalent as a justification for not choosing gap year agricultural employment, especially among women, is the view that casual work in the sector is overly physical. Interestingly, and in spite of prodigious negative media attention on the issue, concerns about the possibility of being mistreated by an agricultural employer were not key to why so few individuals taking a gap year choose to work in the sector.

Based on the results found and trends identified in this report, several recommendations are made regarding the future direction of any advertising or media campaign launched by QFF or other relevant stakeholders to attract more gap year takers into agriculture. Firstly, any campaign should primarily focus on men from regional centres, as they demonstrate the highest level of positive opinion towards the sector of any demographic, meaning they will likely be more receptive than other groups. Secondly, future messaging should focus on the proximity of many agricultural employers to regional towns and population centres, as this would address the primary cause for individuals shunning agricultural work during their gap year: namely, the often-ill-conceived belief that employers are too far away from where they live. It is also important that any messaging makes the strong financial case for casual agricultural employment, and highlights 'less physical' agricultural job opportunities to encourage greater female participation. Given the low status of the issue in the minds of current or recent gap year takers, any campaign should not, however, focus on responding to claims of worker mistreatment. Lastly, the professed inability of many gap year takers to find a suitable agricultural employer points to a disconnect between the two, and means that QFF and other stakeholders need to better understand gap year takers' job-seeking habits so as to reach them more effectively with specific casual agricultural job opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

The international travel restrictions implemented by the Australian Government in response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic have resulted in the agriculture sector being deprived of its usually steady inflow of casual labour in the form of backpackers and migrant workers. These foreign employees are a historically crucial component of the workforce in the sector, meaning their steadily declining number has raised the prospect of substantial casual labour shortfalls across the industry. Indeed, by March 2021, it is predicted that Australia's agriculture industry will face a shortage of 20,000 to 26,000 casual workers, which would represent a 36 to 59 per cent labour supply shortfall over November 2020 to June 2021.¹ This translates to a maximum net gap of 33 per cent by the end of 2021; or a situation where only 67 out of 100 casual roles in the agriculture industry are filled.² It is also predicted that this labour shortage will continue to grow if the international border does not reopen to casual agricultural workers before 21 March, 2021: a situation that now seems almost a certainty.³

The stark reality of this distinct shortfall in casual labour is that it has resulted in crop losses that run into the millions. As of January this year, Queensland alone has lost an estimated \$30.8 million worth of crops because of labour shortages, and has by far incurred the largest losses so far from a national total amounting to \$38.9M in wasted produce.⁴ What this growing loss goes to highlight, is the need for the agriculture sector to find an alternative source of casual labour to offset the increasing shortages; as well as the seasonal labour shortages that persisted before the pandemic began, and will remain once its effects have ended.

One proposed solution involves the greater utilisation of high school graduate labour, who are currently taking a gap year before beginning other studies or training. Indeed, given that 13 per cent of Queensland students take a gap year,⁵ and given that gap years are more common in regional and remote areas where the bulk of agricultural production occurs,⁶ individuals taking

a gap year have the potential to mitigate the predicted contraction and persistent shortages in labour supply. Moreover, depending on their socioeconomic background, between 83 and 90 per cent of individuals who take a gap year also work during this time,⁷ making them a viable source of casual labour for agricultural employers.

Furthermore, not only is the agriculture sector facing a labour shortage in its casual 'low-skilled' job offerings, but it also faces a greater structural labour-force challenge that threatens its long-term prosperity. This is because the sector is ageing, with the median age of a farm manager now 54 years, 14 years more than the median age of the entire Australian workforce.⁸ Additionally, the number of individuals choosing to study agricultural qualifications approximately halved in the decade before 2012 and has since plateaued. This means that there is now a shortage of workers in the agribusiness field, with fewer qualified graduates entering the industry than there are jobs available to them.⁹ Ultimately, this trend constitutes a demographic 'time bomb' that threatens the viability of the agriculture industry into the future, with a shrinking and diminished sector a very real possibility.

Given the ageing of the workforce, and the decline in the number of students studying an agricultural qualification, more certainly needs to be done to encourage a greater number of young people to pursue a career in agriculture. For this to occur, individuals who do not come from a farming background need to be enticed into the industry: something that the federal government has attempted to do by offering a financial incentive to slashing the cost of agricultural university degrees.¹⁰ However, it is also important that individuals of a non-agricultural background get direct experience of working in the sector. This is because work experience early on in a person's life often performs the function of opening an individual's eyes to career possibilities.¹¹

One way of ensuring that more young people experience the agriculture industry is for the

Given the ageing of the workforce, and the decline in the number of students studying an agricultural qualification, more certainly needs to be done to encourage a greater number of young people to pursue a career in agriculture.

Encouraging more gap year participation in the industry is a difficult task in a sector where currently only 6 per cent of the casual labour force are Australian citizens or permanent residents

Queensland's 2019 graduating cohort

348

Farm, Forestry &
Garden Workers

3,410

Sales Assistants &
Salespersons

2,442

Checkout Operators &
Office Cashiers

1,276

Food Preparation
Assistants

991

Hospitality
Workers

sector to employ more individuals taking a gap year. This is because individuals taking a gap year are impressionable to new possible career pathways, and will soon be commencing further study. Indeed, individuals who do not come from a farming background and who are taking a gap year in many respects represent a largely untapped source of the potential agricultural workers of the future. Getting more individuals of this profile to work in casual agricultural employment will open more eyes to the opportunities agriculture can offer them, thus encouraging more people to attain agricultural qualifications and jobs. Such an outcome would, go a long way to mitigating the longer-term demographic problems facing the sector.

However, encouraging more gap year participation in the industry is a difficult task in a sector where currently only 6 per cent of the casual labour force are Australian citizens or permanent residents.¹² Indeed, casual agricultural labour is currently an unloved profession for high school graduates. Of Queensland's 2019 graduating cohort who went onto some form of work, only 348 went into the 'Farm, Forestry & Garden Workers' sector. This pales in comparison to the 3,410 who went into employment as a 'Sales Assistants & Salespersons', the 2,442 who worked as 'Checkout Operators & Office Cashiers', the 1,276 listed as 'Food Preparation Assistants', and the 991 'Hospitality Workers'.¹³ Clearly, agriculture faces an uphill battle in attracting gap year labour.

Ultimately, given the need for casual gap year labour in the agricultural industry, and given the need for more individuals taking a gap year to experience the industry with a view to encouraging more students to choose an agricultural pathway, it is therefore crucial that QFF, and other relevant stakeholders, formulate a more informed and ultimately effective strategy for encouraging individuals taking a gap year to work in the sector. To achieve this goal, QFF must understand the perspectives of those who are currently undertaking a gap year or have recently taken a gap year, on the prospect of working in the agriculture industry during their gap year. Without properly understanding the labour habits of gap year workers, or how those currently taking a gap year, or have recently completed one, view agriculture in relation to other sectors that compete for their labour, or why those who shun the agricultural industry do so, it is impossible to develop an effective approach in this area. This report aims to address these knowledge shortfalls.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Ernst & Young (EY), *Seasonal horticulture labour demand and workforce study*, (Sydney: EY, 2020), 14.
- 2 Ibid., 8.
- 3 Ibid., 8.
- 4 Rosie Lewis, "Coronavirus: Crop losses from labour shortages hit \$39m," *The Australian*, 7 January 2021, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/coronavirus-crop-losses-from-labour-shortages-hit-39m/news-story/2239da0380101cbb6f4fd876e3a1e89>.
- 5 Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), *Completing Higher Education – The impact of taking a gap-year*, (Canberra: DESE, 2020), 1.
- 6 Ibid., 2.
- 7 Ibid., 3.
- 8 Bill Binks et al., *Snapshot of Australia's Agricultural Workforce*, (Canberra: ABARES, 2018), 4.

- 9 Deloitte, *Positioning for prosperity? Catching the next wave*, (Sydney: Deloitte, 2014), 27.
- 10 "Agriculture degrees set to become cheaper under university fee changes" *Country News*, 19 June 2020, <https://www.countrynews.com.au/news/2020/06/19/1240932/agriculture-degrees-set-to-become-cheaper-under-university-fee-changes>.
- 11 Erica Smith and Annette Green, *How workplace experiences while at school affect career pathways*, (Adelaide: NCVET, 2005), 9.
- 12 Ernst & Young (EY), *Seasonal horticulture labour demand and workforce study*, (Sydney: EY, 2020), 46.
- 13 Department of Education, *2020 Next Step survey*, (Brisbane: Department of Education, 2020), 5.

METHODOLOGY

In order to collect the data necessary to provide accurate and reliable insight into the attitudes of those who are currently undertaking a gap year, or have recently taken a gap year, on the prospect of working in the agriculture industry during their gap year, a survey was conducted. The survey questions, and a list of the possible responses to each question, are listed in Appendix 1.

This survey was constructed using surveymonkey.com, and was promoted via an 11-day long Facebook and Instagram advertising campaign from 22/1/2021 to 2/2/2021. So as to ensure an efficient use of QFF resources, advertising spending was targeted to individuals between the ages of 17 and 23, and who were located in Queensland. In order to incentivise

current and recent gap year students to complete this survey voluntarily, it was accompanied with a 'prize' of two \$200 cashcards that were gifted to two 'winning' survey participants who were chosen at random when the surveying period ended. Overall, the survey managed to receive 150 individual responses, with a cursory overview and breakdown of the survey respondents available in Appendix 2.

The results of this survey were also analysed in relation to other data, such as that produced by government bodies including the ABS, in order for the conclusions of this report to be reached, and corollary recommendations made.



RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Gap Year Perspectives on Agriculture, Retail, and Hospitality

In the research survey, individuals who were on a gap year, or had recently completed a gap year, were asked if they believed that the retail, hospitality, and agriculture industries are good industries for someone to work in during their gap year. They gave their answer as a score from 1 to 5, with a larger number denoting a more favourable opinion. This was done so as to understand the perception of those that take a gap year in not only the agriculture sector but also the other industries that commonly compete for their labour during their gap year.

Looking at all responses as a whole, the retail industry came out on top, with a mean average score of 3.59, and a median score of 4. Next was hospitality, with a mean score of 3.44, and a median of 3. Agriculture closely followed hospitality, with a mean of 3.43, and a median of 3. The distribution of these responses can be seen in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

However, the nature of the survey respondents' perceptions is different when location, gender, and employment history variables are considered. The impact of location is demonstrated in Table 1.

	All Respondents	Location lived during gap year			
		Major City	Regional Centre or Rural and Remote	Regional Centre	Rural and Remote
Retail	3.59	3.67 (+0.08)	3.52 (-0.07)	3.60 (+0.01)	3.33 (-0.26)
Hospitality	3.44	3.36 (-0.08)	3.52 (+0.08)	3.47 (+0.03)	3.48 (+0.04)
Agriculture	3.43	3.13 (-0.30)	3.57 (+0.14)	3.71 (+0.28)	3.43 (0.00)

Table 1 – Mean average score for the perception of how good various industries are as a gap year employer (by location).

The perception data in Table 1 clearly shows that the agriculture sector is viewed far more highly in the regions than it is in the city. Indeed, while young people in the cities, who are comparatively isolated from the realities of agricultural production, tend to hold more negative views of the industry, young people in the regions, who are more in touch with the nature of the sector, hold it in higher regard.

In the city, agriculture is considered to be, by far, the worst gap year employer when compared to the retail and hospitality industries. City respondents, on average, scored the agriculture industry 0.54 points lower than retail, and 0.23 points lower than hospitality. This picture inverts for respondents from regional centres. Respondents who spent their gap year in these localities ranked agriculture the highest; 0.11 points above retail and 0.24 points above hospitality.

What this finding indicates is that, with a view to attracting casual workers on their gap year, the agriculture sector does not have a major perception problem in the regions. It instead has a substantial amount of support and goodwill when compared to the other industries that compete for gap year labour. In the city, however, this is not the case. Agriculture instead faces perception problems that would need to be overcome for the sector to be competitive in attracting individuals taking a gap year.

FIGURE 1
Retail Industry
Perception Score Distribution

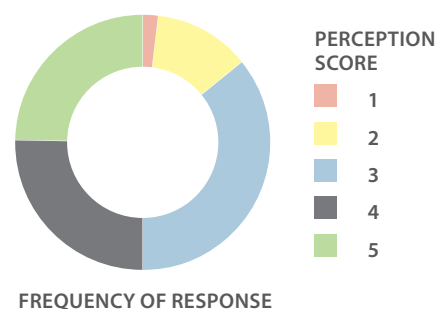


FIGURE 2
Hospitality Industry
Perception Score Distribution

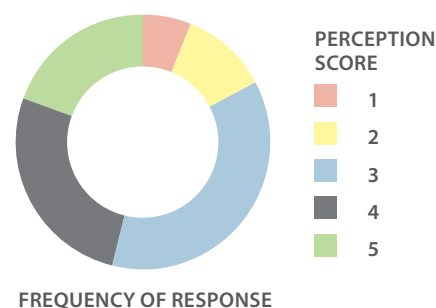
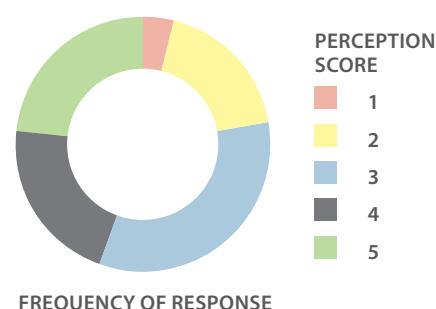


FIGURE 3
Agriculture Industry
Perception Score Distribution



Given the goodwill that this demographic display towards the notion of working in the agriculture sector during a gap year, men from regional centres represent a prime target demographic for attracting casual gap year labour.

A respondent's gender is another factor that appears to influence their perception of casual gap year work in the agriculture sector, with respect to comparable work in retail and hospitality. This is demonstrated in Table 2.

	All Respondents	Gender	
		Male	Female
Retail	3.59	3.70 (+0.11)	3.49 (-0.10)
Hospitality	3.44	3.40 (-0.04)	3.49 (+0.05)
Agriculture	3.43	3.55 (+0.12)	3.32 (-0.11)

Table 2 – Mean average score for the perception of how good various industries are as a gap year employer (by gender).

The industry perception data, when separated on the basis of the respondent's gender, demonstrates that men view gap year work in the agriculture sector more favourably than women do, by a factor of 0.23 points. Also, while women perceive gap year work in the agriculture sector less favourably than comparable work in retail and hospitality, by a factor of 0.17 points, men see agricultural work more favourably than work in hospitality, although still less favourably than retail.

Combining this result with the perception findings based on location, it can be concluded that men from regional centres are the specific demographic that views gap year agricultural work most favourably. This is a phenomenon borne out in the data, with men from regional centres giving gap year agricultural work an average score of 3.79,¹⁴ which is 0.13 points above their comparable score for retail (3.66), and 0.38 above their comparable score for hospitality (3.41). The distribution of the perception responses for the agriculture sector and for this demographic, with its high frequency of 5 out of 5 scores, can be seen in Figure 4.

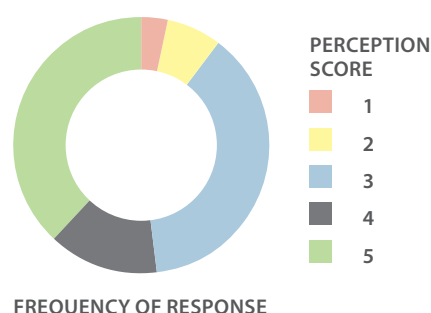
Given the goodwill that this demographic display towards the notion of working in the agriculture sector during a gap year, men from regional centres represent a prime target demographic for attracting casual gap year labour.

Furthermore, analysing a respondent's perception of the retail, hospitality, and agriculture industries in light of the industry that they work or worked in during their gap year is also interesting in terms of its implications for attracting more individuals taking a gap year to work casually in the agriculture sector. A summary of this perception data can be seen in Table 3.

	All Respondents	Industry worked in during gap year		
		Retail	Hospitality	Agriculture
Retail	3.59	3.55 (-0.04)	3.69 (+0.10)	3.45 (-0.14)
Hospitality	3.44	3.48 (+0.04)	3.48 (+0.04)	3.18 (-0.26)
Agriculture	3.43	3.31 (-0.12)	3.49 (+0.06)	4.08 (+0.65)

Table 3 – Mean average score for the perception of how good various industries are as a gap year employer (by industry worked in).

FIGURE 4
Agriculture Industry
Perception Score Distribution for
Men in Regional Centres



Interestingly, separating the perception data on the basis of the industry that an individual is working in, or worked in, during their gap year yields a positive result for the potential of attracting, and retaining, casual gap year labour in the agriculture sector. This is because, while respondents who are working in, or worked in, retail and hospitality ranked agriculture last or very close to last as a gap year employer, those who actually worked in the sector ranked it the highest, and by a great margin. Respondents who worked in agriculture also ranked the industry far higher than respondents working in retail ranked retail, or respondents working in hospitality ranked hospitality. This finding indicates that respondents who worked in agriculture during their gap year had an overwhelmingly positive experience and that the sector genuinely has much to offer recent school leavers.

ENDNOTES

¹⁴ Conversely, women from the city gave agriculture a mean average score of only 3.00. This was the lowest rating it received from any demographic combination, and 0.79 points behind the mean average score from regional men.

Remuneration Comparison Between Agriculture, Retail, and Hospitality

It is a common perception among those who are completing, or have recently completed, a gap year that the agriculture sector is lower paying when compared to the other industries they have the potential to work in immediately after they have graduated high school. Indeed, 24 per cent of respondents cited a belief that agriculture was low paying as a key reason for why they did not work in the industry during their gap year.¹⁵ Among respondents who lived in a major city during their gap year, this figure jumped to 28 per cent. And among individuals who are either working in, or worked in, retail and hospitality during their gap year, these figures were 24 and 25 per cent respectively. The accuracy of this perception can be tested against the relevant data concerning remuneration in these three sectors.

Relevant Awards

The most obvious point of comparison for analysing the remuneration available in agriculture, retail, and hospitality, is the relevant awards available in each sector. Such a comparison is done in Tables 4 and 5 below, which consider a typical 17- and 18-year-old casual employee earning the minimum award in a role indicative of their likely skill level and training.¹⁶

Clearly, Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate that if a casual gap year worker is earning the minimum award available in a position that requires the minimal skill set and limited formal training that they would likely have directly after finishing high school, they are better remunerated if they choose to work in the agriculture sector. This fact casts doubt on the accuracy of the perception that agriculture is a poor paying gap year employer.



Industry	Role / Award Classification	Award (\$/hour)	Percentage Difference to Comparative Agricultural Award
Agriculture	Horticulture Level 1/ Pastoral Level 1/ Cotton ginning Level 1 *	17.36	--
Retail	Retail employee level 1 **	16.06	7.49% less
Hospitality	Food and beverage attendant grade 2 ***	15.61	10.08% less
	Food and beverage attendant grade 3 ****	16.15	6.97% less

Table 4 – 17-year-old Casual Award Comparison

* Describes a horticulture, other farm, or cotton ginning employee with basic training, performing routine manual tasks, exercising minimal judgement, and operating under supervision. These are the most common awards for gap year agricultural workers who are not earning piece-rate. The minimum remuneration values are the same in all of these three award structures.

** Covers the roles of shop assistant and check-out operator, which are commonly performed by gap year workers in the sector.

*** Describes basic waiting duties commonly performed by gap year workers in the sector.

**** Describes more complex waiting duties and bar work of the kind commonly performed by gap year workers in the sector.

Industry	Role / Award Classification	Award (\$/hour)	Percentage Difference to Comparative Agricultural Award
Agriculture	Horticulture Level 1/ Pastoral Level 1/ Cotton ginning Level 1	19.84	--
Retail	Retail employee level 1	18.74	5.54% less
Hospitality	Food and beverage attendant grade 2	18.21	8.22% less
	Food and beverage attendant grade 3	18.85	4.99% less

Table 5 – 18-year-old Casual Award Comparison

Government Income and Hours Data

While information on the relevant awards does provide a useful insight, a simple comparison of the awards available to gap year workers in the various sectors that employ them provides only an incomplete picture of the remuneration landscape. This is because it ignores the fact that many of the casual positions available in the agriculture industry, specifically those that involve the picking of produce, are governed by a piece rate structure, where the employee is paid per unit of production (i.e. per kilogram picked). Although, at least anecdotally, there has been a shift away from piece-rate contracts in recent months in an effort to attract more domestic labour into the industry, piece rates are still undoubtedly a key component of casual work in agriculture.

One of the better sources for finding wage and employment data for work in the agriculture sector, and accounts for both piece rate and fixed rate remuneration structures, is the Australian Government's National Skills Commission 'Job Outlook' website. The information on this site originates in average earnings and hours data collected by the ABS.¹⁷

This data indicates that a person whose primary source of income is as a 'fruit and nut picker' is paid, whether by piece rate or fixed rate, an average of \$948 per week, for an average of 41 hours worked in a week.¹⁸ This corresponds to an average wage of \$23.12 an hour, irrespective of their method of remuneration. Moreover, and in the same way, a person who lists their primary source of income as 'fruit and vegetable packer' is paid an average of \$908 per week, for an average of 43 hours worked in a week.¹⁹ This corresponds to an average wage of \$21.12 an hour. And a person who lists their primary source of income as 'beef cattle farm worker' is paid an average of \$1,040 per week, for an average of 52 hours worked in a week.²⁰ This corresponds to an average wage of \$20.00 an hour. These roles have not been chosen at random, but instead represent the kind of agricultural positions frequently undertaken by entry-level, casual, employees such as those on a gap year.

The above data can now be compared to the earnings and hours information for the actual hours worked, and actual money earned, by employees in the retail and hospitality sectors. The data used in this instance

was collected by the ABS and released in 2018. This data has the advantage of being stratified by age group, so can be used to approximate the remuneration available to 17- or 18-year-olds on a gap year.²¹

According to this ABS data, the average weekly total cash earnings of an Australian employee aged 17 years and under working in the 'retail trade' sector is \$173.20, for an average of 11.1 hours worked in a week. This corresponds to an average wage of \$15.60 an hour. In the 'accommodation and food services' sector, the average weekly total cash earnings of an employee aged 17 years and under is \$144.30, for an average of 10.1 hours worked in a week. This corresponds to an average wage of \$14.29 an hour.

Jumping up an age bracket, the average weekly total cash earnings of an Australian employee aged 18 to 20 working in the 'retail trade' sector is \$435.00, for an average of 19.7 hours worked in a week. This corresponds to an average wage of \$22.08 an hour. In the 'accommodation and food services' sector, the average weekly total cash earnings of an employee aged 18 to 20 is \$391.30, for an average of 18.1 hours worked in a week. This corresponds to an average wage of \$21.62 an hour. However, it is also likely that these figures are over and above the pay received by gap year workers in these industries, as they capture some trainee and skilled workers, not just the generally unskilled, casual, and lesser-paid individuals on a gap year.

All of this above government wage data is summarised, for ease of comparison, in Table 6.

What this data demonstrates, is that agriculture is by no means an obviously poor payer in comparison to the retail and hospitality sectors, which compete with agriculture for an individual's labour during their gap year. Indeed, the wages paid for casual, entry-level jobs in the agriculture sector are similar, and broadly comparable, to those available in retail and hospitality; showing that agriculture is not, as is commonly perceived by individuals taking a gap year, a consistently and demonstrably low-remunerating gap year employer.

Position	Industry	Average Wage (\$/ hour)
Fruit and Nut Picker	Agriculture	23.12
Retail Trade (18 to 20) *	Retail	22.08
Accommodation and Food Services (18 to 20) *	Hospitality	21.62
Fruit and Vegetable Packer	Agriculture	21.12
Beef Cattle Farm Worker	Agriculture	20.00
Retail Trade (17 years and under)	Retail	15.60
Accommodation and Food Services (17 years and under)	Hospitality	14.29

Table 6 – Average Hourly Wage for Various Casual Roles, and Various Age Ranges, in the Retail, Hospitality, and Agriculture Sectors

** It is likely these figures are over and above the pay received by gap year workers in these industries, as they capture some of the trainee and skilled workers in these industries, not just the generally unskilled, casual, and lesser-paid individuals on a gap year.*

Payscale.com Remuneration Data

Moreover, the average hourly wage of an entry-level farmworker in Australia, immaterial of the relevant awards, and considering employees working for both a piece rate or a fixed rate, can be compared to that of a retail sales associate and a waiter/waitress using data from compensation information company [payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com).²² See Table 7.

This data demonstrates that an entry-level farm worker, both

early on in their career and when they are experienced, earns a similar or better hourly rate of remuneration to what can be earned in comparable entry-level positions that an individual might work in during their gap year. This further demonstrates that the agriculture sector does not deserve the perception of 'low paying' that over a quarter of respondents in the research survey cited as a key reason for why they did not consider working in the industry during their gap year.

Role	Average Hourly Wage for Entry Level Worker (<1 year experience) (\$/hour)	Percentage Difference to Comparative Agricultural Wage	Average Hourly Wage for All Workers (\$/hour)	Percentage Difference to Comparative Agricultural Wage
Farm Worker	19.70*	--	22.56^	--
Retail Sales Associate	20.06**	1.83% more	21.32^^	5.50% less
Waiter/ Waitress	15.64***	20.61% less	17.52^^^	22.34% less

Table 7 – Payscale.com Average Wage Comparison

*Based on 19 salary profiles.

**Based on 36 salary profiles.

***Based on 439 salary profiles.

^Based on 143 salary profiles.

^^Based on 354 salary profiles.

^^^Based on 2,544 salary profiles.





Average money
earned per hour



RETAIL
\$17⁸⁰



HOSPITALITY
\$17⁶⁸



AGRICULTURE
\$20⁷⁹

Survey Remuneration Data Comparison

Analysis of the data from the research survey further demonstrates that agriculture is not a poor paying gap year employment alternative to retail and hospitality. Indeed, estimations of the hourly rate available to gap year workers in different sectors can be made from the survey responses of those who have recently completed a gap year, and they show agriculture to be higher paying, on average, than both retail and hospitality.

Retail

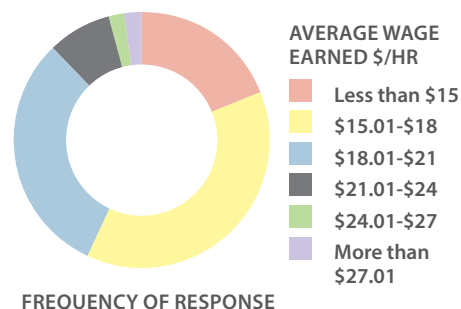
From the 'average wage earned' data collected for employees who either work in, or recently worked in, the retail sector during their gap year, Table 8 and Figure 5 can be created.

Average Money Earned per Hour	Number of Responses
Less than \$15/ hour	10
\$15.01 - \$18/ hour	20
\$18.01 - \$21/ hour	16
\$21.01 - \$24/ hour	4
\$24.01 - \$27/ hour	1
More than \$27.01/ hour	1

Table 8 – Average Gap Year Wage Distribution in the Retail Industry

FIGURE 5

Retail Industry, Average Gap Year Wage Distribution



From this data, a weighted average of the hourly wage available to gap years workers in the retail sector can be found. For this, the midpoints of each of the surveyed wage brackets were used, and the point estimates of \$14/ hour for those in the "Less than \$15/ hour" bracket, and \$28/ hour for those in the "More than \$27.01/ hour" bracket. ²³ The result can be seen in Table 9.

In short, from this calculation above using the research survey data, the average hourly wage for retail industry workers during their gap year is estimated at \$17.80.

Average Money Earned per Hour (i)	Midpoint, or Predicted Average (\$) (a)	Number of Responses (k)
Less than \$15/ hour	14	10
\$15.01 - \$18/ hour	16.5	20
\$18.01 - \$21/ hour	19.5	16
\$21.01 - \$24/ hour	22.5	4
\$24.01 - \$27/ hour	25.5	1
More than \$27.01/ hour	28	1

Weighted Average, or Average
Hourly Wage in the Industry (\$)

$$= \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} \alpha_i k_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} k_i} = 17.80$$

Table 9 – Calculation of Average Hourly Wage of an Individual Working in Retail During a Gap Year

Hospitality

Moreover, in the same way as above, from the 'average wage earned' data collected for employees who either work in, or recently worked in, the hospitality sector during their gap year, Table 10 and Figure 6 can be created. This process enables inter-industry wage comparison for current or recent gap year workers.

Average Money Earned per Hour	Number of Responses
Less than \$15/ hour	17
\$15.01 - \$18/ hour	22
\$18.01 - \$21/ hour	13
\$21.01 - \$24/ hour	7
\$24.01 - \$27/ hour	4
More than \$27.01/ hour	0

Table 10 – Average Gap Year Wage Distribution in the Hospitality Industry

As above, using the same midpoints and point estimates, a weighted average of the hourly wage available to gap years workers in the hospitality sector can be found. The result can be seen in Table 11.

Overall, from this calculation above using the research survey data, the average hourly wage for hospitality industry workers during their gap year is estimated to be only \$17.68. This is \$0.12 less than the estimation found for the retail sector.

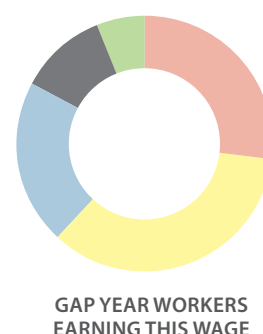
Average Money Earned per Hour (i)	Midpoint, or Predicted Average (\$) (a)	Number of Responses (k)
Less than \$15/ hour	14	17
\$15.01 - \$18/ hour	16.5	22
\$18.01 - \$21/ hour	19.5	13
\$21.01 - \$24/ hour	22.5	7
\$24.01 - \$27/ hour	25.5	4
More than \$27.01/ hour	28	0

$$\text{Weighted Average, or Average Hourly Wage in the Industry (\$)} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} \alpha_i k_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} k_i} = 17.68$$

Table 11 – Calculation of Average Hourly Wage of an Individual Working in Hospitality During a Gap Year

FIGURE 6

Hospitality Industry, Average Gap Year Wage Distribution



AVERAGE WAGE EARNED \$/HR

- Less than \$15/hr
- \$15.01-\$18/hr
- \$18.01-\$21/hr
- \$21.01-\$24/hr
- \$24.01-\$27/hr
- More than \$27.01/ hour

Agriculture

In the same way as above, from the 'average wage earned' data collected for employees who either work in, or recently worked in, the agriculture sector during their gap year, Table 12 and Figure 7 can be created. From this, the remuneration available to casual gap year workers in agriculture can be further compared to the remuneration available to those choosing comparable casual, entry-level, work in retail and hospitality.

Average Money Earned per Hour	Number of Responses
Less than \$15/ hour	2
\$15.01 - \$18/ hour	2
\$18.01 - \$21/ hour	2
\$21.01 - \$24/ hour	2
\$24.01 - \$27/ hour	3
More than \$27.01/ hour	1

Table 12 – Average Gap Year Wage Distribution in the Agriculture Industry

As was done for retail and hospitality, and using the same midpoints and point estimates, a weighted average of the hourly wage available to gap years workers in the agriculture sector can be found. The result can be seen in Table 13.

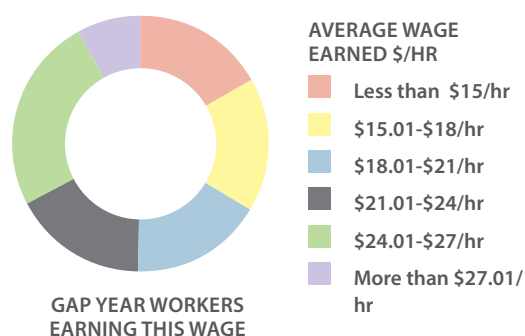
Average Money Earned per Hour (i)	Midpoint, or Predicted Average (\$) (a)	Number of Responses (k)
Less than \$15/ hour	14	2
\$15.01 - \$18/ hour	16.5	2
\$18.01 - \$21/ hour	19.5	2
\$21.01 - \$24/ hour	22.5	2
\$24.01 - \$27/ hour	25.5	3
More than \$27.01/ hour	28	1

$$\text{Weighted Average, or Average Hourly Wage in the Industry (\$)} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} a_i k_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} k_i} = 20.79$$

Table 13 – Calculation of Average Hourly Wage of an Individual Working in Agriculture During a Gap Year

The weighted average hourly wage available in the retail, hospitality, and agriculture industries to individuals on their gap year, as based on the gap year research survey data, can now be compared. See Table 14.

FIGURE 6
Agricultural Industry, Average Gap Year Wage Distribution



Industry	Estimated Average Wage (\$)	Percentage Difference to Comparative Agricultural Remuneration
Agriculture	20.79	--
Retail	17.80	14.38% less
Hospitality	17.68	14.96% less

What this data clearly further demonstrates is the perception that agricultural work is low paying does not correspond with the reality of the remuneration available to casual workers in the industry, when it is compared to both the retail and hospitality sectors. On the contrary, by some measures, agriculture actually provides better hourly remuneration to its casual, gap year workforce than the more highly regarded retail and hospitality industries do.

Working Hours and Underemployment

A worker's hourly wage alone does not give a complete picture of the total remuneration available in a sector, because it ignores the hours of work that an individual has over the working week. This issue of employment hours is especially important for individuals on a gap year, as they are often trying to work as frequently as possible to save for further study or other future endeavours.²⁴

Furthermore, the underemployment rate for 15–19-year-olds, or the percentage of the workforce between these ages that have a job but would like to work more hours, is usually, if the labour force effects of the Corona Virus are excluded, at least two or three times the underemployment rate of the entire workforce. Indeed, in the ABS reporting period between the August quarter 2014 to the November quarter 2020, the average underemployment rate for 15–19-year-olds was 12.20 per cent, as opposed to only 3.43 per cent for the workforce aged 15 to 64.²⁵ This indicates that many individuals in this age bracket, which includes many individuals on their gap year, would like to work more than they already do, but are currently in employment situations that do not allow this.



In the ABS reporting period between the August quarter 2014 to the November quarter 2020, the average underemployment rate for 15–19-year-olds was 12.20 per cent, as opposed to only 3.43 per cent for the workforce aged 15 to 64.



Average hours worked per week



RETAIL
20.10
HOURS



HOSPITALITY
19.42
HOURS



AGRICULTURE
28.42
HOURS

Survey 'Working Hours' Data Comparison

In a similar way as was done for 'average hourly wage' above, analysis of the data from the research survey can be used to predict the average weekly hours of work for gap year employees in the retail, hospitality, and agriculture sectors. This information can then be combined with the average hourly wage values estimated above, to make predictions about the overall differences in remuneration for an individual over the course of their gap year.

Retail

From the 'average weekly hours worked' data collected for employees who either work in, or recently worked in, the retail sector during their gap year, a weighted average of the weekly hours worked can be found. For this, the midpoints of each of the surveyed 'hours of work' brackets were used, and the point estimates of 8 hours per week for those in the "Less than 10 hours" bracket, and 35 hours per week for those in the "More than 30 hours" bracket.²⁶ The result can be seen in Table 15.

In short, from this calculation above using the research survey data, the average weekly time spent at work for retail industry employees during their gap year is estimated to be 20.10 hours.

Hospitality

From the 'average weekly hours worked' data collected for employees who either work in, or recently worked in, the hospitality sector during their gap year, a weighted average of the weekly hours worked can also be found. As above, the same midpoints and point estimates must be used to ensure consistency. The result can be seen in Table 16.

Overall, from this calculation above using the research survey data, the average weekly hours of work for hospitality industry employees during their gap year is estimated to be 19.42 hours per week. This is 0.68 hours less than the estimation found for the retail sector.

Agriculture

From the 'average weekly hours worked' data collected for employees who either work in, or recently worked in, the agriculture sector during their gap year, a weighted average of the weekly hours worked can be found in the same way as for retail and hospitality. As above, the same midpoints and point estimates must be used to ensure consistency. The result can be seen in Table 17.

In short, from this calculation above using the research survey data, the average weekly hours of work for agriculture industry employees during their gap year is estimated to be 28.42 hours per week.

RETAIL

Average Hours Worked per Week (i)	Midpoint, or Predicted Average (\$) (a)	Number of Responses (k)
Less than 10 (i=1)	8	6
10 - 15	12.5	10
15 - 20	17.5	14
20 - 25	22.5	9
25 - 30	27.5	6
More than 30 (i=6)	35	8

Weighted Average, or Average Weekly Hours Worked in the Industry

$$= \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} a_i k_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} k_i} = 20.10$$

Table 15 – Calculation of Average Weekly Hours Worked of an Individual Working in Retail During a Gap Year

HOSPITALITY

Average Hours Worked per Week (i)	Midpoint, or Predicted Average (\$) (a)	Number of Responses (k)
Less than 10 (i=1)	8	8
10 - 15	12.5	16
15 - 20	17.5	14
20 - 25	22.5	8
25 - 30	27.5	6
More than 30 (i=6)	35	10

Weighted Average, or Average Weekly Hours Worked in the Industry

$$= \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} a_i k_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} k_i} = 19.42$$

Table 16 – Calculation of Average Weekly Hours Worked of an Individual Working in Hospitality During a Gap Year

AGRICULTURE

Average Hours Worked per Week (i)	Midpoint, or Predicted Average (\$) (a)	Number of Responses (k)
Less than 10 (i=1)	8	2
10 - 15	12.5	0
15 - 20	17.5	1
20 - 25	22.5	0
25 - 30	27.5	1
More than 30 (i=6)	35	8

Weighted Average, or Average Weekly Hours Worked in the Industry

$$= \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} a_i k_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{i=6} k_i} = 28.42$$

Table 17 – Calculation of Average Weekly Hours Worked of an Individual Working in Agriculture During a Gap Year

Implications for Gap Year Earnings


Furthermore, conservatively assuming only a 40-week working year, so as to account for breaks in employment such as for the kind of short-term travel commonly completed by individuals on a gap year, the difference in total gap year earnings can be compared across industries. See Table 18.

Industry	Estimated Average Hourly Wage in the Industry (\$)	Estimated Average Weekly Hours Worked in the Industry	Estimated Gap Year Earnings, for 40 Week Working Year (\$)	Difference to Agricultural Remuneration (\$)
Agriculture	20.79	28.42	23,634.07	--
Retail	17.80	20.10	14,311.20	9322.87 less
Hospitality	17.68	19.42	13,733.82	9900.25 less

Table 18 – Comparison of Estimated Gap Year Earnings Across Agriculture, Retail, and Hospitality Sectors

Moreover, the average 'income from personal exertion' during a gap year for individuals from the five lowest 'socioeconomic background' deciles is equal to \$14,024.²⁷ Not only is this figure similar to the yearly earnings estimates calculated for the most common gap year employment sectors of retail and hospitality, thus lending credibility to these estimated values, it is also substantially lower than the estimation for work in the agriculture sector. This means that individuals who choose to work in agriculture during their gap year, by way of a higher hourly wage, and far greater weekly hours, have the potential to end their gap year having earned nearly \$10,000 more than the average individual taking a gap year, and who has likely worked in either retail or hospitality.



					
RETAIL	HOSPITALITY	AGRICULTURE	RETAIL	HOSPITALITY	AGRICULTURE
\$14,311	\$13,733	\$23,634	20.10	19.42	28.42
PER YEAR	PER YEAR	PER YEAR	HOURS / WEEK	HOURS / WEEK	HOURS / WEEK

Individuals who choose to work in agriculture during their gap year, by way of a higher hourly wage, and far greater weekly hours, have the potential to end their gap year having earned nearly \$10,000 more than the average individual taking a gap year, and who has likely worked in either retail or hospitality.

Location

Individuals who are currently undertaking, or have recently undertaken, a gap year commonly believe that agricultural employment is located too far away from where they live for them to consider it a viable employment option during their gap year. They are also reluctant to move out of home to secure employment in the sector. Indeed, concerns about the location of agricultural employment ranked highest as the reason for why individuals on a gap year did not pursue work in the industry. A massive 55 per cent of all respondents who did not complete agricultural work during their gap year cited location as a key reason for their decision not to engage with the sector. For respondents from major cities, this number jumped to 59 per cent and remained a high 56 per cent for respondents from regional centres. Only with respondents from rural and remote areas was it not the most common justification for not choosing agricultural work.

Logically, this reasoning is understandable. If agricultural work requires that you leave home straight after finishing high school at the age of 17, to live in temporary accommodation in a country area that you are unfamiliar with, then the decision not to work in the sector during your gap year seems justified. And that is before considering the financial implications that this lifestyle would impose, such as the need to pay for lodgings and cook your own meals.

However, this view of the nature of casual work in the sector does not correspond with the reality of agricultural production and casual agricultural work in much of Queensland. While it is true that individuals living in central Brisbane do face obvious difficulties in commuting to an employer in the agricultural sector, this concern is far less of a problem in reality than most individuals taking a gap year perceive it to be. While the stereotypical image of Queensland agriculture is, arguably, that of extremely remote localities such as the 'outback' and the far north, many employers in the sector are in fact located within a reasonable commuting distance of population centres. Indeed, many agricultural commodities are produced primarily in SA4 regions with a high population density, meaning that an abundance of agricultural work is only a short drive away from many gap year workers and regional centres.

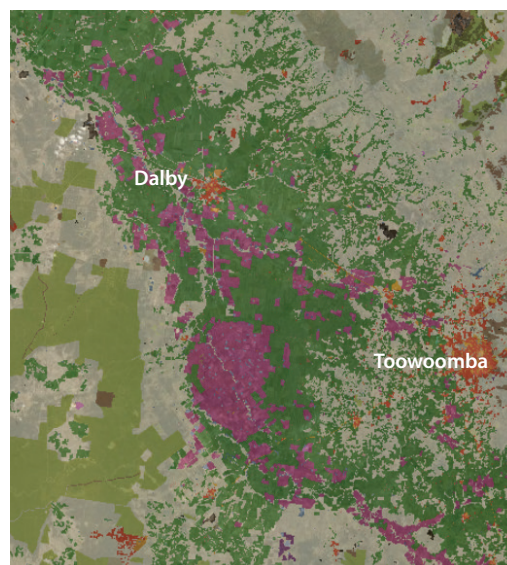


Figure 8 – The regional centres of Toowoomba and Dalby (red) are located close to irrigated (purple) and non-irrigated (green) land used for cropping and horticulture.

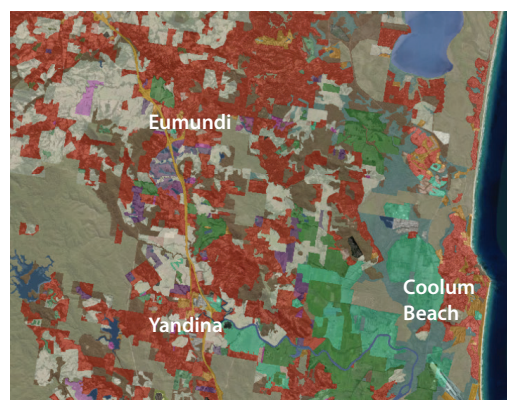
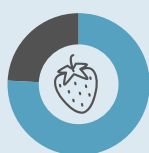
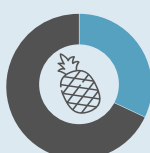


Figure 9 – The urban sprawl (red) of the Sunshine Coast is punctuated with a number of irrigated (purple) and non-irrigated (green) producers that can provide work, close to home, to gap year employees from this populous area.



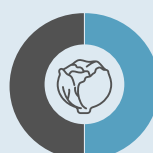
76%

76% of Qld's strawberry production is in the Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay



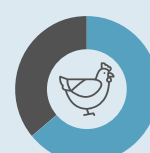
30%

Over a third of Qld's pineapples are grown on the Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay



50%

Half of Qld's lettuce grows in Toowoomba



64%

64% of Qld's chicken meat is produced in the South East Qld (SA4 regions)

As an example, recent ABS data demonstrates that 73 per cent of Queensland's labour-intensive strawberry production occurs in either the Sunshine Coast region or in 'Moreton Bay – North', on farms that are a driving distance away from numerous towns with job-seeking individuals taking a gap year. These two populous regions also produce over a third of Queensland's pineapple crop. Furthermore, the Toowoomba SA4, which is heavily centred on the city itself, produces half of Queensland's lettuce, while a few highly populated localities in the South East (the SA4 regions of Brisbane, Ipswich, Moreton Bay – North, Sunshine Coast, and Toowoomba) produce a combined 64 per cent of the State's chicken meat.²⁸

Furthermore, ABS data indicates that there are 76 agricultural businesses in just the Greater Brisbane region (the SA4 regions of Brisbane North, South, East and West). In the Sunshine Coast SA4, there are 488 agricultural businesses. The Moreton Bay North SA4 has 331, while the Gold Coast SA4 has 160, Toowoomba 244, and Ipswich 764.²⁹ A visual representation of how close agricultural work is to Queensland's regional population centres can be seen in Figures 8 through to 11.

While a great deal of agricultural production does occur in remote localities, and the option of a gap year on a farm far away from where they grew up is obviously available to school leavers. It is often not the case that an individual will be forced to relocate from where they finished high school to find some form of employment in the agriculture industry. The common belief that this is indeed necessary, especially among those who grew up in regional centres, betrays an incorrect understanding of the reality of where agricultural production occurs in Queensland. Even individuals residing in a regional centre, such as Toowoomba, Ipswich, or the Sunshine Coast, are realistically within driving distance of an agricultural employer, even if they do not think that this is the case.

Given the positive perception of gap year agricultural work that exists in regional centres, and that many individuals in regional centres shun casual work in the sector because of a misguided belief that agricultural jobs are not located a reasonable distance from where they are, correcting this misconception is crucial to enticing more gap year workers to the sector. Although the option still remains for an individual who is taking a gap year to move away to a remote locality to pursue casual agricultural work, a greater focus on the offerings closer to population centres would boost the number of gap year workers choosing agricultural employment.

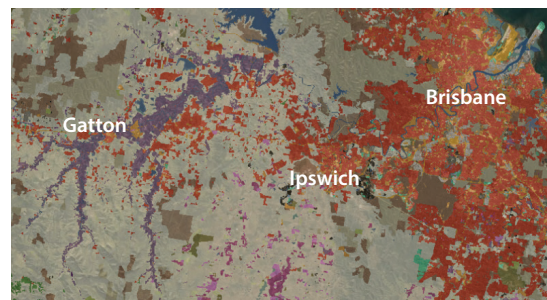


Figure 10 – The western reaches of Brisbane and the town of Ipswich lie less than an hour's drive from a swath of irrigated agricultural land (purple), and a number of agricultural employers.

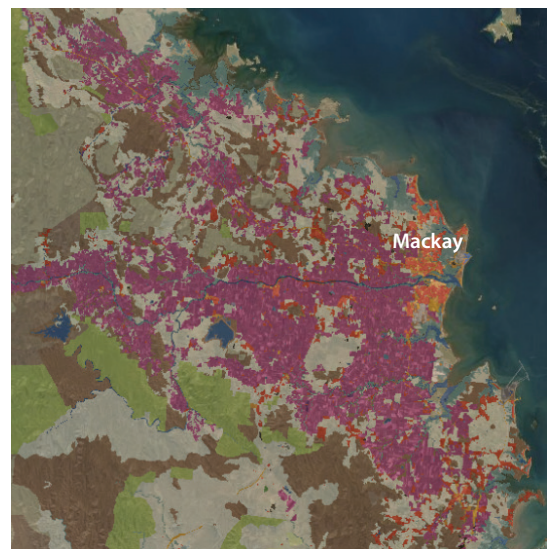


Figure 11 – The regional centre of Mackay is situated in the middle of a plethora of irrigated sugar producers (purple).³⁰

Total Agricultural businesses within a reasonable commuting distance of population centres



76
Greater
Brisbane

488
Sunshine
Coast

331
Moreton
Bay

160
Gold Coast

244
Toowoomba

764
Ipswich

Work-Life Balance

When asked to consider why respondents either don't or didn't work in agriculture during their gap year, 16 per cent of cited a belief that casual agricultural work would "negatively impact my social life". Interestingly, this value was positively correlated with the population density of their location. In rural and remote areas, only 7 per cent of respondents justified their rejection of agricultural work this way compared to 13 per cent of respondents in regional centres and 20 per cent in the city.

This trend likely indicates two things. First, that attitudes towards agricultural work are more welcoming in rural areas, such that an individual's social standing and social life would not be impacted if they chose to work in the sector. Or two, as established above, individuals believe they would be forced to move away from their social network to secure a casual position in the industry: something with obvious social ramifications. While the first factor cannot be definitively proven, the second seems likely. This is because 95 per cent of respondents who believed that working in agriculture would negatively impact their social life also believed that working in the industry required a move to a more remote locality. Considering how the respondents' fears about working in agriculture impacting their social life is largely bound up with the issue of location, correcting the common misconception surrounding the location of agricultural employers will also assuage fears about any negative social consequences.

Furthermore, if a number of individuals, especially in regional centres, came to understand that working in agriculture does not necessarily require them to move from where they went to high school and likely have friends and family, the agricultural industry could argue that working in the sector during a gap year is beneficial to an employee's social life. This is because the agriculture sector is almost unique among gap year employers in that it often does not require its employees to work long into the evenings, or on the weekends. Hours of employment are instead often during the 'standard' working week and in the morning and afternoons.

This is not the case in retail and hospitality. In retail, Saturdays are by far the busiest trading day of the week, and evening and night-time work is common; thus staffing needs are also highest at these points in time.³¹ Similarly, in hospitality, employers are busiest on Friday and Saturday nights, meaning that staffing demand is greatest on these occasions. Therefore, if an individual has either stayed in the place where they graduated high school or moved away with friends to work during their gap year, then casual agricultural employment provides more opportunities for them to enjoy prime leisure time in the evenings and on weekends. This is an often-overlooked perk of casual agricultural employment.

95 per cent of respondents who believed that working in agriculture would negatively impact their social life also believed that working in the industry required a move to a more remote locality.



Conditions of Work

Mistreatment

One issue that the agriculture industry faces in its struggle to attract individuals taking a gap year, is the rogue operators have given the sector a poor reputation for dealing with workers. And since the international travel restrictions introduced in response to the coronavirus pandemic saw the initiation of a larger national conversation about the use of domestic labour on farms, there has been substantial, and damaging, media commentary on this issue.

Popular newspapers and online news sites have not only referred to casual farm work as “a rip-off rort”,³² but also described the employment conditions of many casual farmworkers as “modern slavery”.³³ The search term “fruit picking exploitation” yields hundreds of articles published in only the last few months; all portraying the industry in a negative light. The notion of so-called ‘exploited workers’ regrettably forms a large part of mainstream agricultural news commentary, and the trope has unfortunately seeped out into the consciousness of the wider population. Also, while a great deal of the negative coverage has been focussed specifically on horticultural employers, the damaging connotations associated with casual work have impacted all agricultural producers, even those as far removed from horticulture as cotton.³⁴

Interestingly, the issue of worker ‘exploitation’ did not feature as prominently as might be expected on the minds of individuals taking a gap year. Indeed, when asked why they did not choose to work in the agriculture sector during their gap year, only 13 per cent of respondents answered with “because the agricultural sector does not have a good reputation for dealing with workers”. Among men in regional centres, the demographic that views agriculture most favourably, this figure was only 8 per cent. See Table 19 for a comprehensive demographic breakdown.

While these results do not mean that a minority of rogue operators are not giving agricultural work a bad reputation and discouraging prospective workers from entering the sector, it does, however, indicate that more practical concerns, such as location and remuneration, feature more prominently in the minds of those taking a gap year.



Demographic	Respondents Who Cited Mistreatment as a Key Reason for Shunning Agriculture During Their Gap Year (per cent)
All Respondents	13
Male	9
Female	18
City	11
Regional Centre	13

Table 19 – Impact of Worker Mistreatment on Gap Year Perceptions of Agriculture

The notion of so-called ‘exploited workers’ regrettably forms a large part of mainstream agricultural news commentary, and the trope has unfortunately seeped out into the consciousness of the wider population.

Physicality and Boredom

Another common reason for why individuals reject the agriculture industry during their gap year is because they believe that work in the sector would be too physically demanding for them. Indeed, 28 per cent of respondents thought that because “work in the agriculture sector would be too physically challenging for me”, they would not pursue casual work in the industry. Moreover, 16 per cent of respondents, cited a belief that agricultural work would be too boring for them as a key reason for not taking casual work in the sector during their gap year.

Interestingly, while the majority of reasons for why someone would not choose gap year agricultural work did not display substantial variation based on gender, these two justifications did. See Figure 12.

While only 11 per cent of male respondents said that the perceived physical nature of agricultural work stopped them from entering the industry, this figure jumped substantially to 43 per cent for female respondents. And while only 11 per cent of male respondents said that agriculture being too boring was a reason why they did not take up casual agricultural work during their gap year, 21 per cent of women did. These deviations may account for why men, on average, viewed the notion of casual, gap year, agricultural work more favourably than women did.

However, the overriding belief, especially among young women, that agricultural work is too physically demanding, betrays a lack of understanding of the diversity of employment opportunities available to individuals taking a gap year and working in agriculture. Indeed, while picking work might be physically taxing for some, especially for a crop such as bananas, other roles in the sector, such as in fruit packing or quality control, hold no greater physical burden than casual jobs in retail and hospitality.



Reason for not choosing agricultural work

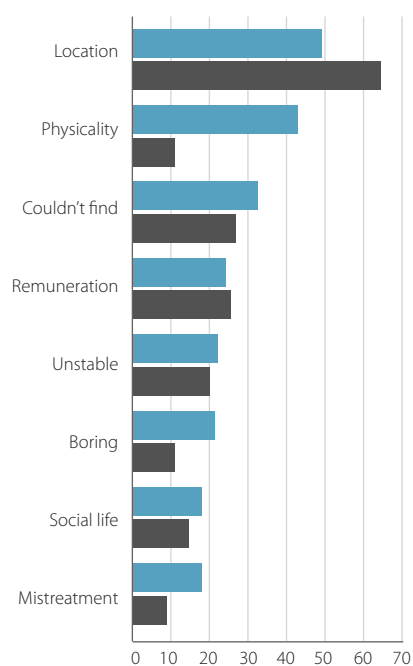


Figure 12 – Reason for not choosing gap year agricultural work by gender

■ Female
■ Male

The overriding belief, especially among young women, that agricultural work is too physically demanding, betrays a lack of understanding of the diversity of employment opportunities available to individuals taking a gap year and working in agriculture.

Short-Term Nature of Employment

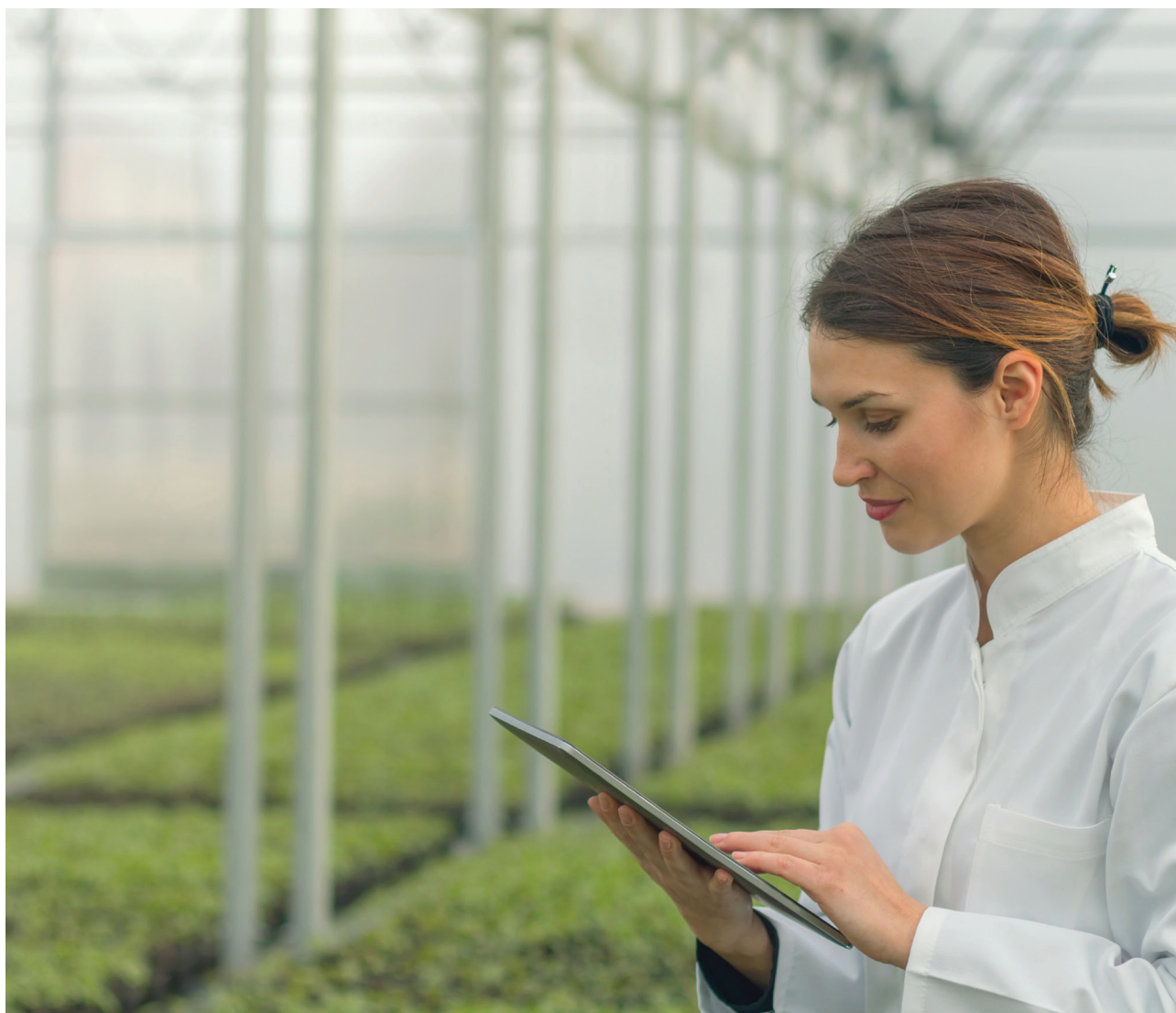
21 per cent of all respondents justified their decision not to pursue gap year agricultural work based on their belief that agriculture only provides “unstable, short-term employment”. This figure remained remarkably consistent among all gender and regional groupings. This finding indicates that job stability is important for a significant proportion of gap year takers.

While little can be done to change the fact that a great deal of casual agricultural work, unlike work in supermarket retail for example, does revolve around short-term, seasonal employment offerings, this is not always true. Many forms of agricultural production, such as beef or dairy farming, require labour all the year round: as do some forms of horticultural production.

Ability to Find Work

Interestingly, given the agriculture sector generally found itself with consistent labour shortfalls even before the coronavirus pandemic began, 29 per cent of respondents said that “I could not find any agricultural jobs for me to take” was a key reason for them not engaging in gap year agricultural employment. Also, this number is not skewed upwards by city respondents, as might be expected. In regional centres, 24 per cent of respondents justified their decision to shun agriculture during their gap year on the grounds that they simply could not find a suitable employer in the industry. Among men in regional centres, this number leapt to 29 per cent.

Given that agricultural employers are frequently short of casual labour and given that the vast majority were periodically short of workers even before the onset of the pandemic, this finding points to some form of a serious disconnect between gap year jobseekers, and those in the industry trying to hire casual staff.



Summary

Overall, considering the results of the gap year employment survey, as assessed based on relevant evidence and statistics, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The agriculture industry does not face a substantial or insurmountable perception problem as a gap year employer when compared to the retail and hospitality industries that compete with it for the labour of individuals who are taking a gap year.
- The prospect of working in agriculture during a gap year is viewed more favourably by current or recent gap year takers from regional centres and country areas than it is by gap year takers in the city.
- The prospect of working in agriculture during a gap year is viewed more favourably by male gap year takers than it is by female gap year takers.
- Men from regional centres are the demographic most supportive of the prospect of working in agriculture during their gap year. Women from the city are the least supportive.
- Individuals who are currently, or have recently, taken a gap year and worked in agriculture view the experience overwhelmingly positively compared to those who worked in other industries.
- Individuals who choose to work in agriculture will, on average, find themselves financially better off at the end of their gap year than individuals who work in either retail or hospitality. This is due to the similar or better hourly wage that can be earned by individuals working in the agriculture industry, coupled with the fact that gap year agriculture employees will work comparatively more hours.
- A belief that agricultural work is too far away from where they live, coupled with a reluctance to move to the regions, constitutes the main justification for why individuals taking a gap year choose not to pursue casual agricultural employment. This view is prevalent not only among individuals from the city, where such concerns are warranted, but also among individuals from regional centres, who are largely ignorant to the fact that many casual agricultural employers are close to where they live.
- Concerns that working in agriculture will negatively influence a gap year taker's social life are largely connected to the belief that they would need to relocate to find employment in the sector.
- Concerns about the mistreatment of casual agricultural workers, although certainly apparent, do not constitute a core reason for why individuals taking a gap year choose not to work in the agriculture industry. Far more pressing are practical concerns regarding location, pay, and physicality.
- A belief that agricultural work is overly physical and, to a lesser extent, boring constitutes an important justification for why many gap year takers shun the industry. These concerns are far greater among women than among men.
- The unstable, short-term nature of a great deal of casual agricultural work is a relatively common reason why individuals taking a gap year pass over agriculture for opportunities in other industries.
- Surprisingly, given the intense labour demand that existed even before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, an inability to find casual agricultural employment is the second most cited reason for individuals on their gap year not engaging with the industry. This represents a severe disconnect and breakdown in communication between casual agricultural employers and job-seeking individuals on a gap year.





ENDNOTES

- 15 This percentage, as with all in this report that concern why an individual did not choose to work in the agriculture industry, is calculated after excluding the responses of those who actually did complete casual agricultural work during their gap year (as well as non-respondents to this question).
- 16 The relevant awards can be found at: www.fairwork.gov.au/awards-and-agreements/awards/list-of-awards. The Horticulture Award [MA000028], Pastoral Award [MA000035], Cotton Ginning Award [MA000024], General Retail Industry Award [MA000004], and Hospitality Industry (General) Award [MA000009] were used in the comparison tables.
- 17 A list of all 'Job Outlook' job profiles (based on ATO data, and produced by the Australian Government's National Skills Commission) can be found at: <https://joboutlook.gov.au/a-z/>.
- 18 National Skills Commission (Australian Government), "Fruit and Nut Pickers," data updated 2018, <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupations/fruit-and-nut-pickers?occupationCode=841212>.
- 19 National Skills Commission (Australian Government), "Fruit and Vegetable Packers," data updated 2018, <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupations/fruit-and-vegetable-packers?occupationCode=832113>.
- 20 National Skills Commission (Australian Government), "Beef Cattle Farm Workers," data updated 2018, <https://joboutlook.gov.au/occupations/beef-cattle-farm-workers?occupationCode=841511>.
- 21 ABS, "63060DO004_201805 Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2018," 2018, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/employee-earnings-and-hours-australia/may-2018/63060do004_201805.xls.
NOTE: Unfortunately, this public dataset does not contain any information on the agriculture sector.
- 22 PayScale, "Average Farm Worker Hourly Pay in Australia," last updated 20th January 2021, https://www.payscale.com/research/AU/Job=Farm_Worker/Hourly_Rate.
PayScale, "Average Retail Sales Associate Hourly Pay in Australia," last updated 20th January 2021, https://www.payscale.com/research/AU/Job=Retail_Sales_Associate/Hourly_Rate.
PayScale, "Average Waiter/Waitress Hourly Pay in Australia," last updated 19th January 2021, https://www.payscale.com/research/AU/Job=Waiter%2FWaitress/Hourly_Rate.
- 23 The values of \$14/ hour for those in the "Less than \$15/ hour" bracket and \$28/ hour for those in the "More than \$27.01/ hour" bracket are somewhat arbitrary, we believe them to be reasonable point estimates. Moreover, although these values are important as they impact the final average wage prediction, consistency in their use for all three sectors is more important in terms of conducting a comparative analysis.
- 24 Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), *Completing Higher Education – The impact of taking a gap-year*, (Canberra: DESE, 2020), 2.
- 25 ABS, "6291.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia, Detailed," 2020, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/dec-2020/6291023b.xls>. (Series ID A84081880C and A84081832K).
- 26 Reasoning for point estimate selection is analogous with that described in 'Footnote 23'. See that footnote for justification.
- 27 Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), *Completing Higher Education – The impact of taking a gap-year*, (Canberra: DESE, 2020), 3.
- 28 ABS, "71210DO001_201819 Agricultural Commodities, Australia–2018-19," 2019, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/agriculture/agricultural-commodities-australia/2018-19/71210do001_201819.xls.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 All images are screenshots taken on 5th February 2021 from:
Queensland Government, "State-wide land use map," 2019, <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/management/mapping/statewide-monitoring/qlump/gallery/qlump-map>.
- 31 Roy Morgan, "The best and worst times to do your grocery-shopping," 2015, <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/6267-best-worst-times-to-do-grocery-shopping-201506020151>.
- 32 Cait Kelly, "A rip-off hort': More calls to clean up fruit picking as locals struggle to land farm jobs," *The New Daily*, 1 November 2020, <https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2020/11/01/fruit-picking-farm-jobs/>.
- 33 Laura Collins, "Australian fruit picking exploitation claims prompt push on protections against 'modern slavery'," *ABC News*, 7 November 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-07/concerns-slavery-has-risen-during-coronavirus-pandemic/12821900>.
- 34 Phone interview with Cotton Australia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions drawn from the results and analysis in this report, several recommendations can be made regarding how QFF, and other associated stakeholders, can effectively encourage more individuals to work in the agriculture sector during their gap year. These are discussed below.

1) Men from regional centres should be the primary target demographic for attracting casual gap year labour.

Given that men from regional centres are the demographic most supportive of the prospect of working in agriculture during their gap year, encouraging this demographic into casual work in the industry logically represents an easier and more fruitful endeavour. This is not to say that regional men should be the only targeted demographic, just that the unique positive standing with which this group views gap year agricultural employment should be capitalised upon in any future advertisement or media campaigns. The benefit inherent in focussing on regional men is also compounded by the fact that gap years are more common in regional areas,³⁵ and that individuals from the regions are located closer to agricultural employers than individuals from the city.

2) The core message that appears in future advertising and media campaigns encouraging more individuals taking a gap year to choose casual agricultural employment should relate to the closeness of agricultural employers to regional towns and population centres.

Many individuals on a gap year, including those from regional areas who generally view the agriculture industry positively, commonly hold the incorrect belief that casual agricultural work is too far away from where they want to live for it to be a viable employment option. Given that this is the single most frequently cited reason for why individuals on a gap year shun casual employment in agriculture, and that for the vast majority of Queenslanders outside of Brisbane this is demonstrably untrue, correcting this perception should be a primary focus. Truthfully dispelling the most common given justification for why an individual rejects agricultural employment during their gap year is crucial to attracting more gap year takers into the industry. Indeed, breaking this perception, and highlighting the many agricultural jobs that exist near population centres and in more densely populated regions, is critical for attracting individuals taking a gap year into casual work in the sector.

Obviously, this approach would work better at attracting more individuals on a gap year to the specific agricultural producers that do operate near regional centres, and would be less effective at getting gap year takers onto farms in very remote areas. However, given the fact that many high school graduates demonstrate a clear reluctance to move to a very remote area for work during their gap year, getting them into such areas may be 'a bridge too far' in terms of what any gap year strategy could hope to achieve. Encouraging more gap year takers into agricultural employment near regional centres is positive for the industry and should be encouraged, but the idea that gap years can provide any form of substantial casual labour supply to very remote producers is too optimistic.

3) Make the financial case for casual agricultural employment.

In Australia, the bulk of high school leavers who take a gap year, especially those from regional areas, do so for at least some economic reasons, and are therefore financially motivated.³⁶ Gap year takers will, therefore, likely respond to messaging relating to pay and hours. Consequently, it is crucial that financial considerations appear in any messaging encouraging more casual gap year workers into the industry. Fortunately for the agriculture industry, as analysis in this report has demonstrated, casual employment in the sector means a similar or better hourly wage when compared with retail and hospitality, and likely more working hours. The greater earnings apparent in agriculture is a real selling point that must be utilised to encourage gap year takers into work in the industry.



4) Highlight the diverse nature of agricultural employment to encourage greater female participation.

The high number of female respondents who cited a belief that work in agriculture would be too physical for them indicates that many female gap year takers associate all casual agricultural work with more physically challenging roles such as the picking of, often heavy, produce. To combat this negative perception, and encourage greater female participation in casual agricultural employment, the diversity of roles available in the sector needs to be communicated. Casual work in agriculture is not just fruit picking, and roles such as fruit packing and quality control require no noticeably different level of physicality than positions in retail and hospitality. This fact needs to be included in the messaging of future advertising and media campaigns, and would work to increase the number of gap year takers, especially women, in the industry.

5) Don't focus on responding to claims of worker mistreatment.

Perhaps surprisingly, the issue of the agriculture sector's reputation as a 'bad' employer of casual workers simply does not feature prominently in the minds of individuals on a gap year. Although the view is certainly present among current and recent gap year takers, and is definitely a reason for some individuals not choosing casual work in the sector, it is not as significant a concern as more practical considerations relating to location and remuneration. Therefore, focusing advertising and media messaging on attempting to correct and dispel the sector's chequered reputation as a casual employer would be a mistake, and more fruitful and more positive promotional messages most certainly exist.

6) Better understand gap year job-seeking habits.

The fact that a substantial number of gap year takers do not or did not engage with the agriculture industry on account of being unable to find any available positions for them to take, at the same time that employers in the sector have been desperate for casual workers, points to a disconnect between employer and potential employee. The current way that casual agricultural jobs are promoted to recent school leavers is clearly not as effective as it should or could be, and more information is required to determine how gap year takers look for work. This would ensure that specific agricultural positions can be better marketed to individuals on a gap year, and more gap year takers can ultimately enter casual roles in the industry.

7) Conduct more in-depth research into this area.

Although the survey that this report is centred around is certainly useful for exploring the labour habits and perception trends that exist among gap year takers, it is not an infallible and comprehensive source of data. For this reason, more in-depth study into this area would be fruitful. Possible avenues for doing this include expanding the sample size beyond only 150 respondents, asking more numerous and more varied questions of gap year takers relating to their gap year experience, and conducting some case studies of those who have worked in the agriculture sector before commencing further study.



ENDNOTES

35 Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), Completing Higher Education – The impact of taking a gap-year, (Canberra: DESE, 2020), 2.

36 Ibid., 2-3.

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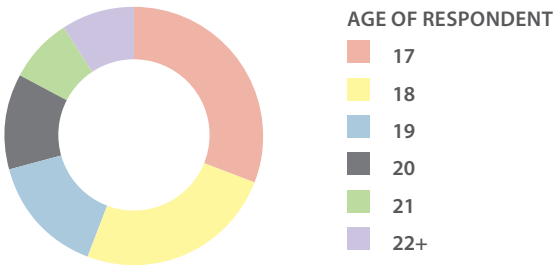


APPENDIX 1 – Basic Overview of Survey Respondents

Age of Respondents

Age at time of Survey Completion	Number of Respondents
17	46
18	38
19	22
20	18
21	12
22+	14

Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

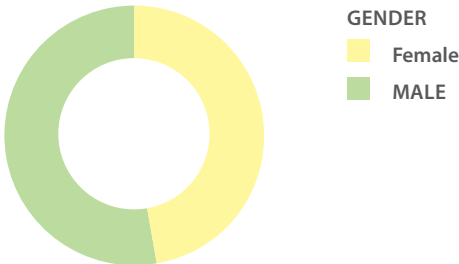


RESPONDENTS OF THIS AGE

Gender of Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents
Male	71
Female	79

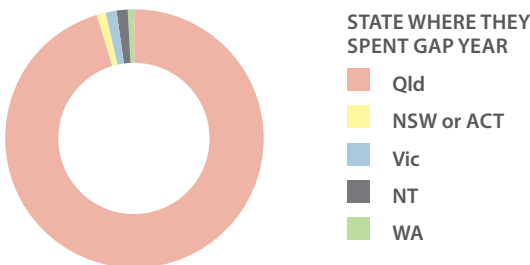
Age Distribution of Survey Respondents



RESPONDENTS OF THIS GENDER

State of Respondents

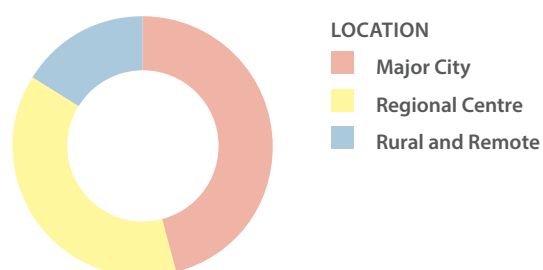
State Where Respondent Spent Gap Year	Number of Respondents
Queensland	142
NSW or ACT	2
Victoria	2
NT	2
WA	1



Location of Respondents

Location Where Respondent Spent Gap Year	Number of Respondents
Major City	69
Regional Centre	57
Rural and Remote	24

Location Distribution of Survey Respondents

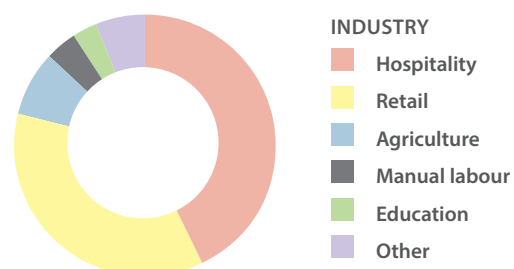


RESPONDENTS WHO SPENT GAP YEAR IN THIS LOCATION

Industry of Respondents

Industry That Respondent Worked in During Gap Year	Number of Respondents
Hospitality	63
Retail	53
Agriculture	12
Manual Labour	6
Education	4
Other	9

Industry Distribution of Survey Respondents



RESPONDENTS WHO WORKED IN THIS INDUSTRY DURING GAP YEAR