

Discussion paper

Agribusiness, Food and Wine Workforce Strategy

Government of South Australia
Department of State Development

Government of South Australia
Department of Primary Industries and Regions

Discussion paper – Agribusiness, Food and Wine Workforce Strategy

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A Workforce Strategy for Agribusiness, Food and Wine

The State Government of South Australia is taking action to strengthen South Australia's agribusiness, food, wine sector through the development of a sector-wide strategy to attract and retain workers.

The sector includes production of food, wine and other agricultural products, as well as associated processing and manufacturing.

The Department of State Development (DSD) and Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) are jointly developing an Agribusiness, Food and Wine Workforce Strategy. It will aim to deliver a long-term, integrated approach to supporting workforce growth in line with the Government's broader economic mission to Build South Australia's Talent.

The development of the workforce strategy has a critical focus on stakeholder engagement. The co-design of specific initiatives will also be informed by workforce data analytics and workforce research and policy analysis.

Purpose

The purpose of this discussion paper is to support stakeholders to share their experiences of challenges, barriers and opportunities in relation to workforce in the agribusiness, food, and wine sector in South Australia.

This document sets out findings from the first round of targeted 1-to-1 engagement with agribusiness, training providers and food and wine sector participants across South Australia.

This document will be used by the Government of South Australia to validate first round findings, identify additional considerations for workforce attraction and retention, and support development of the workforce strategy.

Background

The development of a workforce strategy is a key recommendation in a business case commissioned by the State Government, which was launched at the 2025 Primary Industries and Regions Forum.

The business case was developed by Deloitte Access Economics, commissioned by PIRSA in partnership with Primary Producers SA (PPSA), and in collaboration with other stakeholders across industry, government and the education sector.

The business case highlighted the extent to which workforce challenges are acting as a handbrake on the growth and productivity of our agribusiness, food and wine sector and identifies key barriers to workforce attraction and retention. It outlined five major recommendations – the foremost being the development of a coordinated, state-wide workforce strategy for the sector.

The business case outlined potential actions to deliver coordinated initiatives to:

- Improve community perceptions
- Highlight diverse career opportunities available
- Help education providers inspire and equip students to pursue agribusiness careers
- Support businesses to attract and retain migrant and overseas workers.

The Business Case Final Report is available via https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/afw-workforce-strategy.

Key dates

The discussion paper will be open for public comment via yourSAy from 14 May 2026 – 10 June 2026.

The Strategy will be completed in late 2026.

This paper will be shared with relevant industry groups and key primary producers, manufacturers and training providers servicing the sector. Recipients are encouraged to share it with their network to increase the number of stakeholders who can consider it and submit a response.

Online workshops

PIRSA, with DSD, is holding a series of online workshops in late May and early June 2026 to discuss the matters outlined in this discussion paper. All stakeholders within the agribusiness, food, and wine sector in South Australia are encouraged to participate.

These workshops will each focus on a South Australian region and will provide an opportunity to collaboratively discuss and provide feedback with other sector participants from your region.

To register your attendance, please visit https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/sa-agribusiness-food-and-wine-workforce-strategy-4841161.

The focus of the workshops will be:

1. To explore the key themes emerging from the first round of targeted engagement and to confirm these align to participants views or if there are additional areas that need to be considered.
2. To hear from participants about what is most important for them in the development of the Agribusiness, Food and Wine Workforce Strategy.

What We've Heard

Consultation

In late 2025 and early 2026, PIRSA and DSD engaged with more than 40 stakeholders across all South Australian regions through targeted interviews. Interviewees included primary producers of diverse size, commodities and location, representative bodies, and AgTech and training providers.

Through this consultation, interviewees were asked to share their experience of barriers in the primary industry workforce, to identify the key challenges impacting the workforce. They were also asked to share positive experiences relating to workforce initiatives or outcomes that may be useful for cross sectoral learning and application.

Summary information about the key challenges is provided below to help inform this next phase of engagement.

Through engagement on key questions via this discussion paper and regionally focused online workshops, we seek to test and validate the experiences that have been shared so far and identify potential opportunities and actions.

Challenges identified through the targeted interviews have been clustered under 8 **themes**, which are:

1: Regional talent pool constraints

2: Migration and visa constraints

3: Training and education limitations

4: Sector capability gaps

5: Challenges in technology

6: The nature of the work

7: Perceptions of the sector

8: Regional infrastructure and social support system gaps.

Each theme is explored further in the next section.

While these themes reflect what we heard through engagement, some barriers – such as regional infrastructure or working visas – may be out of scope for specific actions developed under the Strategy.

1: Regional talent pool constraints

Stakeholders have reported that regional talent pools are limited in size and availability of certain key skills and qualifications is constraining organisational growth and increasing recruitment costs.

Common themes
Candidate pools in regional areas are limited.
Competition with other employers and sectors for scarce talent inflates wages and reduces the pool further.
Local applicants are declining in suitability – submitting applications without the required or desired skills, licences, or qualifications.
Digital, technology, and maintenance skill demand is rising and can outstrip the capacity of the local talent pool.
Administrative roles, such as auditing, are in high demand in primary industries but low supply in regional areas.
Young people working for small or family businesses in regional areas may leave their roles to pursue career progression.

2: Migration and visa constraints

Stakeholders have reported that when seeking migrant workers to fill workforce gaps, they faced structural, logistical, and financial barriers and challenges.

Common themes
Visa process complexity and costs are prohibitive, including the need for employer expertise.
Eligibility constraints of visa pathways mean that even if candidates have the appropriate skills and experience, they may not be eligible for that visa.
Some visas restrict young people from undertaking work placements, traineeships, and apprenticeships, meaning long-term settlement and families staying in the workforce can be inhibited.
The conditions of structured migration pathways (e.g. mandatory return periods and minimum rates of pay) can make retention more complex or challenging.
Recruiting skilled migrant workers who are already in Australia can be challenging due to employer-specific visa restrictions.
Highly skilled migrant workers may require re-accreditation to meet particular Australian standards.
Working holiday visas leave employers having to re-recruit following mandatory regional work.

3: Training and education limitations

Stakeholders have reported that the capacity to upskill and train prospective and current employees is limited, could be more proactive, and/or struggles to keep pace with changing needs.

Common themes
There is a shortage of agriculture teachers with exposure to and an understanding of the sector.
Training providers can struggle to meet demand for training in regional locations, due to thin financial margins.
Younger recruits arrive lacking "soft skills" (e.g. ability to integrate feedback, communication skills), creating work-readiness gaps and additional training/management burden on employers.
Industry is increasingly seeking shorter, specialised training products, to meet skill needs.
Apprentices are challenging to retain post qualification due to high demand for qualified tradespersons across the economy.
Registered training organisation offerings may not retain alignment with evolving or increasingly complex sector needs.
While training providers do partner with industry to develop and deliver courses, it varies across subsectors and regions. In some areas, industry/training provider connections can be weaker, increasing the challenge of keeping training current.
Skill demand for automation and/or digitisation outpaces the capacity to respond to need, or provide training, with training systems struggling to keep pace with industry development.

4: Sector capability gaps

Stakeholders have reported that there are key skill gaps across the sector that prevent business and workforce development and forward planning.

Common themes
Smaller and family business owners are often involved operationally, limiting capacity to focus on strategic or administrative functions like business or workforce development.
Complex compliance or certification processes can demand management attention and prevent focus elsewhere.
Accessing training and identifying opportunities to upskill can be complex, time-consuming, and/or costly.
Trade shortages mean that key roles are very challenging to fill, and depending on the size of the workforce, the capacity to supervise new workers (including apprentices) can be challenging.

5: Challenges in integrating technology

Stakeholders have reported that, while technology can help reduce the impacts of workforce constraints, key barriers exist to its adoption and/or scaling it up.

Common themes
Technology and automation can be cost prohibitive, particularly for smaller businesses.
Digital connectivity infrastructure required to support AgTech or other innovations can be lacking in the regions.
Work sites or business locations may not be set up to accommodate technology and machinery, and may require additional, significant investment to refurbish the site or building(s) before investment in technology can be made.
Appetite and capacity for adoption of technology across the workforce and across sectors can be inconsistent.
Farm managers and agronomists are the most likely occupations to actively look at using technology, with water, farm, and soil management to maximise yields and improve resource management.
AgTech companies perceive that technology does not remove job roles, and instead supports efficient resource use, allowing workers to take on other tasks.
Education and training on the use of technology should be prioritised in training and education pathways into the sector.
Education of the sector on the business case/application for technology is the key barrier identified by AgTech companies.

6: The nature of the work

Stakeholders have reported that the nature of the work in the sector can make moving into the sector less appealing.

Common themes
Shift work and rotating rosters in support of 24/7 operations can dissuade entry into the workforce.
Exposure to the elements and physically demanding work can dissuade entry into the workforce, particularly younger and school leaver cohorts.
Seasonality of work can create a barrier to candidates who are interested in long-term opportunities.
Some workers may prefer specific shift patterns for work/life balance or flexibility, which cannot necessarily be accommodated.

7: Perception of the sector

Stakeholders have reported that prospective workers hold misperceptions about the sector and the nature of work, resulting in lower entry of new workers.

Common themes
Perceived remoteness of work from amenities and modern convenience does not always match the reality of living in regional towns.
Misconceptions about the skills and qualifications involved in primary production result in assumptions that certain skillsets (e.g. administration), despite being in demand, will only find a home in metropolitan areas.
Low exposure to primary production and agriculture in education results in further embedding of misconceptions. For example, people can perceive horticulture and other primary industries as "low skill", "dirty" and/or "inflexible".
Existing pathways encourage candidates into tertiary education and away from trades and primary production.
A perceived lack of career progression and concerns over future renumeration may dissuade graduates and other workers from entering the sector.

8: Regional infrastructure and social support system gaps

Stakeholders have reported that the non-wage needs of workers, which are outside of the control of employers, are not always met. They noted that a lack of affordable housing, schools, childcare, and more, can dissuade people from working in regional South Australia.

Common themes
Housing shortages are a barrier to attraction.
Available housing is perceived as too expensive for the pay rate in the sector.
Lack of local childcare reduces the likelihood that workers will move to and/or stay in regional roles.
School entry dates are not aligned with recruitment dates or commodity seasons, increasing barriers to workers with families moving to and/or staying in regional roles.
Travel to remote work sites, high fuel costs, and/or poor or no access to public transport, can create barriers to recruitment and retention.
Concentration of study opportunities located far from regional roles can drive workers to exit the sector.
The cost of living can be a deterrent when compared with the pay rate in the sector.

Feedback

Your feedback is sought to confirm the key workforce challenges, barriers, and opportunities in the agribusiness, food, and wine sector, and to support in identifying potential actions to help attract and retain workers in the sector.

Your insights will be critical to development of the Agribusiness, Food and Wine Workforce Strategy.

When preparing to participate, you may wish to consider the barriers and challenges listed in this document.

Your feedback is sought on the following matters:

1. **What additional workforce challenges or barriers experienced by the agribusiness, food, and wine sector should be considered?**

2. **What challenges or barriers have you or your business experienced in workforce attraction?**
   You may wish to elaborate on cohorts of workers you would like to, but struggle to employ.

3. **What challenges or barriers have you or your business experienced in workforce retention?**
   You may wish to elaborate on roles or type of workers you struggle to maintain.

4. **What actions have you or your business taken to overcome these workforce challenges or barriers?**
   You may wish to elaborate on whether these actions have been successful.

5. **Are your workforce requirements changing in response to future needs?**
   You may wish to elaborate on what these changes or needs are.

6. **What actions or initiatives are needed to support a strong and sustainable workforce in your sector or the agribusiness, food, and wine sector more broadly?**

Feedback can be provided through the following methods:

- Submitting your response to the Discussion Paper **via https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/afw-workforce-strategy**
- Contacting the Project Team via e-mail at pirsa.strategyandpolicy@sa.gov.au
- Signing up for the online workshop for your region via https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/sa-agribusiness-food-and-wine-workforce-strategy-4841161.