



## Case Study

### Holiday Harvest Pilot Program 2022

**Overview:** The Holiday Harvest Pilot Program, initiated by the Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network (QAWN) in 2022, aimed to address the chronic labour and skills shortages facing the Australian agriculture sector. By attracting students to engage in paid employment during school holidays, the program sought to equip them with industry-specific skills, enhance their soft skills, and raise awareness about modern agricultural career opportunities.

**Background:** The Australian agriculture industry is grappled with persistent labour and skills shortages resulting from dynamic mega-trends, such as shifting demographics, climate change, global disruptions, sustainability concerns, and digital transformation. This changing landscape demanded a modernization of farming practices and skillsets, emphasizing digital literacy, data management, communication, and technical operational skills. Despite these changes, outdated perceptions of agriculture persisted, deterring students from considering it as a viable career option. In response, QAWN collaborated with local stakeholders and adapted the successful 2019 Holiday Harvest Program to create a pilot initiative.

**Challenge/Goal:** The central challenge was to bridge the gap between the evolving needs of the agriculture industry and the outdated perceptions held by students. The overarching goal was to entice students to participate in paid employment during school holidays, foster relevant industry skills, and promote a contemporary understanding of agricultural career pathways.

#### Solutions:

- 1. Program Development and Partnerships:** In collaboration with the Bowen Gumlu Growers Association and local producers, QAWN designed the Holiday Harvest Pilot Program. This initiative aligned with the Queensland Agriculture Workforce Plan's objectives of Adaptation, Attraction, Retention, and Skill enhancement.
- 2. Strategic Engagement:** QAWN successfully engaged five high schools across the region and partnered with seven horticulture and aquaculture producers. The program was thoughtfully structured to provide participants with paid employment, industry insights, and the development of essential soft skills.
- 3. Training and Induction:** All students underwent a comprehensive online Hort Card Field Worker Farm Safety Induction, encompassing crucial safety aspects and good manufacturing practices. This training ensured that students were well-prepared for their roles in the industry.
- 4. Enhanced Communication:** Recognizing the need for effective stakeholder engagement, QAWN invested significant effort in connecting with schools, students,

and industry partners. Streamlining the onboarding process and improving communication channels were vital components of this effort.

**Results:** The pilot program achieved remarkable outcomes as demonstrated through key metrics:

- **School Engagement:** Collaboration with multiple high schools facilitated program participation.
- **Producer Engagement:** Partnerships with horticulture and aquaculture producers demonstrated industry interest.
- **Student Participation:** Enrolling five students who secured paid employment highlighted program appeal.
- **Anecdotal Feedback:** Valuable insights collected from students, educators, and industry stakeholders highlighted the program's impact.

### Branding and Images



### Campaign Highlights:

- **Diverse Student Involvement:** Four female students from Home Hill State High School and one male student from Proserpine State High School were actively engaged.
- **Employer Preference:** Tassal and Pacific Bio emerged as the favoured employers among participating students.
- **Workforce Fulfillment:** The program efficiently met local workforce needs for seasonal harvesting.
- **School-Industry Nexus:** Strengthened connections between schools and the agriculture industry were a notable outcome.
- **Enhanced Career Awareness:** Students gained invaluable insights into diverse career pathways within agriculture.
- **Effective Training Completion:** All students successfully completed the Hort Card compliance training before commencing their employment.

**Key Learnings and Opportunities:** The pilot program yielded several valuable insights:

- Extending engagement timelines before school holidays can attract a greater student cohort.
- Comprehensive information sharing with schools, including requirements like medical examinations, is essential.
- Expanding promotional efforts through diverse social media channels can broaden program reach.
- Aligning the program with specific industry seasons, like horticulture, enhances relevance.
- Strengthening school-industry connections through platforms like the QFF Ag Career Magazine can offer a glimpse into emerging careers.
- Seeking funding support for broader implementation can ensure sustained success.
- Employing technology, such as a QR code for student enrolment, can streamline communication.

**Conclusion:** The Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network's Holiday Harvest Pilot Program 2022 emerged as a resounding success, effectively tackling labour shortages and skill gaps within the agriculture sector. Through strategic partnerships, tailored engagement, comprehensive training, and focused communication, QAWN paved the way for students to access paid employment, acquire pertinent industry skills, and explore the diverse and contemporary landscape of agricultural careers. This pilot program's triumph underscores its potential for expansion and its vital role in nurturing a skilled and diverse agriculture workforce to meet the industry's evolving demands.

### **Acknowledgement**

The Holiday Harvest Jobs Program (HHJP) was delivered in collaboration with the HHJP designers Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers and QAWN Wide Bay Burnett & Surrounds.

### **About QAWN**

The Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network (QAWN) is funded by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and supports Queensland agribusiness to attract, train and retain workers. QAWN is a free service available to Queensland agribusinesses regardless of commodity or organisational membership.

### **About BGGGA**

Bowen Gumlu Growers Association (BGGGA) represents the interests of horticultural growers, producers and associated agribusinesses in North Queensland. The association's key activities include member services, advocacy, workforce and industry development and the delivery of projects focused on improving on-farm practices, commercial outcomes for farming businesses and the prosperity of our regional community.