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Te Pokapū a Mahi me Te Manene Rangahau

A SERVICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

RSE Monitoring: Key Findings from the 2011 Employers Survey



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PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to summarise the key findings from an online survey of employers in the horticulture and viticulture industry. The survey was conducted in 2011 as part of the Department of Labour's post-evaluation monitoring of Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) policy. This is the fourth such survey undertaken by the Department. The purpose of the survey is to provide evidence-based information on the policy implementation to ensure it continues as intended.

1 BACKGROUND

This document details the results of the recent online and telephone survey of n=251 horticulture and viticulture employers, comprised of three primary groups of respondents.

1. Official RSE: Employers/contractors with Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) status who have employed seasonal workers under the RSE scheme (n=81)
2. Other RSE: Employers/contractors who, while not being RSEs, sourced RSE workers through another means (n=33)
3. Non-RSE: Employers/contractors who have not employed seasonal workers under the RSE scheme (n=137).

The survey sought employers' feedback in relation to the following areas:

- How recruitment of seasonal workers was undertaken this year and expectations as to how it will be done next year
- Perceptions of the performance of seasonal workers sourced from various schemes in relation to their dependability, enthusiasm while working, and productivity
- Amongst employers of RSE workers, difficulties or issues experienced in providing appropriate pastoral care to workers
- Whether there had been any character-related issues amongst RSE workers
- Amongst employers of RSE workers, the short-term impacts and benefits of participating in the RSE scheme.

2 KEY FINDINGS

Recruitment practices

Demand for seasonal workers is particularly strong between February and April. The 2011 survey found that RSEs are significantly more likely than other types of employers to identify a longer period - February through June - as the peak period for their labour supply needs. This follows a similar pattern to previous years (the survey has been run annually since 2008).

Key findings for recruitment practices are:

- On average, RSEs report having 64 Pacific workers admitted under the RSE scheme (up from 54 in 2010) and 56 non-Pacific workers (down from 68 in 2010)
- RSEs also continue to source seasonal workers extensively from other sources, with ninety-three percent employing seasonal workers from Work and Income and ninety-nine percent sourcing seasonal workers from the local community
- Other employers who report employing RSE workers ('other RSEs') source these workers most frequently through an RSE labour contractor. The majority of these employers plan to continue using current arrangements in future
- Forty-seven percent of RSEs would like to recruit the same group of workers for next season/year, and 45 percent would like a mix of returning and new workers from the same countries they are currently recruiting from at present.

Perceptions regarding performance of seasonal workers

Maintaining the pattern observed in 2010, Pacific RSE workers are rated higher than all other employee groups for their dependability, enthusiasm while working, and their productivity. Specifically, Pacific RSE workers are viewed as significantly more dependable (mean 9.04 out of 10), productive (mean 8.82) and enthusiastic (mean 8.75) than all other categories of seasonal worker. Overall scores for Pacific RSE workers on each of the above attributes have not changed significantly since 2010.

As observed last year, a large proportion (91 percent) of RSEs employed Pacific RSE workers whom they also employed the previous year. Questions about the attitude and productivity of both new and returning Pacific RSE workers were answered positively by the majority of RSEs.

In terms of early productivity, 61 percent of RSEs rated their returning Pacific RSE workers as "excellent – all hit the ground running" (up from 55 percent in 2010) and a further 34 percent rated these workers as "good – most need very little training".

Of those RSEs who employed both new and returning Pacific RSE workers, 86 percent believe that their returning workers are 'much more productive' (47

percent) or 'somewhat more productive' (39 percent) than their new workers this year – significantly lower than the 97 percent of RSE employers who believed that returning workers were more productive in 2010.

90 percent of RSEs who employed both new and returning Pacific RSE workers report that returning workers helped with the training of new workers – up from 80 percent in 2010.

Difficulties experienced in providing pastoral care

In line with the 2010 research, this year's survey found that more than three quarters (77 percent) of RSEs stated they had no difficulties in providing pastoral care for their RSE workers.

Eighty-one percent of RSEs believe that managing the provision of pastoral care was easier this year than last year.

Changes to the pastoral care provided

Just over half (51 percent) of RSEs have already made some improvement to their pastoral care arrangements for RSE workers. One in five (21 percent) have improved the provision of "food at reasonable cost".

The most common areas for planned improvement are suitable accommodation (15 percent), food at a reasonable cost (11 percent), transport to and from worksites (11 percent) and health and safety inductions (11 percent).

Matching 2010 research findings, in the latest survey 20 percent of RSEs reported having made changes to their pastoral care for New Zealand and other workers as a result of their care provision for RSE workers.

Thirteen percent of RSEs are considering making changes to their care provision for New Zealand and other workers in the future, compared to six percent in 2010.

Health and character issues

As observed in 2010, similar levels of character issues, such as altercations with other workers or not fitting in, were observed for Pacific RSE workers and other employee groups.

Almost two-thirds (67%) of RSEs report that all of their Pacific workers arrived in good health. Continuing the trend from last year, around one in four RSEs (26 percent) reported that at least some of their Pacific RSE workers did not arrive in good health. Boils, dental problems and pregnancies were again the most frequently mentioned health issues.

Short-term impacts

Roughly six in ten RSEs say they have made changes this year in at least one of the areas of business practice they were asked about. Changes to health and safety practices and business expansion have been implemented by roughly a third of RSEs in the past year:

- Changes in health and safety practices (33 percent)
- Investment in new plant and equipment (32 percent)
- Expansion of the business (32 percent)
- Improvements in workforce planning (27 percent)
- How seasonal staff are managed and supervised (26 percent)
- Training and induction practices for seasonal workers (26 percent)
- How seasonal workers are recruited (20 percent).

With the exception of investment in new plant and equipment, at least 40 percent of RSEs plan to make changes in each of the above areas, next year or in the near future.

As observed in 2010, RSEs are also more likely than non-RSEs to have made – or be planning to make – changes to their business.

Benefits of participation in the RSE policy

In line with the 2010 survey, almost all RSEs (93 percent) say that the benefits of participating in the scheme outweigh the costs.

At least 95 percent of RSEs agree that participation in the programme has resulted in:

- Better quality and more productive workers
- A more stable workforce than in previous years.

Three quarters (75 percent) of RSEs report having extended their area of cultivation since 2007. Of these, 77 percent say that participation in the RSE scheme has been a factor encouraging this expansion.

Awareness and perceptions of RSE

Prior to receiving communication about this survey, 84 percent of employers who did not recruit any RSE workers in the last 12 months say they had heard of the RSE scheme.

The availability of sufficient staff from other sources is identified as the main reason for not participating in the scheme.

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