

# Understanding workforce participation

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## Introduction

- Take home message
- Research questions and methods
- Summary of findings
  - Different labour pools
  - Unsustainable labour flows
  - Intermediaries: a new hope?
- Three models of workforce development
- Recommendations



# Take home message

1. Challenge
  - Profound environmental, social and economic pressures on Primary Industries leading to workforce development atrophy
2. Opportunities
  - A history of innovation in production output offers hope for renewal through collaboration
3. The Centrality of Regions
  - Regional responses to workforce development atrophy are not guaranteed successful but offer the clearest path to renewal



# Research questions and methods

- Research questions:
  - What shapes workforce development in primary industries?
  - How viable are those models for the future?
  - What can be done to support sustainable workforce development?
  
- Literature, key informants(31), focus group participants (29), other informants (30)
  - Two locations – Mildura, Shepparton
  - Not just farmers, but farm workers and contractors



### Summary of findings: different labour pools

- Farm operators
  - Farmers (ie the classic 'owner occupier farmer')
  - Farmer managers
    - Professional general managers
    - 'from the field' managers
    - The 'agricultural graduate' manager
- General farm workers and supervisors
- Seasonal workers
  - Professional pickers and pruners
  - Transient independents
  - Migrant relyants
- Machine contractors in broad-acre
  - Farmers at part-time machine contractors
  - Harvest trail contractors



## Summary of findings

- **Unsustainable labour flows:**
  - Farmers eating their seeds and sweating assets
  - Critical traditional labour pools drying up
  - Low employment standards getting lower
  - Flows into and through PI are blocking up
  - Increasing reliance on contractors and labour hire
  - Increasing need for complex knowledge



## Summary of findings continued:

- **Networks and intermediaries: 'a new hope?'**
  - Not a focus of the study but importance apparent
  - Formal networks powerful but exclusive
  - Informal networks effective but unorganised
  - Intermediaries a critical public good



## Three models of workforce development

- **1. Struggling family farms and rising corporate farms**
  - Continuation of current dynamics of atrophy
- **2. Targeted VET responses**
  - Important element but can't lead renewal
- **3. Building new capacity**
  - Sharing risk and shaping sustainability



# Recommendations

- Establish a Regional and Primary Industries Workforce Development Taskforce
  - Role:
    - fund alliance based initiatives at a regional level
    - recommend improvements for the training system
- Immediate priorities
  - Navigating disparate funding sources
  - Specific training system problems
  - Sponsor regional workshops
- Regional alliance based initiatives



## Recommendations continued:

- Pre-conditions for sustainable initiatives
  - Labour in demand
  - Sharing risk
  - Regional cohesion
  - Champions
  - Experts
  - Good intermediaries



# Recommendations continued

- Existing initiatives
  - Seasonal labour pools/flows
    - Seasonal Demand Calendar
    - Fire and Ice
    - Darwin accommodation
  
- Experimental initiatives
  - Continuing labour pools/flows
    - Large family farm flywheel/group training model
  - Potential labour pools/flows
    - Group employment schemes

