



## Skills issues in the Riverina's horticulture industry

Regional Development Australia Riverina (RDA Riverina) is part of a national network of committees fostering regional economic development.

RDA committees work with all three tiers of government, regional business and the wider community to boost the economic capability and performance of their region. Focused on the economic, social and environmental issues affecting its communities, RDA Riverina has a pivotal role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Riverina.

In early 2017, through RDA Riverina's relationships with the local horticulture industry, we became aware of a skills shortage. Growers expressed difficulty in finding skilled staff after advertising widely. Affected horticulture industries in the Riverina include irrigated crops of citrus, tree nuts, vegetables, stone fruit, wine grapes and the cooler climate apple industry.

With the Riverina region producing:

- One third NSW fruit and nuts - \$271 million
- One third NSW vegetables - \$141 million
- Half NSW wine grape production - \$81 million

this skills issue has had an enormous impact and will continue to impact on economic development in the Riverina and as well as NSW if solutions are not found. RDA Riverina's Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (Subclass 187 visa) (RSMS) enables regional employers to sponsor overseas skilled workers and employ them in skilled positions that cannot be filled using the local labour market. We found that the horticulture industry was using RSMS at a higher rate than before.

RDA Riverina sought funding from the NSW Government to conduct a study to establish and validate the extent of the issue and formulate policy responses to address these skills shortages. This formed part of a broader study across NSW of skills needs. In June 2017, RDA Riverina engaged RMCG to lead this investigation.

With new initiatives in the Riverina supporting agriculture, including TAFE NSW Griffith Campus hosting the Agribusiness Skills Point and the new AgriSciences Research and Business Park at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, this study supports the growing recognition of the importance of the horticulture sector in our community.

Including a desktop review, stakeholder consultation and industry surveys, this research informs government, industry and community about skills in the horticulture industry and makes five recommendations.

A copy of the full study can be obtained by emailing RDA Riverina CEO Rachel Whiting at [ceo@rdariverina.org.au](mailto:ceo@rdariverina.org.au).



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