

ATTRACTING PEOPLE TO CAREERS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S FOOD, WINE AND AGRIBUSINESS SECTOR



Government of South Australia
Department of Primary Industries
and Regions



WORKFORCE PROJECT SUMMARY

ATTRACTING PEOPLE TO CAREERS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S FOOD, WINE AND AGRIBUSINESS SECTOR

WHY

In 2023, the Government of South Australia released the South Australian Economic Statement: Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive, including the mission to Build South Australia's Talent. In line with the Government's economic agenda, it is a priority of the food, wine and agribusiness sector to future proof workforce needs.

Industry advises that workforce shortages are constraining productivity. Attracting people to take up careers in our sector is recognised as one key strategy to address workforce shortages, and in regions more broadly.

This work is about future proofing the industry, recognising increased competition for talent across the economy and the increasing complexity of the sector.

HOW

Deloitte Access Economics was engaged to create a business case for improving and repositioning career opportunities in South Australia's food, wine and agribusiness sector.

The scope of this work included:

- Analysis of the barriers and challenges to attracting people to the workforce across the food, wine and agribusiness sector.
- Analysis of the existing work being undertaken by all tiers of government, academia and industry to attract people to these careers, including current linkages and coordination, perceived conflicts or duplications in effort, and opportunities for improved alignment.
- Development of a project plan comprising recommendations and actions to address the barriers and challenges and improve and reposition career opportunities.

The outcomes of the process will inform forward actions to address workforce shortages in our sector and regional South Australia more broadly.



BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Competition with other occupations

While skills shortages in South Australian food, wine and agribusiness are less severe than the national average, recruitment challenges have been exacerbated by competition both within the sector and from other industries such as mining and defence. Broader skills shortages across the economy, along with the appeal of higher wages, flexible work arrangements and clearer professional development opportunities are intensifying competition.

Seasonal fluctuations in labour demand and rural living

Pose unique challenges to attraction and retention of workers in some occupations, particularly for smaller organisations.

Lack of adoption into the education curriculum

While food and fibre is included as a topic within appropriate school subjects to allow young Australians to understand and value primary industries, dedicated agribusiness education is under-represented in South Australian school curriculums. Specialist programs do exist, but these are often only in regional areas. In South Australia, only 92 out of 765 schools have dedicated primary industries programs¹.

Shortage of agriculture teachers

A contributor to the lack of agribusiness education in school curriculums is the critical shortage of qualified teaching staff.

Students' lack of awareness and negative perceptions

Many students have limited awareness and hold outdated or negative perceptions about agribusiness careers – seeing them as low-paying, regionally bound, and lacking variety – due to gaps in education, exposure, and engagement with the sector.

Declining and flatlining student numbers

Rates of student participation in Vocational and Education Training (VET) and higher education affect future workforce skill shortages, recruitment difficulty and vacancies. First preference selections and commencements in agriculture-related higher education courses have flatlined since 2017, while VET, apprentice and traineeship commencements have declined since 2012.



Negative community perceptions about agribusiness careers

While current workers often report positive experiences, the broader community tends to hold negative and outdated views of the industry, seeing it as physically demanding, poorly compensated, lacking in modern opportunities and often in hardship.

Job vacancy increases

The number of internet vacancies in agribusiness occupations in South Australia doubled from May 2020 to the end of 2021 and remains elevated relative to pre-COVID-19.

Low job retention in operational roles

While the retention rate for agriculture, forestry and fishing is above the state average, retention of workers in operational roles is much lower than employers and managers.

Attraction

People are more likely to pursue rural industry careers when they trust the sector to act responsibly, perceive good working conditions and culture, and feel a personal or cultural connection to the land.

¹ Primary Producers SA, AgCommunicators, South Australian Agricultural Education Strategy, 2024

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The report encourages collaboration between industry, government and education providers to:

Design a workforce strategy for the food, wine and agribusiness sector to address current and future workforce challenges, and deliver coordinated initiatives to attract and retain workers, improve community perceptions of the sector and highlight the diverse career opportunities available.

Establish stronger partnerships with education providers to co-design and deliver initiatives that inspire and equip students to pursue careers in agribusiness.

Explore opportunities to drive attraction of underutilised workforce demographics such as women, Aboriginal people, senior/retired and part-time worker cohorts.

Support businesses to access information and assistance that enables them to attract and retain migrant and overseas workers.

NEXT STEPS

Government and industry will work together to develop a workforce strategy for the food, wine and agribusiness sector, using the business case as an important starting point and further feedback from industry and other key stakeholders.

Additional activities to be considered as part of the workforce strategy development could include the following:



To read the full report, *Business Case to attract people to careers in food, wine and agribusiness in South Australia* from Deloitte Access Economics, visit: pir.sa.gov.au/industry-forum





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Primary Industries and Regions respects Aboriginal people as the state's first people and nations. We recognise Aboriginal people as traditional owners and occupants of South Australian land and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Steering Committee members

The Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) and Primary Producers SA (PPSA) thank Project Steering Committee members who have provided invaluable oversight and guidance for the project:

- Caroline Rhodes (Co-chair), Primary Producers SA
- Jo Collins (Co-chair), PIRSA
- Tori Dixon-Whittle and Ray Borda, Food SA
- Inca Lee, South Australian Wine Industry Association
- Kyri Tournazos, Seafood Industry SA
- Robyn Verrall, South Australian Skills Commission
- David Nagy, Department for Education
- Georgina Windley, Department of State Development

We also thank the industry organisations, businesses and education providers who were interviewed as part of the project.



Government of South Australia
Department of Primary Industries
and Regions

