Understanding Skilled Workforce Issues in the Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry

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Abstract

The availability of suitably skilled people for jobs across the supply chain is recognised as a critical element for success in Australian agriculture, yet this can be challenging to achieve. The perennial fruit industry in the Goulburn Valley is an example of this. In 2015, employers in this industry identified a shortage of people for ‘middle management’ roles as a particular current concern. This report outlines the findings of a scoping study focused on developing a better understanding of the issues affecting the ability of perennial fruit industry businesses in the Goulburn Valley to attract, retain and develop appropriately skilled workers. The study was informed by a ‘systemic’ approach to workforce development. This approach assumes that the availability of suitably-skilled workers arises from the dynamic interactions of elements in the workforce system including the policy environment, the training system, broader labour market conditions, and the business context and human resource management practices of employers. Based on interviews with twenty-five fruit industry employers and two additional industry stakeholders, as well as a desktop study of relevant existing documents and data, this report presents a typology of four typical workforce structures that were found in the participating fruit growing businesses. It also identifies the most common job titles that were found in these businesses, and the typical duties, and range of pay scales and conditions attached to these jobs. We discuss the approaches that employers used to recruit workers, including both internal and external recruitment pathways. The findings of this study allow us to begin identifying the range of entry points to jobs, and the career progression pathways, that currently exist for workers in the perennial fruit industry. We identify also a range of areas for potential industry collaboration to improve workforce development.
Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings of a scoping study focused on developing a better understanding of the issues affecting the ability of perennial fruit industry businesses in the Goulburn Valley to attract, retain and develop appropriately skilled workers. The study was informed by a ‘systemic’ approach to workforce development, as described by Nettle and Oliver (2009). This approach assumes that workforce outcomes, such as the availability of suitably-skilled workers, arise from the dynamic interactions of elements in the workforce system. The relevant elements include the policy environment, the training system, broader labour market conditions, and the business context and human resource management practices of employers. Improving workforce issues requires understanding this whole system of influences, and not just identification of skills gaps and labour shortages. This approach is illustrated in Figure A.

![Figure A: Interacting elements that affect the status of a sectoral or regional workforce](image)

The research involved interviews with twenty-five fruit industry employers and two additional industry stakeholders, as well as a desktop study of relevant existing documents and data. The employers interviewed including fruit growers with orchard sizes ranging from less than 50 hectares up to over 400 hectares, integrated fruit businesses that store and pack other growers’ fruit as well as fruit they grow themselves, and a small sample of employers from other parts of the industry supply chain (input sales and advisory firms and fruit processors).

Findings

Within our small sample of interviewees we identified a lot of variation in the way that different businesses organise their workforce and the work to be done. All but one of the participating fruit growing businesses can be described as a family business, but the number of family members working in the business varied, and this was one cause of difference in the way the overall workforce was organised. However, despite the individual differences between businesses, we were able to identify four typical workforce structures that were commonly found in fruit growing business of different sizes and types, and a range of job titles that were commonly used in these businesses. These different types of business and workforce structures are illustrated in the diagrams on the next page (Figure B).

It was the medium and large orchards (over 100 hectares), and integrated fruit businesses, that already had, or had identified a need for, ‘middle management’ jobs such as Leading Hands, Supervisors and Orchard Managers. A rough estimate of the level of demand for these positions across the region could be calculated by looking at orchard census data in relation to our typology.
Figure B: Workforce structure for four broad types of fruit-growing businesses

Type 1: Small orchards (<50ha) with no permanent staff beyond the family

Type 2: Small-medium orchards (50-70ha) usually with one permanent employee

Type 3: Medium orchards (100-200ha) with a small permanent staff

Type 4: Large orchards (>200ha) and integrated businesses with multi-tiered management structures
Our interviews also covered employers’ experiences and preferences for how they filled jobs in their businesses. Overall, there seemed to be a preference among orchard and integrated business interviewees for building upon the skills of existing staff to enable internal recruitment for increasingly skilled positions. This stemmed from the value that employers placed on existing employees already understanding the business and how particular tasks are approached. Internal recruitment was also seen to offer a reduced risk that the candidate would be a poor fit for the business. The pool of potential candidates for internal recruitment included seasonal workers, permanent-casual workers and permanent workers. Businesses were more likely to recruit externally for jobs requiring new or additional skills that were not available in the existing workforce. When assessing external candidates for jobs, orchard businesses and integrated orchard/coolstore/packhouse businesses tended to look more at candidates’ industry experience, rather than at their formal qualifications. Few employers had in the past required graduate (University) qualifications for roles, although there was recognition from some employers that graduates may be suitable for some roles. A number of research participants had recently struggled to fill positions and at times this had impeded business development and growth. This research confirmed the finding of the 2015 Food Futures Innovation Cluster project, that middle management positions were difficult to fill.

Implications for understanding career paths and workforce development

Our findings give an indication of the career pathways that exist in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry, as shown in Figures C and D. It is important to note that these diagrams involve a large degree of generalisation. They do not represent the actual situation in any individual business, and are not an attempt to depict any recommendation on what might be considered desirable or best practice. Rather, they are a communication tool that allows us to represent in a concise format a range of relevant findings from this study, to enable further discussion of what could be done as part of future workforce development work.

These diagrams take the most common job titles we identified and group them into two broad levels of jobs. We have termed jobs which involve independent decision-making as managerial jobs (‘DECIDERS’), and jobs which are mostly about carrying out instructions given by others as non-managerial jobs (‘DOERS’). The ‘decider’ and ‘doer’ distinction implies different skillsets. Those in managerial jobs rely on strategic and abstract thinking, risk management, as well as business and workforce planning when they are making decisions. Those in non-managerial jobs rely on concrete knowledge of the tasks being performed, the capacity to identify urgent problems or risks associated with tasks, and ability to communicate and supervise other staff in implementing day-to-day tasks.

![Figure C: Two broad levels of jobs in the fruit industry workforce](image-url)
Important conclusions and implications from this study are as follows:

1) Many employers have a preference for the internal recruitment pathway, including the internal recruitment pathway that leads from non-managerial jobs to managerial jobs, partly because of the importance they place on business or orchard-specific knowledge, and partly because they like to hand pick candidates who show aptitude and motivation. Therefore:

- Developing better linkages between businesses and the VET sector so that skills development is occurring within a specific business context will address the need of employers for business knowledge and will reveal aptitude and motivation of individuals for further recruitment. A key element of improving these linkages is ensuring alignment of the industry’s preferred training method with the current VET funding models.
- Given the difference in skillsets between ‘doers’ and ‘deciders’, it is important for those involved in workforce development, including industry, to (a) understand the new skills that are required when someone moves from a non-managerial into a managerial role and (b) have options available to employers and employees to assist with acquisition of these skills.
- There are likely to be other factors that influence the capacity to move from a ‘doer’ to ‘decider’ pathway. Understanding these factors would help industry minimise some of the barriers to this career path transition.

2) Despite the common preference from internal recruitment, employers also recruit externally, as evidenced from our interviews and the job advertisements that appeared on Seek during our data collection period. Larger businesses (particularly those of Type 4 according to our typology) appear to be recruiting externally more often, because of the number of jobs in these businesses. Our findings indicate that employers had difficulties filling some jobs, especially managerial roles, and this difficulty is impeding business development and growth.

Where managerial roles are recruited for externally, it is important to understand how much practical orchard ‘doing’ skill and experience is required and, if these skills are required, how they can be gained. This is particularly the case for small to medium orchards (Type 3 according to our typology), where orchard managers are typically required to be involved in practical orchard ‘doing’ work in some seasons. Therefore:

- Developing clear position descriptions for managerial positions that clarify the degree of ‘doing’ required and distinguishing these from managerial roles within the industry that have less of this requirement may help give candidates accurate expectations of what a job involves.
- Recognising, however, that the expectation mismatch may result in fewer applications, businesses may benefit from focusing on targeted development of existing staff.
• A collective industry-led program at a regional scale to develop future managers may draw in new candidates that are seeking a managerial career path. This will be especially useful to smaller businesses, which are limited in their ability to offer career pathways within their own business.

3) Effectively maintaining a workforce that meets business needs relies on both internal and external recruitment. This requires employers to consider the workforce needs of the business over the coming years and the retention of existing staff. Therefore:

• Strategic workforce planning and human resource management training may benefit businesses that do not already utilise these skills.

• Research to understand job attractiveness and retention issues from the perspective of employees would be useful to identify steps that businesses can take to improve attractiveness and minimise turnover.

• Given the potential for changes to the skills and career paths needed by the industry, those involved in workforce development will benefit from regular environmental scanning of changes that may influence skill needs (e.g. technology, changes to supply chain structure, policy and regulation). This information can be provided to businesses to inform their strategic workforce planning and will enable effective recruitment.

• The model in Figures C and D representing jobs and career paths in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry can be used to think about the range of possible skills acquisition pathways that are available to meet industry needs, including:
  – What jobs in the fruit industry are suitable for university graduates, and what skills would the industry like these graduates to have?
  – How do the skills required of the various jobs match up to the competencies included in different levels of VET qualifications (Cert III, Cert IV, Diploma) and in University qualifications? Are there any important competencies that need to be covered that currently aren’t included in these qualifications?
  – What is the best mode for delivery of VET training, given employers’ preference for on-the-job learning and orchard-specific knowledge? (But noting also that employees’ preferences may differ from those of employers.)
  – What is the role for industry-specific management traineeships and graduate programs?

4) Employers had diverse approaches and views about the use of position descriptions in their businesses. Nevertheless, position descriptions are a useful tool for understanding expectations for a job and for comparing expectations across businesses in the industry. This is useful for businesses and for those seeking positions. Therefore:

• It may be useful to the Goulburn Valley fruit industry to collectively develop a set of generic position descriptions for common roles, as a discussion tool for the industry. Even if they are not used by all businesses, the process of developing a tool like this will trigger conversations regarding expectations and will help businesses reflect on what they are offering compared to other businesses.

5) Seasonal workers are critical to business success because of the labour intensity required during peak times. Seasonal workers are also a source of ‘doers’ for the Goulburn Valley fruit industry. Changes in policy that impede access to these workers is a risk for the industry. Therefore:

• It is recommended that industry and the state government monitor changes to relevant policies, including visa programs, to understand how they may affect businesses.

• Industry may want to consider where a collective approach may be useful to managing risks (e.g. worker pay and conditions, public perceptions) regarding this important set of workers.

Areas of potential industry collaboration

Our research confirmed that the challenge employers currently face in recruiting suitably skilled workers is impeding business development and growth in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry. There is therefore a need for stakeholders to discuss what aspects of this challenge can be addressed at the individual business scale, and what aspects would benefit from collective action at the regional industry scale. The observations and implications above point to several areas of potential collaboration in workforce development for the industry.
A. **Targeted linkage development with the training sector to ensure that training scope and delivery meet industry needs, including:**
- Identifying how skills development through the VET system can be integrated with on-the-job training.
- Developing a skills development focus for employers in strategic workforce planning and human resource management for those in the industry who do not currently have these skills.
- Connect with the universities delivering relevant courses to identify opportunities to have input into course content and delivery.
- Work with universities to develop opportunities for students to gain horticulture industry exposure (for example through internships and work experience placements).

B. **Develop a collective understanding of common jobs, pay scales and associated position descriptions as a way to develop mutual understanding of expectations by employers within the region and industry.** (The collective discussion will be beneficial even for employers who do not currently use position descriptions).
- This may illuminate some of the issues associated with different expectations regarding managerial roles, i.e. some relying on more ‘doing’ than others.
- Clarity regarding jobs, pay scales and position descriptions will help employers with their strategic workforce planning.

C. **Establish a regional industry approach to enhance the availability of career paths for managerial roles.**
- This could be an industry-led program to develop future managers for the region’s fruit businesses.
- Learning from the experiences of existing management traineehip programs, as well as linkages with the VET system and universities, will be useful inputs to developing such an approach.

D. **Industry-directed environmental scanning and research**
- Environmental scanning by industry and partners to identify changes that may affect the industry workforce and workforce development now and into the future is important for fruit businesses. This scanning needs to include consideration of factors that may influence the skills that will be needed (e.g. technology, supply chain structure, social licence, policy and regulation) and factors that may influence access to the workforce (e.g. visa programs and community perceptions of workforce pay and conditions).
- The models representing jobs and career paths in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry developed in this study can be used to think about the range of possible skills acquisition pathways that are available to meet industry needs. This can then inform the direction of collective action to support workforce development by industry and partners (especially for A and C above). Some questions that can be considered include:
  - What jobs in the fruit industry are suitable for university graduates, and what skills would the industry like these graduates to have?
  - How do the skills required of the various jobs match up to the competencies included in different levels of VET (Cert III, Cert IV, Diploma) and University qualifications? Are there any important competencies that need to be covered that current aren’t included in these qualifications?
  - What is the best mode for delivery of VET training, given employers’ preference for on-the-job learning and orchard-specific knowledge? (But noting also that employees’ preferences may differ from those of employers)?
  - What is the role for industry-specific management traineeships and graduate programs?
- Our research revealed a number of gaps in knowledge that need to be understood further to adequately respond to the workforce development needs of the Goulburn Valley fruit industry. These include:
  - Research to understand fruit industry jobs and careers from the perspective of employees. What makes fruit industry jobs attractive or unattractive? How do employees experience the human resource management practices of employers? What is the perspective of employees on career paths in the industry?
  - Research on employers’ current human resource management policies and practices, to assess any skills gaps and/or practices that could be improved;
  - Research to identify the barriers to moving from non-managerial to managerial career pathways so that these barriers can be minimised where possible.
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1 Introduction

The restructuring of Australian farm businesses as they seek to remain competitive and profitable has major implications for the agricultural workforce (Cowan 2015; Nettle 2015b). As a result, the availability of suitably skilled people willing to take up the range of roles that are needed is increasingly recognised as a critical element for success in Australian agriculture, across the supply chain.

The perennial fruit industry supply chain in the Goulburn Valley is an example of this challenge. The Goulburn Valley in Victoria is a premier fruit production region, and the industry is a significant generator of regional wealth and employment (RMCG & GVFGSWG 2013). The industry is facing challenges and opportunities in response to changes in the domestic fruit processing industry and the emergence of new, highly competitive, export markets. It will need to develop and retain an appropriately-skilled workforce to respond to these challenges and opportunities. While attracting and retaining a workforce has been identified as a critical challenge for the industry (Catalyst Exchange 2015), specific details of the issues involved are not yet adequately understood.

This report outlines the findings of a scoping study focused on developing a better understanding of the issues affecting the ability of perennial fruit industry businesses in the Goulburn Valley to attract, retain and develop appropriately skilled workers. The research involved interviews with twenty-five fruit industry employers and two additional industry stakeholders, as well as a desktop study of relevant existing documents and data.

The study was informed by a ‘systemic’ approach to workforce development, as described by Nettle and Oliver (2009). This approach is discussed further in Section 2. In summary, a systemic approach assumes that workforce outcomes, such as the availability of suitably-skilled workers, arise from the dynamic interactions of elements in the workforce system. The relevant elements include the policy environment, the training system, broader labour market conditions, and the business context and human resource management practices of employers. Improving workforce issues requires understanding of this whole system of influences, and not just identification of skills gaps and labour shortages. A systemic approach pays attention to features of the workforce system such as career paths and the ways that skills are formed. A further implication of this ‘systemic’ view of workforce development is that while there are some workforce issues that can be addressed through individual action by employers at the scale of the individual business, there are other issues that require collaboration between stakeholders in the workforce system.

Our specific aims in this study were:

- To improve understanding of the types of jobs that exist in fruit industry businesses of different sizes and types (we refer to this as ‘workforce structure’);
- To improve understanding of how employers approach the task of meeting their workforce needs;
- To identify issues and dynamics in the workforce system that are affecting the availability of appropriately-skilled workers for permanent roles;
- To identify areas where regional or industry scale collaboration may be required, to address the issues identified.

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 presents relevant background material about the Goulburn Valley fruit industry and its workforce, and about workforce issues in Australian agricultural industries more generally;
- Section 3 describes the research approach we used including the scope, key questions and methods employed for this study;
- Section 4 presents the study’s findings, including findings on the workforce structure of fruit industry businesses, and findings on how fruit industry businesses recruit and retain staff to meet their workforce needs;
- Section 5 discusses the implications of our findings for understanding the dynamics of the fruit industry workforce and, suggests some possible next steps to be taken to begin addressing the industry’s workforce development needs.
2 The context for this scoping study

This section describes changes that are currently underway in Australia’s agricultural workforce generally, and in the horticulture industry and the Goulburn Valley fruit industry more particularly. It also introduces workforce development as an emerging area of work that is occurring in a number of Australian agricultural industries and regions, in response to the workforce issues identified.

2.1 The changing organisation of farm work

Australian agriculture continues to be dominated by family farms, on which farm owners and members of their families do much of the work, especially at the management level. However family farmers’ use of and reliance on paid workers from outside the family is increasing (Nettle 2015b).

Cowan (2015: 55) describes the changing organisation of farm work as a shift away from a ‘solo owner-operator renaissance farmer approach to one of farm business management’ in which the farmer manages a workforce of those with the specialised skills needed to run the farm business. Cowan (2015) suggests that this change is associated with increasing farm size, increasing mechanisation and with the adoption of new technologies that require specialist knowledge and skills. Similarly, AgriFood Skills Australia (2015) conclude that Australia’s agrifood industries, including horticulture, are in the midst of a structural change that is seeing low-skilled jobs replaced by automation, but at the same time creating a demand for new para-professional/technician roles. They expect this to become the dominant tier of the agrifood labour force in the future. This transition is represented graphically in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: A graphical representation of the structural change underway in Australia’s Agrifood workforce](Source: AgriFood Skills Australia 2015: 25)

As farmers’ reliance on a paid workforce with specialist skills increases, so farm performance comes to depend on the ability of farm managers to find the right workers, and to manage the workplace and these employment relationships to get good results from these workers. This is the context in which workforce development has become an increasingly important issue for Australian agriculture.

2.2 Workforce issues in horticulture

Several recent studies have found that the Australian horticulture industry is experiencing significant challenges in attracting and retaining an appropriately skilled workforce and that this is hindering industry growth (Allen Consulting Group 2012; Growcom Australia 2013; AgriFood Skills Australia 2015; Regional Development Company 2015).

These reports have identified the following factors as contributing to these difficulties:

- Low numbers of people attaining specific agriculture and horticulture qualifications;
- Competition for labour from the mining and coal seam gas sectors;
- Poor promotion of the industry as an employer of choice including a lack of advice, planning and transparency regarding career pathways within the industry;
• The nature of the industry means that a high percentage of employees are seasonal or casual, which discourages those looking for job security, ongoing on-the-job training and career progression;

• While some businesses report having few issues attracting staff, there is widespread recognition that some businesses deter workers due to lower salaries and a reputation for poor working conditions;

• Overall it has been reported that that is little collaboration at the local or regional level to build skilled and adaptive labour pools;

• The remote location of some workplaces;

• There has been a general reluctance to employ under the Seasonal Worker Programme because of the costs involved and the obligation to provide minimum work hours, even during slow periods;

• Visa rules make it difficult to recruit skilled migrants to roles in horticulture.

Formal training through the vocational education and training system is one mechanism of skills development for the horticulture industry. Nationally, the horticulture industry has relatively low levels of attainment of accredited qualifications compared to other industries. Indeed, while the demand for workers with higher level skills and knowledge is increasing, levels of course enrolment in the relevant areas is declining (AgriFood Skills Australia 2015). In addition to the traditional horticulture production skill domains, there is an emerging need for formal training in risk management techniques, workplace health and safety, biosecurity, labour relations, and food safety and quality assurance (Allen Consulting Group 2012; Growcom Australia 2013; AgriFood Skills Australia 2015).

A second mechanism for skills development is through upskilling of the existing workforce. In Queensland, Growcom Australia (2013) identified several specific barriers that horticultural producers face when considering professional development for their current workforce:

• Slim profit margins mean that training tends to be viewed as an expense rather than an investment;

• There is a reluctance to invest in development of seasonal employees, as most do not return to the same employer in subsequent years;

• Some employers are concerned that if they invest in training, the trained employee may then seek an increase in salary, or else may leave for another industry (e.g mining);

• Basic language and literacy skills are barriers to training for some low-skill level workers;

• Many regard the cost of mandatory training (i.e. forklift licences) as being too high;

• There is generally a lack of understanding of the traineeship system and how it can help lift the skill levels within a business. Some have not employed trainees as they do not have the staff to train and mentor trainees/apprentices;

• There is a concern regarding digital literacy levels among older workers and their ability to adapt and innovate as technology rapidly evolves; and

• The financial viability of supplying training in the regions is challenged due to the small number of participants. This makes training courses expensive, which further lowers demand.

All the issues listed above are potentially relevant context for understanding issues affecting the fruit industry workforce in the Goulburn Valley.

2.3 Key trends in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry and their implications for workforce

This study follows the Goulburn Valley Fruit Growing Industry Roadmap (RMCG & GVFGSWG 2013) in defining the Goulburn Valley region to include the four Local Government Areas of Moira Shire, Strathbogie Shire, Campaspe Shire and the City of Greater Shepparton. Within this region, fruit growing is concentrated mostly in Moira Shire and the City of Greater Shepparton. There are several features of the region that make it suitable for fruit production including good soils, available and relatively affordable land, suitable climate, irrigation infrastructure and good water resource availability (in most years), and access to a variety of markets and supply chains. The fruits grown include pome fruits (apples, pears and nashis), stone fruits (peaches, nectarines, plums, apricots) and cherries. In 2013 there were 306 fruit farms in the region1, with a total area planted of some 11,500 hectares (RMCG & GVFGSWG 2013: 24-25). The vast majority of these farms are family-owned and operated.

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1 This includes only farms with an annual value of production over $5,000
The Goulburn Valley fruit industry is of national significance, producing 10 – 85% by volume of the national crop for each of the fruits listed above (RMCG & GVFGSWG 2013: 16). The farm gate value of fruit production in the region was $485 million in 2013, which is 30% of the total value of agricultural production in the region (RMCG & GVFGSWG 2013: 13). There is also a significant food processing industry within the region, including major fruit processor SPC Ardmona.

The industry is currently in a period of transition. Major trends identified in the Goulburn Valley Fruit Growing Industry Roadmap (RMCG & GVFGSWG 2013) include:

- An increase in the area planted (26% increase between 2001 and 2011), combined with increasing planting density;
- On-going decline in the number of growers as businesses consolidate;
- A significant decrease in fruit demand from the major fruit processor SPC Ardmona (53% and 65% reduction in intake for pears and peaches respectively between 2008 and 2015). This has led to a shift in the varieties planted towards fruit for the fresh market;
- A growing interest in export markets, and growing export sales (although export sales are still only a small portion (<10%) of total production).

All these trends have implications for the structure of the industry’s workforce. For example:

- as individual businesses get larger and adopt more intensive (higher density) planting systems, they require more permanent employees, sourced from outside the business-owning family;
- there are several trends, including the shift from processing to fresh fruit production, that are driving a requirement for greater precision in orchard management, thus requiring higher skill levels and effective supervision of workers. (Other drivers of changing role and skill demands are discussed in Section 4).

The most recent information on workforce issues and concerns specifically in the Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry is contained in the Food Futures Innovation Cluster report (Catalyst Exchange 2015: 13). Drawing on both individual interview data and structured consultation and workshop activities, the project identified the following ‘insights about skills and labour’:

- No career development structure.
- Limited pool of talent for internal development.
- Limited training in management skills for those who are recruited internally.
- Limited training for external recruits who may have management skills but need technical skills.
- Difficult to connect local jobless with the jobs that are available.
- Limited culture of career development within companies.
- A perceived lack of flexibility in accredited training available.
- Expectation that middle managers need to be operational very quickly—limited scheduled time for orientation and job specific training.
- Unemployed locals are often not work-ready or keen enough… overseas labour is generally better suited for the hard work… highly motivated.
- Limited capacity or capability to focus on strategy, technology, business model innovation or innovation in general because of stretched resources.
- Ongoing concern among industry that training is more focused on education in the schoolroom rather than in the workplace.
- The need for reverse mentoring where new entrants with other skills (particularly digital) can share those skills with others in the workplace.

The report summarises the industry’s ‘challenge’ in the workforce area as follows (Catalyst Exchange 2015: 18):

- Fruit growers have identified that labour and skills shortages are the major concern for their enterprises.
- There is an ongoing shortage of people available for picking and packing.
- There are constraints created by government policies in relation to IR and visas.
- There is a shortage of middle management either because of too few suitable internal people, who need management skills and/or too few external candidates who need technical skills.
The issues identified in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry largely mirror those identified in other parts of the Australian horticulture industry, as discussed above. Understanding more about the ‘shortage of middle management’ issue was a particular focus of this scoping study, as discussed further in Section 3.

2.4 Workforce development

Jacobs (2002) defines workforce development as ‘the coordination of school, company, and governmental policies and programs such that as a collective they enable individuals the opportunity to realize a sustainable livelihood and organizations to achieve exemplary goals, consistent with the history, culture, and goals of the societal context’ (p. 13). In essence then, workforce development involves shaping the activity of multiple stakeholders so as to achieve good matching of the capabilities and goals of individual workers with those of employers.

When thinking about workforce development needs, agricultural industries and policy-makers have historically tended to focus on labour supply and skills gaps, as the summary of recent reports above indicates. Understanding the skills needs of a business or industry and understanding the mechanisms whereby workers can acquire these skills are certainly central to workforce development efforts. Skills can be acquired in a number of ways, ranging from more informal (such as on-the-job learning) to more formal (certificate and degree attainment) approaches (Deloitte Access Economics 2011; Seymour and Barr 2014). This range of mechanisms is represented diagrammatically in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: A representation of the range of mechanisms available for skills acquisition in agricultural industries](Source: Cowan 2015: 51)

Nettle (2015b) argues, however, that effective workforce development for agricultural industries requires a broader focus, beyond labour supply and skills. Nettle and Oliver (2009: 2) refer to this broader and more inclusive approach to workforce developments as a ‘systemic’ approach. ‘Systemic’ here denotes an awareness that the status of an industry’s workforce arises from the dynamic interactions between several different elements, including the policy environment, the formal training system, the human resource management practices of individual employers, the interactions between employers, and the interactions between other stakeholders in regions and industries.

Thus, in addition to seeking to understand labour supply and demand issues and skills requirements, a systemic approach to workforce development needs to consider the way people enter and move through a sector (i.e. career pathways); how individuals’ skills are formed; the attractiveness of workplaces and of the jobs on offer; how policy (for example visa policies and vocational educational and training policies) affects workforce development; and the range of other stresses and pressures on businesses that create the business context for workforce decisions and human resource management practices (Nettle and Oliver 2009). This range of elements that interact to influence an industry or region’s workforce is illustrated in Figure 3. A systemic approach to workforce also needs to be cognisant of the trends and changes underway in the structure of the workforce (as discussed in Sections 2.1 to 2.3 above), and of the need for leadership and collective action within agricultural sectors and within regions, in particular for responding to workforce development issues that cannot be addressed by individual employers acting on their own (Nettle 2015b).
Several Australian agricultural industries have in recent years embarked on workforce development planning and activity, informed by this systemic perspective, at a sectoral and/or regional scale. This includes the dairy industry nationally (Nettle 2008), regionally (Murray Dairy 2013) and sub-regionally (Bridge 2014) the cotton industry (Nettle 2015a) and at State scale, Tasmania (TFGA 2015).

The most developed current example of a systemic workforce development plan for horticulture is the 2013 – 2015 Queensland Production Horticulture Workforce Development Plan (Growcom Australia 2013). It sets out specific aims and actions in relation to attracting, developing and retaining skilled workers, as well as actions to improve data collection for planning purposes. It also emphasises the need for collaboration between industry and three levels of government, in order for these actions to proceed.

The Goulburn Valley Industry and Employment Plan (GVIEP) (SGS Economics and Planning 2014) provides a strategic context for systemic workforce development planning for the Goulburn Valley fruit industry. Strengthening the region’s agricultural sector is the first of three ‘pillars’ that make up this plan, and within this pillar there is a particular strategic focus on horticulture, aiming to ‘strengthen innovation, diversify and improve’ the sector. Establishment of the Horticulture Centre of Excellence, based at Tatura, was one of the priority actions under this plan and was realised in 2014. The GVIEP also contains a priority action on skills development and workforce participation that aims to achieve better alignment between education and training provision, industry needs and workers’ preferences.

This scoping study seeks to contribute to the evidence base needed to support systemic workforce development for the Goulburn Valley fruit industry, focusing in particular on understanding the shortage of ‘middle managers that has been identified by the industry (Catalyst Exchange 2015). Our approach to this task is described in the next section.
3 Scope, Approach and Methods

3.1 Scope and key questions

The scope of a study that seeks to understand workforce issues in an agricultural sector is potentially very wide, as the discussion in Section 2.4 indicates, and hence there is a need to select a focus, and to set some boundaries. There were four scope-related considerations that informed the design of this study: (1) a focus on ‘skilled’ workers; (2) a focus on ‘permanent’ workers; (3) a focus on the fruit-growing (orchard) sector of the industry and (4) a focus on understanding workforce issues as seen from employers’ perspectives. The background to, and implications of, these scoping decisions are discussed below.

The initial focus of the study was on ‘skilled workers’, however defining what this means in the fruit industry context is not straightforward, since some skills are required for almost any job. A seasonal fruit picker, for example, needs to know how to unload a picking bag into a bin without bruising the fruit, and how to safely position a ladder. Picking fruit to size or colour specifications requires more skills than stripping trees of all fruit, and a more experienced picker can pick fruit much faster than someone who is new to the job. Thus, it is more accurate to refer to ‘appropriately-skilled’ workers (that is, workers who possess the skills that are required for the role they are performing) rather than to create a somewhat arbitrary division between ‘skilled’ and ‘unskilled’ workers.

Another distinction that is commonly made concerning the fruit industry workforce is between permanent workers and casual or non-permanent workers, with the assumption being that the skilled workforce is mostly those in permanent roles. But this distinction again is not always straightforward. There is a pool of skilled people who work in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry as seasonal pruners, for example (see Section 4.2.4).

Our choice of scope and approach for this study was informed by the findings of the Food Futures Innovation Cluster report (Catalyst Exchange 2015: 18). As noted in Section 2.3, the Innovation Cluster project identified both ‘an ongoing shortage of people available for picking and packing’ and ‘a shortage of middle management’ to be critical workforce challenges for the industry. Our focus was on the second of these challenges - middle management – and middle manager positions are likely to be permanent roles in most businesses. However, a systemic approach to workforce issues also encompasses an interest in career pathways within the industry, which could potentially include people moving from non-permanent roles into permanent roles. It was therefore important to gather some information about the non-permanent workforce as well, to assess its potential role in the career paths of permanent workers.

Concerning the industry supply chain, the Innovation Cluster project focused on workforce needs and issues in the fruit growing (orchard) sector of the industry, and that is also the focus of this study. However, Cowan (2015) found that the agriculture workforce is changing to have more off-farm positions and farm advisor roles, and that there has been little research undertaken to understand the potential for people to move between farm jobs and these other business types. Since career pathways are an important element of the workforce system, and since many orchard businesses are too small to be able to offer career pathways within the one business, understanding whether people move between different types of employers within the industry is an important element of understanding the career paths available. We therefore decided to include in the study a small selection of employers from other parts of the industry supply chain, to get some insight into whether workers’ career paths do – or could - encompass employment in different parts of the supply chain. Figure 4 shows the simplified conceptualisation of the industry supply chain that informed this aspect of the study.

![Figure 4: A simple representation of the fruit industry supply chain](https://example.com/figure4.png)
Lastly, understanding workforce issues requires understanding both employees’ and employers’ perspectives, as implied by the definition of workforce development given in Section 2.4. However, for this initial scoping study, we decided to focus on gathering the perspectives of employers only.

Informed by the scoping considerations discussed above, this study addresses the following key questions:

1. What is already known about the people who work in fruit growing in the Goulburn Valley?
2. What types of jobs are there, and how many of them, in fruit growing businesses of different sizes and types?
3. How do employers approach the task of meeting their workforce needs, and what do they see as the major challenges in meeting these needs?
4. What are the implications of our findings for the nature of career pathways and workforce development in the fruit industry?

3.2 Data gathering

Concerning Question 1 above, the most detailed available data identifying the characteristics of the people who work in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry are found in the Australian Census of Population and Housing. The most recent data available at the time of writing are those from the 2011 census (ABS 2011). Given the scope of this study, ideally analysis of census data should include people working all along the fruit industry supply chain. However, the way jobs are defined in the census, combined with the overall small number of people working outside the fruit growing sector of the industry, made it impractical to analyse census data other than for those employed in fruit growing. The relevant Industry of Employment is termed Fruit and Tree Nut Growing, however there are very few commercial-scale nut producers in the Goulburn Valley region, and so this industry category provides a close approximation of the workforce engaged in fruit growing.

For the remaining topics, data were gathered via structured face-to-face interviews with fruit industry employers. The questionnaire instrument used to guide the interviews is shown in Appendix A, and is an expanded version of one used by Nettle and Oliver (2009). The major topics covered are: the characteristics of the business, description of the current workforce, recent and planned recruitment, recruitment methods, use of position descriptions and general reflections on workforce issues.

Many of the questions were designed to elicit category data, to facilitate identification of patterns. Some open-ended questions were also included to enable data capture about topics that relied on more contextual information. The face-to-face interview format provided the opportunity to discuss each question in detail, so we could be sure that the intent of each question was understood. The instrument was designed so that the interviewer could record answers to most questions directly onto the form, however the interviews were also audio-recorded (with consent).

We completed 25 interviews with fruit industry employers, of whom 20 were fruit growers. Participants were recruited using the existing industry networks of the Horticulture Centre of Excellence. Recruitment was purposive, with the aim being (a) to include a diversity of employers of different types, including orchards of different sizes; and (b) to focus in particular on orchards that are large enough to have permanent staff. In most cases, we interviewed business owner-managers (sometimes as couples in the case of orchard owner-managers), but in some cases, we interviewed senior employees. The 25 interviews ranged in duration between 23 and 128 minutes, with a median duration of 53 minutes.

This data gathering process was approved by the Human Ethics Advisory Group of the Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences, University of Melbourne. Where quotations from interviews have been reproduced in this report, names have been replaced with pseudonyms and any other information that could allow individual interviewees to be identified has been removed.

Key characteristics of the employer interview sample are presented in Tables 1 to 3 below. These tables indicate that the sample included a range of orchards and integrated orchard/coolstore/packhouse businesses of different sizes, and a small number of fruit industry businesses from other stages of the supply chain.
Table 1: Business model characteristics of the interview sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Employers</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit growers (most also store and/or pack their own fruit)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated fruit businesses (store, pack and market other growers’ fruit as well as their own)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coolstore &amp; transport (standalone)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchard input sales and agronomic advice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract research</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit processor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Workforce development stakeholders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Distribution of business size for orchard businesses, based on annual turnover

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business turnover 2015-16</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; $500,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No businesses in these categories store or pack fruit for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500,000-$1.5 million</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1.5 million-$3 million</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3 million-$5 million</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5 million-$10 million</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $10 million</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>All but one business in this category is an integrated business that stores, packs and markets other growers’ fruit as well as their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Distribution of orchard businesses by orchard area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Size Category</th>
<th>Number of Orchards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 50ha</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 99ha</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 - 199 ha</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 - 399 ha</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 399 ha</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Data Analysis

All of the interviews were transcribed in full for qualitative analysis, as well as being used to complete the quantitative and category data in the survey instrument.

We entered the quantitative and category data into a series of Excel spreadsheets to facilitate cross-case analysis and pattern identification (following Bazeley 2009) in relation to the topics and questions listed above. We provide further details about the specific analyses alongside the relevant results in Section 4.

We used qualitative data analysis software (QSR International 2013) to code the data according to themes that were identified as potentially relevant to understanding an employer’s approach to meeting their workforce needs, and to
understanding the major challenges they face in doing so. For data coded to each theme, we carried out cross-case comparison to identify patterns (commonalities and dissimilarities).

This is a scoping study, based on limited data gathered from a small pool of research participants. Our findings reflect the experiences of the particular employers we spoke to, and are not representative of the experiences of all employers in the Goulburn Valley perennial fruit industry. There may be gaps in our findings and there may be some issues that appear to be more significant because of the specific cohort involved in the study. The data gathering and analysis process described above begins the task of understanding some of the elements that are influencing the status of the Goulburn Valley fruit industry, as indicated in Figure 5. Importantly, this study looked at workforce issues only from the perspective of employers, and even within the employer’s perspective, only began to touch on the topic of employment/HRM practices and how they might be influence the attractiveness of jobs to employees. Despite these limitations, the research does help to identify some of the challenges and opportunities that are likely to be relevant to a range of employers and the industry, and hence our results should be useful in informing next steps.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5:** Scope of this study in relation to the systemic view of workforce development presented in Figure 3
4 Findings

This section sets out our findings in relation to the initial three key questions identified in Section 3.1. First we consider what is already known about the Goulburn Valley fruit industry workforce through analysis of the 2011 Australian Census data. Second, we describe the structure of the workforce within businesses through the analysis of employers’ experiences that we gathered through personal interviews. Finally, drawing again on these interviews, we focus on the approaches that employers used to meet their workforce needs, as well as the challenges they faced in doing so.

4.1 Characterising the existing fruit growing workforce

The 2011 Australian Census was conducted on the night of 9 August 2011. A total of 941 people reported that they work in Fruit and Nut Growing within the four LGAs that make up the Goulburn Valley Region. This is 2% of the region’s total workforce, and 16% of the region’s agricultural workforce. The distribution across the four LGAs is shown in Figure 6 below.

Some key characteristics of this workforce are analysed and discussed below. Where relevant, the characteristics of the fruit and nut workforce are compared to the characteristics of the region’s agricultural workforce and its general workforce. There are some important limitations that apply to the census data:

- Farm activity and hence employment in fruit growing are highly seasonal and August is a relatively quiet time in the orchard seasonal calendar. The census questions concerning employment ask respondents about their main place of work in the week prior to the census. Hence the number of people who report working in fruit growing at census time is likely to be at the lower end of the seasonal variation in employment levels, and these people are more likely to be permanent as opposed to seasonal or casual workers;
- The total number of people within the Goulburn Valley region who reported working in ‘Fruit and tree nut growing’ was only 941. This is a small population, which has the effect of limiting the reliability of data that break this population down into further sub-categories, such as those discussed below.

Nevertheless the census data do provide some general insights into the structure and characteristics of the industry workforce.

Age

The age distribution of the workforce is shown in Figure 7 below. These data show that the fruit growing workforce has a larger proportion of people aged over 60 years, and a smaller proportion of people aged under 50 years, than the general workforce in the Goulburn Valley. However, this pattern of fewer younger workers and more older workers in less pronounced in the fruit growing workforce than in agriculture generally.

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2 Census data can be accessed on the basis of ‘Place of Work’ or ‘Place of Usual Residence’. We used data compiled on a ‘Place of Work’ basis whenever it was available, meaning that we are describing the characteristics of the people who reported working on orchards in the Goulburn Valley, including people whose place of usual residence is outside the region.
Employment type

Of the people who reported working in Fruit and Nut Growing:

- 27% (251 people) were owner-managers;
- 15% (140 people) were contributing family workers;
- 57% (540 people) were employees.

Whereas the Fruit Industry Roadmap estimated that there were 306 commercial orchard businesses in the region (RMCG & GVFGSWG 2013), there were only 251 people who identified themselves in the census as owner-managers in fruit and nut growing. There are likely to be a range of factors contributing to this discrepancy. It is noteworthy that there are significant numbers of employees working in the industry, even during its quieter season.

Occupation

Of the people who reported working in Fruit and Nut Growing:

- 51% (475 people) were managers
- 37% (346 people) were labourers
- 7% (63 people) were clerical and administrative.
- The balance (5%) were professionals, technicians and trade workers and machinery operators and drivers.

The number of people reporting their occupation as managers is larger than the number reporting their employment type as owner-managers. This indicates that there are a number of people employed in managerial roles.

Hours worked

For people who reported working in Fruit and Nut Tree growing, in the week prior to the census:\n
- 24% worked >48 hours
- 12% worked 41-48 hours
- 26% worked 40 hours
- 24% worked 25-39 hours
- 14% worked 1-24 hours

3 The question asks how many hours did the respondent worked in all jobs, in the last week. Some respondents may have other jobs in addition to their work in fruit growing.
These figures are shown in comparison to those for the whole agricultural workforce and the whole regional workforce in Figure 8. A higher proportion of workers in fruit and nut growing worked more than 40 hours in the previous week than in the general workforce. However, the proportion of people who worked more than 48 hours was much lower in fruit and nut growing than in all of agriculture. The figures would most likely be quite different in peak season.

![Hours worked diagram](image)

**Figure 8: Hours worked in the week prior to the census (Source: ABS, 2011)**

**Income**

The distribution of annual incomes reported by people who work in fruit and tree nut growing, in comparison to the agricultural and general workforces in the Goulburn Valley, is shown in Figure 9. In comparison to the general workforce, people who work in fruit growing are underrepresented in the higher income categories (above $41,600 per year) and overrepresented in the $20,800 - $41,599 category. In comparison to the whole agricultural workforce in the region, there are fewer workers in fruit growing with incomes in the $1 - $20,799 category, but also fewer in the highest income category (> $104,000).

![Income distribution diagram](image)

**Figure 9: Usual incomes for workers in the fruit and tree nut industry (ABS, 2011)**

---

The question asks for total income from all sources, on a gross income basis (i.e. before tax). For some people the total income reported will include other sources of income in addition to their earnings from work in the fruit industry (e.g other jobs or Government benefits).
**Highest year of schooling**

For people who reported working in Fruit and Nut Tree growing in the Goulburn Valley:

- 36% had completed Year 12 or equivalent;
- 18% had completed Year 11 or equivalent;
- 36% had completed Year 9 or 10;
- 10% had completed schooling to Year 8 or below.

These figures are shown alongside those for the general agricultural and general workforces in the Goulburn Valley in Figure 10. The proportion of workers in fruit growing who have completed Year 12 is slightly higher than in the general agricultural workforce, but lower than for the general workforce. The proportion of workers in fruit growing who finished their schooling at Year 9 or below is higher than for the general agricultural and general workforces in the Goulburn Valley.

![Figure 10](image)

*Figure 10: School education levels for workers in the fruit and tree nut industry (ABS, 2011)*

**Post-school qualification**

For people who reported working in Fruit and Nut Tree growing in the Goulburn Valley:

- 6% hold a Bachelor Degree qualification or higher;
- 7% hold a Diploma or Advanced Diploma;
- 16% hold a Certificate;
- 71% have no post-school qualification. This compares to 64% for the Goulburn Valley agricultural workforce and 69% for the general workforce;
- There is a higher proportion of people with post-school qualifications for people aged 20 – 39 years (41%), than for people aged 40 years and above (24%).
- For those with post-school qualification the most prevalent areas of study are ‘Agriculture, environment and related studies’; ‘Engineering and related technologies’ and ‘Management and commerce’.

The comparative data are shown in Figure 11 below. There is a somewhat lower attainment of Certificate-level qualifications in the fruit growing industry than for the general agricultural workforce.
The analysis above indicates that the census data are quite limited in their ability to provide a detailed characterisation of the people who work in fruit growing, especially given the timing of the census and the seasonality of fruit industry work. Nevertheless, there are some general conclusions of relevance to this study that can be drawn:

- There appears to be a significant cohort of permanent employees in more senior (managerial) roles;
- There are fewer people who work in fruit growing who have relatively high incomes, in comparison to the general workforce, but incomes in fruit growing do not appear to be lower than those in agricultural generally;
- Educational attainment for those who work in fruit growing is somewhat lower than for the general Goulburn Valley workforce, and the attainment of post-school qualifications is lower than for the Goulburn Valley agricultural workforce.

4.2 Workforce structure for fruit industry businesses

The findings in this section are drawn from our 25 face-to-face interviews with fruit industry employers. The focus is on understanding workforce structure in fruit growing businesses, but some discussion of other employer types is also included, to informing understanding of career paths.

Our representation of the fruit industry supply chain in Figure 4 identifies ‘growing’, ‘storing’ and ‘packing’ as three separate stages. In our interviews, we found that many fruit growers (but not all) also have their own coolstores and some also have their own packhouse facilities. That is, these three stages of the supply chain are often combined in one business. However, there is a major distinction between businesses that store and pack only fruit that they have grown themselves, and businesses that store and pack (and often market) fruit grown by others as well as their own fruit. In this report, we use the term ‘integrated fruit businesses’ to refer to businesses that store, pack (and possibly market) other growers’ fruit, and we use the term ‘orchard’ to refer to businesses that do not handle other growers’ fruit (but often store and pack their own fruit).

The work involved in running an orchard included orchard operations, coolstore and packhouse operations (for those businesses that operated these facilities), administration operations including payroll and bookkeeping, and marketing operations. Some large businesses also ran their own heavy vehicle transport operations. The people who did this work included business owners, contributing family members, permanent employees and non-permanent or casual employees. The number and type of workers involved in these different operational areas varied with business type and business size. A summary of the data about workforce size and structure provided by each of the 20 orchard and integrated fruit businesses who participated in this research is shown in Table 4 below.

---

5 Interview IDs I1, I7, I8, I16 and I25 were with employers elsewhere in the industry supply chain.
6 As noted in Section 3.2, the selection of employers in our sample is not representative of the population of employers in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry. In particular, our sample of fruit growing businesses is not representative of the distribution of different sizes of
Table 4: Summary of workforce structure for the interview sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview ID</th>
<th>Business type7</th>
<th>Orchard Size category8</th>
<th>Total permanent workforce (inc. family)9</th>
<th>Approximate peak seasonal workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I3</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I4</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I5</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I6</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I9</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I10</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I11</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I12</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I13</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I14</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I15</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
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<td>I17</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I18</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L19</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L20</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I21</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50 (approx.)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I22</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6010</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I23</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I24</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 A typology of business types and workforce structures

To generate further insight about the workforce structure for fruit-growing businesses of different sizes and types, we undertook a simple form of cluster analysis of the data presented in Table 4. The analysis involved comparing the orchard size, permanent workforce size and business type (orchard or integrated) for each of the twenty businesses, and identifying clusters of businesses that were most similar across these variables. This analysis generated four broad categories of businesses, as follows:

1. **Small orchards with no permanent staff beyond the family** – ‘JUST US’. The two orchards in this category were both less than 50 hectares in size, with one Owner-Manager in charge and family members carrying out all other routine tasks including administration.

Orchards in the industry. Our sample was deliberately skewed towards larger orchards and integrated businesses with larger permanent workforces.

7 ‘Integrated’ businesses store, pack and market fruit sourced from other growers, as well as their own fruit. Many ‘Orchard’ businesses also store and/or pack and market their own fruit.

8 As per Table 3: ‘1’ = <50ha; ‘2’ = 50 - 99ha; ‘3’ = 100 - 199; ‘4’ = 200 - 399 ha; ‘5’ = >399 ha

9 No adjustment has been made to account for part-time workers. In some cases the effective full-time equivalent workforce is slightly less than the figure in this column due to the presence of part-time workers (often including family members).

10 This is for the fruit growing division of the business only.
2. Small-medium orchards usually with one permanent employee – ‘US AND OUR WORKER’. These four orchards were from 50 to 70 hectares in size. Three of the four had a full-time employee in an orchard operations role. In two cases this was an ‘Orchard Hand’, while in the third case the employee had the title of ‘Orchard Manager’ and works on a second property some distance away from the owners’ home property. One orchard in this category had three family members involved full-time, and no permanent employees. Two of these orchards also employed a part-time Administration Assistant.

3. Medium orchards with a small permanent staff reporting directly to the owner-manager ‘US AND OUR STAFF – AND WE NEED SOMEONE TO STEP UP’. The four orchards in this category were between 100 and 200 hectares in size and had up to three permanent staff under the direct supervision of the Owner-Manager. One of these four orchards had four family members involved full-time, and only one permanent employee, whereas the other three orchards had three employees with various job titles including Orchard Hand and Orchard Manager. Two orchards in this category had identified a specific employee who was being trained for an orchard management role, and a third orchard had previously tried and failed to recruit someone to an Orchard Manager position. This suggests that orchards in this size range are at the limit of what can be managed by a single Owner-Manager without a further level of devolved responsibility. (Unless there are several family members to share the load).

4. Large orchards and integrated businesses with multi-tiered management structures ‘WE HAVE A FORMAL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE’. The ten businesses in this category all had 200 hectares or more of orchard area and nine of them also operated coolstores and packing sheds. Seven of them stored and packed fruit on behalf of other growers as well. They were typically structured with a General Manager, several division or department managers (such as Orchard, Shed, Office or Transport Managers) and also a tier of Supervisors or Leading Hands (in the orchards and in the shed). Often there were several Orchard Managers responsible for individual orchard locations.

This typology helps to identify the typical permanent workforce needs of fruit growing businesses of different sizes and types. It could be applied in combination with orchard census data to generate estimates of the total level of demand for permanent positions in the region.

4.2.2 The family nature of fruit growing businesses

All but one of the orchard and integrated fruit businesses can be described as family businesses, in the sense that:

a. the principals [owners] are related by kinship or marriage,

b. business ownership is usually combined with managerial control, and

c. control is passed from one generation to another within the same family. (Gasson et al. 1988: 2).

The number of members of the business-owning family working in the business was quite variable. For nine out of the thirteen orchard businesses, family members comprised half or more of the businesses’ permanent workforce. This extent of family involvement influenced businesses’ employment and management practices in several ways, and is referred to several times in the finding and discussion below.

4.2.3 Common jobs in orchards and pack houses

Another aspect of understanding workforce structure in the fruit industry is to identify the typical jobs that are found within businesses. A job has a particular title, and is associated with a set of duties or responsibilities, and a level of pay and conditions. (Although the same job title may be associated with different duties and responsibilities in different businesses, as discussed below). The tasks or duties associated with a job require certain skills and abilities.

In keeping with the scope of this study, we focussed on understanding the typical jobs that are found in the fruit industry’s permanent workforce, in orchards, coolstores and packhouses. The data for this task consisted of the responses to Question 7 in the employer questionnaire (see Appendix A). The analysis took place in two phases. In the first phase, we identified the most common job titles across the twenty orchard, coolstore and packhouse interviews and tabulated for each title the duties, hours of work, pay and conditions and training or experience requirements identified by each interviewee.

Some interviewees found it difficult to identify a job title for some workers, particularly where there were multiple family members working together in the business, without formally-specified roles or position descriptions. For example, when
asked to identify a job title in the business Tony (I20) said ‘It's hard, because we don't have labels like that. So it's pretty
difficult for me to say, he's not a Foreman, maybe not in the sense that some people would realise'. Nevertheless after
some discussion interviewees were able to settle on a title that they felt was generally appropriate to the duties
performed by each worker.

Interviewees used different terminology and units of measurement to describe pay, such as hourly rates, weekly wages
or annual salaries. Wherever possible we sought to identify which workers were paid hourly wages and which were paid
an annual salary, and to identify approximate salary and wage ranges. This was often not possible in the case of
business owner-managers and contributing family members, because many of these workers drew a variable living
allowance from their business, and not a regular salary. We also sought information on other common non-cash
components of employment packages, such as mobile telephones, vehicles and accommodation.

In the second phase of the analysis, we examined the less common job titles described in the interviews and identified
for each the common title that it seemed to most closely resemble, based on the duties, pay and conditions, and training
and experience needs identified.

Narrative summaries of the data table for each of the common titles are presented below, including both the features that
were common across multiple interviews and the features where there was significant variation in the data. In some
cases (for example Orchard Manager) the same job title referred to what was clearly a different role in different
businesses. The summaries below also include less commonly-used job titles that somewhat resemble the more
commonly-used ones and so can be taken to refer to a similar role.

**Owner Managers and General Managers**

Business owners usually referred to themselves as Owner-Managers or General Managers. The term General Manager
was more commonly used for larger businesses and particularly for what we have termed integrated businesses that
store, pack and market other growers' fruit as well as their own. For integrated businesses, growing, storing, packing and
marketing operations were usually set up as a number of distinct business divisions or legal entities, but with one
General Manager at the head of all these divisions or entities. In these larger businesses, General Managers carried out
strategic planning for the business(es) and supervised the Managers of the various business divisions.

There were some businesses with multiple family members involved as co-owners, and where there was a sharing of
business leadership responsibilities between these family members (usually brothers). Karl (I11), for example, identified
three senior roles occupied by family members: ‘Marketing and Packhouse Manager’, ‘Manager of Orchards and Pickers’
and ‘Manager of Tractors and Spraying’, whereas Tony (I20) referred to three families members as together fulfilling the
‘management’ function in the business.

Orchard Owner-Managers and General Managers often worked very long hours (55 – 80 hours a week is common).
Some General Managers reported earning a salary, with the range reported being from $80,000 to $200,000 annually.
However, it was more common for General Managers and Owner Managers to report drawing a living allowance or profit
share from the business. Owner-Managers and General Managers usually had access to a vehicle and a mobile phone,
and often lived on the property.

Interviewees reported that to do their jobs, Owner-Managers and General Managers needed many years of practical
experience in the orchard industry. Almost all the people in these jobs grew up in orchard-owning families. At least five of
the General Managers or Owner-Managers that we interviewed had degree-level qualifications, but mostly not in
agriculture or horticulture.

There was only one business in our sample where the title General Manager was applied to an employee, and not a
business owner.
Orchard Manager

The title Orchard Manager was widely used, but could refer to quite different jobs with different levels of responsibility.

At the upper end of responsibility, an Orchard Manager had autonomous responsibility for achieving desired production outcomes from the orchards they were responsible for. Some large businesses employed a number of Orchard Managers for different orchard areas, with a single manager often responsible for an area of 80-100 hectares. Other businesses employed a single Orchard Manager to be responsible for all the orchards – up to an area of over 200 hectares. Depending on the size of the area to be managed, an Orchard Manager of this type would be more or less involved in the actual physical work involved:

> [Harry] is the manager here, he oversees roughly around about 14 full-time employees. At the moment, he would have probably about another 35 casual employees currently pruning [...]. Basically they would actually run their farm according to what we require in the pack house and that’s to grow a specific piece of fruit to [the required size] to the best of their ability and they would look after the running of all the farm, whether it be irrigation, pruning, spraying, fumigation, staff, all that as well (Vicki (I22), describing the work of an Orchard Manager responsible for a single orchard within a larger business).

> [Y]ou’re your orchard manager in my situation, he’s almost like a fruit grower. He actually - he has to be able to make decisions on how to grow fruit. [...] Whilst I might make some of the more high level [decisions] with him, he’s making 80 or 85 per cent of the decisions (Niccolo (I14), describing an Orchard Manager who is responsible for all the business’ orchards).

One business with 240 hectares of orchard identified a need to augment their Orchard Manager role with a second Orchard Operations Manager, with the Orchard Manager to focus on planning and decision-making and the Operations Manager focusing on implementation of decision through delegation to Leading Hands:

> We’re finding now [...] the Orchard Manager - his whole time is taken up with making decisions, evaluating what’s happening in the orchard and making a decision. He’s not really got any time to make sure that each job is being done efficiently, or effectively. So then I’ve got the Leading Hands taking care of that role, in a gang by gang basis, but there’s a gap to bring it all together. Because the Leading Hands have a ceiling in their ability to make the right decision about how that job should be executed (Fabia, I6).

Orchard Managers of this type were paid annual salaries. Our interviewees reported salaries in the range $70 to $100,000, with most in the range $80 - $90,000. Their package usually included a mobile phone and often a vehicle.

At the lower end of responsibility, in some businesses an Orchard Manager was a senior permanent employee with responsibility for supervising staff and implementing instructions given to them by a more senior manager, often the Owner-Manager. This type of Orchard Manager made few autonomous decisions, rather they followed instructions. For businesses consisting of several geographically separated orchard areas, the Orchard Manager of this type often managed the day-to-day work on a particular orchard area:

> Well he manages the orchard at [our other location]. [...]. I tell him what to do and he supervises the people there and gets them to do it (Xavier I24).

This type of Orchard Manager was paid a salary by some employers, and hourly wages by others. Interviewees reported annual earnings in the range $60 to $80,000. Sometimes a mobile telephone, or an employer’s contribution to a monthly telephone bill was included and in one case a vehicle for private use is also included. This job is very similar to a Leading Hand job in other businesses – described below.

Some people who were employed as Orchard Managers (of either of the types discussed above) had relevant qualifications such as Certificates or Diplomas, but this is unusual. Employers placed much more emphasis on someone’s practical orchard management experience, as indicated in the following quote:

> He had his own property for a little while and he was managing another property in a different district. So he came to the region and I employed him [...] Ninety per cent of [his suitability for this job] is his experience. The other 10 per cent is probably, yeah, qualifications that he’s got (Niccolo (I14), describing an Orchard Manager with responsibility for all the business’ orchards).
Orchard Supervisor or Leading Hand

Many orchards had a job called Orchard Supervisor, Orchard Leading Hand or Orchard Foreman that sat at a level between an Orchard Manager and an Orchard Hand. An Orchard Leading Hand was expected to supervise a team of workers to achieve a set of tasks set by an Orchard Manager. Sometimes Leading Hands were required to undertake record keeping, which had become an important requirement due to the prevalence of auditing and regulatory requirements. Some business owners also expected Orchard Leading Hands to be able to make some technical decisions in relation to how particular tasks were done. For this, they had to have some knowledge of tree cultural requirements.

So basically the Orchard Manager is just saying okay this is the decision we've made, and these guys [the Leading Hands] have to actually be the ones to make sure it's executed to that manner, and take the measurements to make sure we've achieved what we set out for (Fabia, I6).

A manager is capable of running an orchard independently, and that's the way we expect the managers to run, to make their own decisions. A supervisor is capable of administering a gang of 10 or a dozen workers. [...] They're still skilled people, knowledgeable people, people capable of making decisions without reference. Cultural decisions. Pruning decisions. Thinning decisions. Decisions that relate to the way the crop is going to outturn (Oscar, I15).

On some orchards Leading Hands were paid award wages at the appropriate award level that recognises their supervisory responsibilities while in other businesses they were paid an annual salary. The range of salaries reported in our interviews was $50,000 - $70,000. The relevant award is the Horticulture Award 2010\(^1\), and the highest classification in this Award is Level 5, which attracts a minimum weekly award wage of $783.30. This corresponds to an annual income of $40,843. Thus it appears that some employers were paying significantly above award rates for Leading Hand positions.

Interviewees commented that the skills required of a Leading Hand were of a level similar to a vocational Certificate IV, and some businesses did support staff to acquire qualifications. But as with other jobs, it was more common that people acquired these skills through experience. Few if any employers would insist on qualifications, or use qualifications as an important selection criterion\(^2\).

Orchard Hand

Orchard Hands carried out routine orchard work including tractor operations (slashing, spraying), maintenance and operation of irrigation equipment and seasonal tree management tasks including pruning. During harvest, Orchard Hands supervised fruit pickers. Orchard Hands were usually paid award wages under the Horticulture Award. Employers indicated that Orchard Hands sometimes chose to be engaged as casuals, with a higher hourly wage rate and more flexibility rather than leave entitlements. Orchard Hands had a range of practical skills for orchard work, and usually required a Chemical Users Certificate. Most didn't have any other post-school qualifications. Two businesses also mentioned a role they called 'Tractor Driver', which referred to an Orchard Hand position whose duties were more focused on tractor driving.

Office and administration jobs

Every fruit growing business that participated in this research also had workers in office and administration jobs. These were similar to office and administration jobs found in other industries, involving duties such as payroll administration and bookkeeping, but one interviewee (I12) commented that in some businesses office workers too may be expected to assist with other tasks, such as packing fruit or loading trucks, during peak periods or emergencies. On smaller orchards office and administration work was a part-time job, often performed by a family member. The largest integrated businesses had an office team headed by an Office Manager (or Chief Financial Officer) paid at senior management level (up to $100,000 annual salary or more).

Seasonal jobs

Every fruit growing business that participated in this research also employed workers seasonally for activities including thinning, pruning, picking and packing. Some of our interviewees provided an estimate of the size of their seasonal

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\(^2\) Mandatory qualifications such as the Chemical Users Course, forklift driving and business-specific audit requirements such as “Freshcare” are an exception. All employers we interviewed appeared to understand and comply with mandatory training requirements.
workforce, as shown in Table 4. Where an estimate was not provided, it was usually because there was insufficient time available to cover all sections of the interview in detail. Since the focus of this study was on understanding the permanent and more highly skilled jobs found in the industry, these seasonal roles and their duties, pay and conditions are not discussed in detail here. However, this seasonal workforce is of some relevance to the study because of the potential for seasonal workers to move into more permanent positions in the industry. For this reason, the non-permanent workforce, including seasonal workers, that our interviewees described are discussed in Section 4.2.4.

Packhouse and coolstore jobs

Interviewees described a similar hierarchy of jobs in their packing shed to that described above for their orchards:

- Packing Shed Manager: In large integrated businesses, this is a senior role attracting a salary up to $100,000 per year;
- Shed Leading Hand or Supervisor: Usually paid award wages;
- Forklift Driver: Special skills are required for working with fruit bins, compared to general forklift work;
- Shed Hand;
- Casual Packer.

Two employers, both managing integrated businesses, also identified particular workers responsible for Quality Assurance/Quality Compliance in their packhouses.

4.2.4 The non-permanent workforce

All the orchards, coolstore and packhouse businesses that participated in this study depended on non-permanent or casual workers for key operations including thinning, pruning, harvesting and packing. The numbers used varied across businesses, sometimes depending on the overall approach to managing workforce. For example, Mitul (I13) had a relatively small number of non-permanent employees (see Table 4), which he described as a deliberate approach:

> That's something we pride ourselves on that we like to keep workers here all the time and something about our business being very diverse we've got work here all the time. So it's not as if I'm bringing in a wave of workers for a harvest window and then get rid of them and then start with a new crew. We are the same crew all the time.

The production system also influenced the seasonality of workforce need. For example, Ivan (I9) mechanically harvested fruit and therefore had fewer employees that he hired seasonally. Yvette (I25) expressed interest in developing better mechanical harvesting technology, to reduce the need for a large influx of labour during peak times. As well, Samuel (I19) described how the ripening time of different fruit varieties influenced the seasonal workforce need for his business.

Non-permanent positions were often not viewed as highly-skilled positions, requiring somewhere between a few hours (e.g. picking) to a few weeks (e.g. pruning) of training at the most. Even so, this cohort of labour was viewed as important by those who participated in this research. For example, Samuel (I19) described the importance of pickers to the farm’s income: ‘in the peak season [the pickers work] seven days a week. It never stops - non-stop for four or five weeks. That's the killing part of the season for the pickers ... because they have to pick the fruit, because that is the last job to get the money in. If that goes wrong, things have gone wrong altogether’.

As noted in Section 3.1 the main reason for examining the non-permanent workforce in this study is to understand career paths in the industry, and the potential of the non-permanent workforce as a source of permanent workers. Two particular categories of non-permanent workers that were discussed by the interviewees are of particular interest in this regard: so-called ‘permanent casuals’ and seasonal workers.

Permanent casuals

Many orchard, coolstore and packhouse businesses employed a cohort of people they referred to as ‘permanent casuals’. These workers were employed on casual terms (no leave entitlements) but worked for only one or a small number of different employers on a regular basis for most of the year. The number of hours worked varies with workload through the year. This is an important characteristic of this type of worker, as some interviewees indicated that they could not afford to commit to a fixed number of hours all year.
Sometimes they were given informal ‘bonuses’ by their employers, such as a week or two of paid leave. These employees were sometimes transitioned into permanent positions within the business. Other interviewees described how they had offered permanent positions to some of their permanent casuals but that these employees preferred the higher pay rates and flexibility they received from the casual role. These workers were usually local residents and often had a long-term relationship with their employer. In some cases, the same employee may have been paid an hourly rate for some tasks, but a piecework rate (per tree or per bin) for other tasks. Permanent casuals were usually employed directly by the business, rather than being employed via a labour-hire contractor, which had become a more common practice for hiring seasonal pickers.

**Seasonal workers**

Seasonal workers were used especially for picking and packing by the employers we interviewed. A smaller number of seasonal workers were sometimes also used for thinning and pruning.

Working holiday-makers (417 Visas) were an important source of these workers for employers. Employers also used labour hire contractors as an intermediary for engaging these workers. Fewer seasonal workers were employed directly by orchard businesses than appeared to be the case in the past. Some employers used a mixture of direct employment and labour hire, with direct employment being used for seasonal workers who return to work on the same orchard repeatedly. As well, some employers were beginning to use the Commonwealth Seasonal Worker Program for Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste to access a small number of workers.

Many interviewees reported employing a cohort of seasonal workers who return to work at their orchard every year. While in past decades there was a cohort of migratory workers who travelled around Australia following the availability of seasonal work this practice is now uncommon and returning seasonal workers are usually local residents such as retired orchardists, or others with a connection to the fruit industry. Pruning and sometimes thinning were commonly identified as tasks performed by this cohort of workers.

Pruning in particular was identified as a semi-skilled role by some of the research participants and returning workers were appreciated for their skills. Niccolo (I14) stated that ‘it’s a specialised job. So you can’t have a different person doing that all the time, because it’s - you don’t - yeah, you’re starting all over again training them’. Hiran (I8) described how ‘If you’ve got the same people coming back each year they see the same trees, but also you get that feedback of how their pruning was for the thinning and the harvest operations. So was the yield there? The fruit size? Et cetera. Because of the pruning’. And finally, Quinn (I17) pointed to the importance of pruning to their business and linked this to the skills of the pruner:

> Pruning is our first line of defence in minimising damage to the fruit. Fruit has to be good in quality or we can’t sell it. That is also true for the processing industry. Our best price is achieved of course, from good quality produce and pruning is very important in achieving that. The trees must be pruned well. It is a skilled job - well I said semi-skilled and I think that's correct - but it must be done correctly.

Many orchards engaged these pruners as independent contractors. The independent contractors had their own Australian Business Number (ABN) and were paid on invoice according to rates and conditions negotiated with the orchard owner (for example a rate per tree, or a total sum for an orchard block). These independent contractors were an important pool of skilled labour for the industry.

Seasonal workers that were identified as having useful attributes were sometimes offered other positions by the business for which they were working. For example, orchardists sometimes directly employed good seasonal pickers who initially arrived with a labour hire company. In the same vein, a good worker could be offered work for a longer period of the season and potentially a permanent casual role. This could eventually lead to an ongoing role.

Once these workers moved out of seasonal casual roles, businesses were more likely to invest in training them, as training casuals was often viewed as of limited value for the business. For example, Umar (I21) said that ‘casuals are very hard to manage in the respect of - so they come and go as they please. There's no commitment in their behalf. The training side of things - we really don't want to spend much time on training casuals because all they do is you train them and then they move on.’

Some interviewees indicated that they had faced challenges converting a seasonal worker over to an ongoing position when the worker was a migrant on a temporary work visa. For example, after Oscar (I15) could not find a suitable applicant for a nurseryman role in his business he found a seasonal worker with relevant skills. However, the worker’s visa expired and they had to return to their home country before Oscar was able to apply for an appropriate visa that would enable them to stay.
Figure 12 below summarises the broad typology of business types described in Section 4.2.1 and its relationship with the description above of the most common jobs found in fruit growing businesses.

Figure 12: Workforce structure for four broad types of fruit-growing businesses
4.2.5 A draft task ranking for orchard work

The tabulation of job titles and duties that informed the discussion of common jobs above can also be used to place individual orchard tasks in ranked order, from highest-level tasks (those performed by Owner-Managers and General Managers) to lower-level tasks performed by Orchard Hands or seasonal workers. This ranking is shown in Table 5 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Task/duty</th>
<th>Who?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High level tasks</td>
<td>Marketing and negotiating with customers</td>
<td>GM-OwM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing decisions and staff development</td>
<td>GM-OwM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business planning (e.g. crop and variety selection, development decisions, equipment purchasing)</td>
<td>GM-OwM(OrM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparation of annual budgets</td>
<td>GM-OwM-OrM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Day-to-day and week-to-week cultural decisions such as fertiliser applications and pest control</td>
<td>GM-OwM-OrM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing day-to-day and week-to-week work flow and delivery to achieve production to specification. Includes supervision and management of OLH and OH</td>
<td>OwM-OrM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Record keeping for orchard operations</td>
<td>OwM-OrM-OLH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality control during harvest</td>
<td>OwM-OrM-OLH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervising orchard hands</td>
<td>OwM-OrM-OLH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervising pickers &amp; pruners</td>
<td>OwM-OrM-OLH-OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spraying, slashing, irrigation operation &amp; maintenance</td>
<td>OwM-OrM-OLH-OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skilled pruning, planting, tree training</td>
<td>OwM-OrM-OLH-OH-SL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level tasks</td>
<td>Routine thinning and pruning</td>
<td>OwM-OrM-OLH-OH-SL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Routine picking</td>
<td>SL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GM = General Manager; OwM = Owner-Manager; OrM = Orchard Manager; OLH = Orchard Leading Hand; OH = Orchard Hand; SL = Seasonal Labourer

One important feature to note from this task ranking is that the tasks performed by someone with a particular job title are strongly influenced by the size of the business and the size of its workforce. Hence, in smaller orchards, it was common for the Owner-Manager to perform all tasks themselves. The role of Orchard Manager could also cover this entire range of tasks from routine physical orchard operations (planting, pruning, training, slashing, spraying) up to higher level management tasks such as preparation of budgets. Several interviewees who managed medium-sized orchards commented that this could create challenges for recruiting and retaining people in Orchard Manager positions, for example:

What is an orchard manager for example? Now it could be someone just driving around and making decisions hypothetically or it could be one that needs to get in and get his hands dirty when needed. [...] I’m not big enough to justify a full time just orchard manager as in - without doing any physical work, so it’s sort of a bit of both (Mitul, I13).

Orchard Managers must be willing to carry out these lower-level routine tasks, particularly in the quieter seasons of the year when this is the only work available.

13 Few businesses described orchard managers as having this level of responsibility.
A second and related feature of orchard work to note from Table 5 is that it is common for orchard jobs to include a wide range of particular tasks and duties. A number of interviewees spoke of the need for employees to be multi-skilled and flexible, for example: Fabia (I6) described an orchard worker as ‘a jack of all trades or a bush mechanic type’. As well, Lynda (I12) talked about the orchard’s shed manager as ‘a fairly diversified role … because we wanted them to know the trucks, wanted them to do maintenance and wanted them to do this - wanted them to do everything’.

A final point to note from Table 5 is that some skills in supervising the work of other people are part of the job requirements for jobs over the full range from Orchard Hand up to General Manager since Orchard Hands are sometimes called on to supervise seasonal workers undertaking routine picking.

With more data, a similar ranking could also be developed for coolstore and packhouse tasks. Tasks at the higher end of the ranking include management of fruit in storage and supervision of pre-sizing and grading operations, whereas tasks at the lower end include routine box packing.

4.2.6 Jobs and career paths across the supply chain

Key findings from our interviews with other employers in the fruit industry supply chain are as follows.

As would be expected, the roles found in a standalone coolstore business (I1) were similar to those found in the coolstore division of large orchard and integrated businesses and included a general manager, coolstore manager, transport manager, administration staff, forklift drivers and truck drivers. This interviewee emphasised that forklift driving in a coolstore business was quite a skilled and demanding role that requires specific fruit industry knowledge. They identified some potential for workers to move between orchard work and coolstore/packhouse work:

I think there is [a potential career path between orchard and coolstore work]. A forklift driver on an orchard doesn’t do a lot of forklift driving, because he’s only driving a forklift outside, putting bins on trailers or on trucks, working outside. We’re working in confined spaces with forklifts, where you’ve got walls you don’t want to hit, you’ve got different types of forklifts, you’re using battery, electric forklifts and you’re working in the cold at times. So, it is different, but they can progress, there’s no doubt about that (Alfred, I1).

The roles found in input supply and agronomic advice businesses (I7, I8) included agronomist positions, administration positions and management positions. These interviewees indicated that new appointments to agronomist positions were currently expected to be university graduates (Bachelor degrees), whereas that wasn’t necessarily the case in the past. Interviewees identified that starting salaries for new graduates being appointed to agronomist positions were in the range $50,000 to $60,000 and that experienced senior agronomists attract salaries in the range $100,000 to $150,000. They identified that the career path typically followed by people in this sector was unlikely to involve moving between input supply/agronomy work and orchard, and more likely to involve moving between different input supply businesses, or between the manufacturer/distributor/retailer stages of the input supply chain:

It’s more of a movement within the distribution area, so within chemical distributors or re-seller movement, moving from one company to another or to a chemical company, or vice versa, backwards. More so than moving to an orchard (Hiran, I8).

Similarly, the contract research provider who participated in this study saw it as unlikely that people would move between the specialist technical and scientific roles in his business and roles within fruit growing businesses.

4.3 Approaches to meeting workforce needs

Thus far we have analysed the workforce structure of the Goulburn Valley perennial fruit industry businesses as well as common roles and tasks undertaken. The next section describes the findings associated with how employers approach the task of meeting their workforce needs, such as through bringing new people into the business and developing existing members of the workforce. We also consider here the experiences these employers had with recruitment including positions that were difficult to fill. The use of position descriptions are also discussed as a potential source of information regarding how workforce is managed at the business level. These findings are important because they reflect the employer perspectives regarding factors relevant to career paths in the industry.
4.3.1 Bring new people into the business: Recruiting

Bringing in new staff to fill a business need was an approach used by interviewees. At times these new staff were sourced internationally (especially from New Zealand), from other states or other industries. For example, Vicki (I6) had recently hired a candidate for a manager role from interstate, with experience in a different sector of the horticulture industry. While it was recognised that he would need to be trained in pome fruit production, his management skills were seen as valuable.

Interviewees linked their recruiting decisions to current and future business needs. For example, Umar (I21) indicated that recent growth in their business meant that some new roles were being developed which existing staff didn’t have the skills to fill. As well, Vicki (I22) identified a need for managers in the future and noted that this business has developed a succession plan by hiring trainees who are being trained on the job to become assistant managers and, potentially, managers. Fabia (I6) had been expanding the business and identified that a lack of workforce was a big issue for their business: ‘Our single biggest impediment to growth now is people. It's not ideas and it's not access to capital, it's who is the next person?’

Employers described how they recruited staff predominantly through informal and industry networks, as well as by advertising. Informal networks were used to spread the word that a position was vacant. Xavier (I2) described using ‘the grapevine’, Karl (I11) gave an example of someone he hired who had ‘left another job so we asked his brother-in-law if he wanted to work here’ and Eileen (I5) said that she rang someone she heard was looking for a job because an employee had left. A couple of interviewees described ‘poaching’, or ‘cherry picking’ potential employees who were employed elsewhere. One interviewee acknowledged that this practice could create tensions between employers. Advertising was used by employers when there appeared to be a need to cast the net wider than was available through the informal and industry network. For example, Fabia (I6) has filled management and skilled technical positions through advertising in Australia and New Zealand, using job-seeking webpages and newspapers. Lynda (I12) advertised for a Shed Manager role, which was ‘fairly diversified’ because the candidate needed to know the pack house, trucks and maintenance.

These employers appeared to recruit externally for entry level positions and where the new position relied on skillsets that were not available and not easy to build within the existing workforce. Positions that have been difficult to fill are discussed in Section 4.3.3.

There were differences between the orchard and integrated businesses compared to the businesses elsewhere along the supply chain concerning what qualifications were expected for entry level positions. While orchard businesses were often seeking minimal qualifications (to a maximum of certificate II, III, or IV), the supply chain businesses often sought tertiary qualifications. For example, Yvette (I25) said ‘we wouldn’t say that tertiary qualifications are mandatory, but we would say that they were preferred … what we really want is somebody who’s got a brain in their head and anybody with a tertiary qualification has shown that they do, generally.’ Similar sentiments were offered by businesses that offered farm advisory services. Hence, arriving to a role with some skills developed through tertiary training was a priority for these businesses.

Even so, these tertiary qualified entrants to the business were still seen as requiring considerable experience. Yvette (I25) described this well:

*You can come straight out of college and be highly trained but you've just got to get the feel for it and know – I’ve been here 20 years… and I’ve not seen two [years] the same. They’re always different so you just build up the experience over time, you’ve just got to get a good look at the crop and say, yeah I think… – a lot of it just goes by instinct with fruit and agriculture in general.*

4.3.2 Recruiting internally

Many interviewees described experiences of internal recruitment, where an existing member of staff was promoted to a higher position. Wyatt (I23) described staff that started ‘at the bottom’ as fruit pickers and then were trained and promoted over time to farm worker, supervisor and then manager roles. For Xavier (I24), entry-level positions were used to vet who may be suitable for other positions within the business, such as starting potential fruit packers off on the sorting table or starting a potential forklift driver off as a box stacker and then paying for their forklift licence if they are suitable. At times this internal recruitment drew on the seasonal workforce as a source for longer term roles, such as moving to permanent casuals and then working the way up toward permanent and higher level roles.
Some interviewee comments indicated that this internal movement of staff through positions was not ‘ad hoc’ but instead a deliberate approach within their workforce planning. Umar (I21) said ‘we try and get the sorters to try and get into the quality controlling area and then from the quality controlling area they get into the supervisor role’. Mitul (I13) described a plan to transition an employee into management over time by giving increasing responsibility. This deliberate approach aligns with Vicki (I22), who was recruiting trainees in order to focus on the job training on areas that would develop them into future managers for the business.

Some interviewees indicated a preference for internal recruitment which can be linked to a view that understanding the business is critical to role competence. This was described as being ‘immersed in the business, so they know how it works’ (Tony, I20) or ‘having an understanding of all departments’ (Umar, I21). It was described as benefiting the business because ‘they already know the problems’ of the business (Mitul, I13) and ‘the way we do things, they know our brand, our passion’ (Wyatt, I23).

According to Tony (I20), the importance of knowing the business is associated with the need to match the entire fruit production process (growth, harvest, picking, sorting, packing) to specific market requirements. This relies on the ‘black art’ of intuition in a ‘highly variable and subjective business’ (Tony, I20). A key factor in developing this intuition is likely to be experience in various aspects of the business:

> I've got to know what value looks like, and I've got to craft the end product in a way that I know the customer will buy it. It's very different than making nuts and bolts. I think this is actually one of the challenges. We can get a person who's a university graduate in horticulture or fruit marketing or this and this and this. You put him in and he may be imminently suitable on paper, but he just may not be able to connect all of the diverse pieces of string together and tie a knot. Now that's probably the best way I could describe it. (Tony, I20)

Interviewees described some of the benefits to the business of hiring internally. Umar (I21) indicated that internal recruitment meant that they already understood what the employee had to offer the position, ‘whereas hiring externally required more monitoring and more uncertainty regarding suitability’. This included knowing ‘what training will be needed to be good at the job and whether the person was able to be trained’ (Umar, I21). Tony’s experience aligns with this in which they ‘identified the aptitude’ of staff and then ‘probably experimented with them a little bit to give them some responsibility’ to determine suitability for a higher role (I20). Two interviewees stated that there was a decreased risk of someone coming with ‘bad habits’ when hired and trained internally.

In contrast, some interviewees described experiences of investing resources in training staff only to have the staff member leave. This suggests that retention influences the capacity of businesses to internally recruit for roles. Several interviewees discussed issues associated with retention and turnover. For example, Juan (I10) stated: ‘If they were turning over there must be job dissatisfaction or problems with the boss or not paying enough money, so something’s wrong. You’re better off hanging on to the people who’ve got the skills rather than losing them and trying - starting again.’ Tony (I20) recognised a problem with retention in their business: ‘There’s also a fairly high burn out rate I think because it’s a highly pressured industry as well. This is also a common - look why is it like this? It’s because the margins are thin.’ Given the recognised problem, Tony (I20) was ‘always thinking about someone who can fill’ a manager role.

Tony indicated that where a family member was involved, the willingness to invest in training someone was higher:

> I think it's very hard actually to describe a pathway for someone to be up to speed. The way we're doing with our [family member], we're immersing him in the business, so how many people get that chance? We'd only do it with him because he's a [family member], so there's a connection there. (I20)

While Fabia (I6) did recruit internally, she also described an experience with training existing staff that was not successful:

> We tried to do some stuff in the shed a couple of seasons ago based on warehousing type logistics type stuff, and it didn't really work. It was just too far removed from what they were doing. Whereas the orchard guys, although a lot of it mightn't be exactly the same, there's enough of it that lines up close enough that it's okay for them.

This suggests that building on an existing skillset matters to the success of internal recruitment approaches.

Overall, there seemed to be a preference among orchard and integrated business interviewees for building upon the sets of skills within existing staff to enable internal recruitment for increasingly skilled positions. This stemmed from the value that employers placed on existing employees already understanding the business and a reduced risk that the candidate would not be suitable for the role.
will be a poor fit for the business in the role. The pool of potential candidates for positions could come from the seasonal workers, permanent-casual workers or permanent workers.

Even so, where positions within the perennial fruit industry rely on new sets of skills, it is likely that businesses will need to externally recruit. Identifying potential new skillsets that are not easily built upon by the existing workforce (e.g. such as sometimes associated with disruptive technology) will help to identify where external recruitment will occur.

4.3.3 Recruitment experiences and jobs that were difficult to fill

We asked interviewees about jobs that they had sought to recruit to in the previous 12 months and those they envisaged recruiting to over the coming 12 months. Fourteen businesses indicated that they had recruited, or attempted to recruit, or were planning to recruit staff for more than 27 positions, as shown in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>No. of positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orchard Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchard Operations Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchard Leading Hand</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchard Hand</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shed Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shed Supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman/Senior Foreman</td>
<td>Several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatch manager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other managers</td>
<td>Several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck driver</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forklift driver</td>
<td>2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality assurance role</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agronomist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field officer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainees</td>
<td>Several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General labourers</td>
<td>Several</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We gathered some additional data on recruitment efforts and labour demand by carrying out a regular search of advertisements placed on the online recruitment site Seek over the period 15/9/16 & 31/12/16. Five jobs located in Goulburn Valley and featuring the search term ‘orchard’ were advertised during this, with the following job titles:

- Orchard Manager
- Stone Fruit Grower
- Nursery Manager – Orchard Tree Propagation
- Leading Hand
- Experienced Orchard Manager

Eleven interviewees indicated that they had experienced difficulties filling roles in their businesses, with some businesses describing multiple positions that were difficult to fill. The list of hard to fill positions identified is shown in Table 7.

14 www.seek.com.au
Understanding Skilled Workforce Issues in the Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry

Table 7: Positions that interviewees reported were recently or currently hard to fill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positions that interviewees reported were recently or currently hard to fill positions</th>
<th>Number of interviewees reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orchard Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Orchard Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shed manager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatch manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other managers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agronomist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurseryman</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist pruners</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accessing skilled workers was important for interviewees and two interviewees linked the recruitment needs to their interest in expanding the business. For example, Fabia (I6) said ‘Our single biggest impediment to growth now is people. It's not ideas and it's not access to capital, it's who is the next person?’, and Samuel (I19) was ‘expanding and need[ed] to find someone to take on two Orchard Hand roles… it's going to be difficult to find people. Even if they don’t have that qualification, if they're - if I can find the right person with the right attitude, I'd be willing to spend time to teach them and put them through the qualification. But even that’s a struggle in itself.’

Some interviewees indicated that applicants were difficult to come by, such as when ‘no one applied’ when Bernie (I2) advertised for an Orchard Manager role. At other times, turnover was implied to be an issue, when interviewees stated that they were always looking for someone to fill a manager role (I20 and I21). Interviewees also found that sometimes people applied but just didn’t have enough experience, such as when Oscar (I15) was looking for a Nurseryman.

Some challenges filling roles related to the need for specialist skillsets. Xavier (I24) was struggling to find Specialist Pruners who could train young trees in intensive systems. Samuel (I19) also identified problems finding someone with these skills, though he responded by taking on the job himself. Wyatt (I23) had been trying to find a Dispatch and Logistics specialist for over a year, and was still looking at the time of the interview. This echoed the experience of Fabia (I6) who couldn’t fill a logistics role and then tried to train someone internally, which didn’t work out.

Seven of the 11 businesses struggling to fill roles were having difficulties finding Managers (I2, I6, I12, I14, I15, I20, I21). For example, Lynda couldn’t find a Shed manager:

> They could probably work two days, three or four hours a day, five days a week during the winter to get what needed to be done. But during the summer they’ll be here 10 hours a day seven days a week. So it’s hard to fill that sort of role. (I12)

Yet, management skills, especially people management skills were viewed as critical to business success (I6, I13, I17, I22).

> It's a massive cost to our business and it's probably the quickest way to go broke if your staff doesn't have either the right manager or the right people giving instructions. So if the wrong instructions are given well then you've just gone and spent a heap of labour and time on doing something that may not have needed to be done. Mitul (I13)

The finding in this research that employers sometimes struggled to fill skilled and management roles aligns with the finding of the Food Futures Innovation Cluster project, that middle management positions are difficult to fill (Catalyst Exchange 2015).

4.3.4 Use of position descriptions

Written position descriptions are a common tool used in many businesses and industries to formalise the allocation of duties to particular workers, both as part of recruitment processes and on-going management of employees. The use of position descriptions, along with standard job titles, can also help facilitate greater comparability or standardisation of roles within an industry. We asked the employers who participated in this study about their use of position descriptions, in order to understand how they viewed these documents. Employers’ responses are shown in Table 8 below.
Table 8: Use of position descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position descriptions used for permanent positions?</th>
<th>Typology category (as per Section 4.2.1 and Figure 12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All positions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some positions</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No positions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employers’ expectations of employee flexibility toward tasks aligns with an informality toward the use of position descriptions. Only half (10) of 20 orchard businesses reported having written position descriptions for all permanent employees and seven out of 20 reported having no written position descriptions for anyone. For example, Samuel (I19) said ‘We don't need it, we don't change the people … they've been here for a long time, don't need [it] written’ and Tony (I20) said ‘it's never been asked for, it’s very informal around here’.

Those who used position descriptions indicated that it makes the expectations regarding a role clear for the business and employee. Vicki (I22) said that the business used position descriptions because they ‘mak[e] people aware of their roles in the industry and it gives them then the responsibility and allow[s] them to take ownership of their positions as well.’ Xavier (I24) indicated that he used position descriptions ‘because I wanted to make sure that my core employees knew exactly what their roles were’. Wyatt (I23) used position descriptions in discussion of performance.

> It gives us, then, a way to be able to - one, it's both agreeing on what their job - what we expect of them. We're able to, then, every six months, do an assessment on it, to then talk about their salary. If they want a raise or we think they're worth more - they've gone more and beyond our job description. We like that. We want you to be more and beyond. Yeah. Job descriptions are important. (I23)

It was also recognised by some who did not currently use them that position descriptions are important for communicating expectations of the job. For example, Samuel (I19) indicated that ‘if we’re going to hire somebody, then we have to give that description of the job - what we want’, though the current permanent position was held by a family member.

Some participants indicated quite clearly that position descriptions needed to allow for the flexibility needed for work in the perennial fruit industry. Guadalupe (I7) said that position descriptions offer ‘parameters around what we’re talking about. Not to box people in - because this business is small we don’t, like I’ll go and sweep the floor or pack the boxes or deliver stuff if we have to. That’s just part of the deal. So we don't ever let a title or a description restrict you. Yeah there are titles but they're not adhered to’. And Lynda described:

> …a favourite saying of some of us around here - that wasn't in my job description. So you've got to be diverse - well diversify - you've got to be able to do a bit of everything. There's not a thing that, you know, Joe does this and Fred does that and Charlie does that. We've all got to be able to back each other up and do a bit of everything. Everybody is responsible for their own actions, for what they've done, as well. So that comes down to a bit of job description…[but it] doesn’t fit completely because there’s always - you’ve always got to be able to do something else. If you get asked to come out and help do this you can’t say, ‘it’s not in my job description’ because it’s not that sort of industry. (I12)

Eight out of the 10 orchard businesses with position descriptions for all permanent employees were large orchards and integrated businesses. This suggests that larger businesses (those with a defined task set for a role) perceive a benefit associated with using position descriptions, while smaller businesses (with a broader and fluctuating set of tasks) may not perceive sufficient benefit to use them. Employers’ different attitudes to the use of position descriptions will need to be considered in any future workforce development interventions that seek to introduce more standardisation of job descriptions and duties.
5 Implications for understanding career pathways and for workforce development in the perennial fruit industry

5.1 Career pathways

Taken together, the findings presented in Section 4 on (a) workforce structure and job types and (b) employer’s approaches to meeting workforce needs give an indication of the career pathways that exist in the Goulburn Valley perennial fruit industry. We have represented this information diagrammatically in Figure 13 and Figure 14. It is important to note that these diagrams involve a large degree of generalisation. They do not represent the actual situation in any individual business, and they are not an attempt to depict any recommendation on what might be considered desirable or best practice. Rather, they are a communication tool that allows us to represent in a concise format a range of relevant findings from this study, to enable further discussion and deliberation on what these findings suggest could be done as part of future workforce development work.

In Figure 13, we take the most common job titles identified in Section 4.2.3 and group them into two broad levels of jobs. We have termed jobs which involve independent decision-making as managerial jobs (‘DECIDERS’), and jobs which are mostly about carrying out instructions given by others as non-managerial jobs (‘DOERS’). The ‘decider’ and ‘doer’ distinction implies different skillsets. Those in managerial jobs rely on strategic and abstract thinking, risk management, as well as business and workforce planning when they are making decisions. Those in non-managerial jobs rely on concrete knowledge of the tasks being performed, the capacity to identify urgent problems or risks associated with tasks, and ability to communicate and supervise other staff in implementing day-to-day tasks. While we have identified the distinction between these two categories of jobs, this research has not analysed in detail the skillsets needed for each.

As was discussed in Section 4.2.3 we identified that jobs with the same title can involve quite different duties in different businesses, and so it isn’t always clear whether the job of Orchard Manager, for example is a ‘doer’ or a ‘decider’. That is why the middle grey box on the left of Figure 13 has been shown straddling the line between managerial jobs and non-managerial jobs. Based on the findings of this study, it is this middle grey box that contains the ‘middle management’ positions that were identified as difficult to fill by the participants in the Food Futures Innovation Cluster project (Catalyst Exchange 2015).

![Diagram of two broad levels of jobs in the fruit industry workforce](image-url)

Figure 13: Two broad levels of jobs in the fruit industry workforce

Figure 14 goes on to depict the pathways of entry into jobs, and career pathways within the industry at these two different levels, as they were described to us by the participants in this study. This diagram depicts both the external and internal recruitment pathways described in Section 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. External candidates are sourced from the range of sources shown on the left of the diagram, and there is some differentiation between typical sources of external recruitment for managerial versus non-managerial jobs. Internal recruitment occurs when an employee moves from one job to another within the business. Internal recruitment can occur within one or another of the two broad levels of jobs (for example when a seasonal or casual worker moves into a permanent orchard hand position), but internal recruitment...
can also involve workers moving from a non-managerial role into a managerial role, as depicted by the dotted grey arrow that crosses the blue dotted line in the centre of Figure 14. Figure 15 presents three illustrative examples of the career paths than an individual worker might follow either within, or moving between, the non-managerial and managerial job levels.

![Figure 14: Entry and career pathways for fruit industry workers](image)

Drawing on the framing of jobs and career paths offered in Figures 13 and 14, in the context of our broader research findings, a number of observations can be made that are relevant to thinking about future workforce development for the Goulburn Valley perennial fruit industry.

1) Many employers have a preference for the internal recruitment pathway, including the internal recruitment pathway that leads from non-managerial jobs to managerial jobs, partly because of the importance they place on business or orchard-specific knowledge, and partly because they like to hand pick candidates who show aptitude and motivation. Therefore:

- Developing better linkages between businesses and the VET sector so that skills development is occurring within a specific business context will address the need of employers for business knowledge and will reveal aptitude and motivation of individuals for further recruitment. A key element of improving these linkages is ensuring alignment of the industry’s preferred training method with the current VET funding models.

- Given the difference in skillsets between ‘doers’ and ‘deciders’, it is important for those involved in workforce development, including industry, to (a) understand the new skills that are required when someone moves from a non-managerial into a managerial role and (b) have options available to employers and employees to assist with acquisition of these skills.

- There are likely to be other factors that influence the capacity to move from a ‘doer’ to ‘decider’ pathway. Understanding these factors would help industry minimise some of the barriers to this career path transition.

2) Despite the common preference from internal recruitment, employers also recruit externally, as evidenced from our interviews and the job advertisements that appeared on Seek during our data collection period. Larger businesses (particularly those of Type 4 according to our typology) appear to be recruiting externally more often, because of the number of jobs in these businesses. Our findings indicate that employers had difficulties filling some jobs, especially managerial roles, and this difficulty is impeding business development and growth.
Figure 15: Examples of possible career paths for individual fruit industry workers
Where managerial roles are recruited for externally, it is important to understand how much practical orchard ‘doing’ skill and experience is required and, if these skills are required, how they can be gained. This is particularly the case for small to medium orchards (Type 3 according to our typology), where orchard managers are typically required to be involved in practical orchard ‘doing’ work in some seasons. Therefore:

- Developing clear position descriptions for managerial positions that clarify the degree of ‘doing’ required and distinguishing these from managerial roles within the industry that have less of this requirement may help give candidates accurate expectations of what a job involves.
- Recognising, however, that the expectation mismatch may result in fewer applications, businesses may benefit from focusing on targeted development of existing staff.
- A collective industry-led program at a regional scale to develop future managers may draw in new candidates that are seeking a managerial career path. This will be especially useful to smaller businesses, which are limited in their ability to offer career pathways within their own business.

3) Effectively maintaining a workforce that meets business needs relies on both internal and external recruitment. This requires employers to consider the workforce needs of the business over the coming years and the retention of existing staff. Therefore:

- Strategic workforce planning and human resource management training may benefit businesses that do not already utilise these skills.
- Research to understand job attractiveness and retention issues from the perspective of employees would be useful to identify steps that businesses can take to improve attractiveness and minimise turnover.
- Given the potential for changes to the skills and career paths needed by the industry, those involved in workforce development will benefit from regular environmental scanning of changes that may influence skill needs (e.g. technology, changes to supply chain structure, policy and regulation). This information can be provided to businesses to inform their strategic workforce planning and will enable effective recruitment.
- The model in Figures 13 and 14 representing jobs and career paths in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry can be used to think about the range of possible skills acquisition pathways that are available to meet industry needs, including:
  - What jobs in the fruit industry are suitable for university graduates, and what skills would the industry like these graduates to have?
  - How do the skills required of the various jobs match up to the competencies included in different levels of VET qualifications (Cert III, Cert IV, Diploma) and in University qualifications? Are there any important competencies that need to be covered that currently aren’t included in these qualifications?
  - What is the best mode for delivery of VET training, given employers’ preference for on-the-job learning and orchard-specific knowledge? (But noting also that employees’ preferences may differ from those of employers.)
  - What is the role for industry-specific management traineeships and graduate programs?

4) Employers had diverse approaches and views about the use of position descriptions in their businesses. Nevertheless, position descriptions are a useful tool for understanding expectations for a job and for comparing expectations across businesses in the industry. This is useful for businesses and for those seeking positions. Therefore:

- It may be useful to the Goulburn Valley fruit industry to collectively develop a set of generic position descriptions for common roles, as a discussion tool for the industry. Even if they are not used by all businesses, the process of developing a tool like this will trigger conversations regarding expectations and will help businesses reflect on what they are offering compared to other businesses.

5) Seasonal workers are critical to business success because of the labour intensity required during peak times. Seasonal workers are also a source of ‘doers’ for the Goulburn Valley fruit industry. Changes in policy that impede access to these workers is a risk for the industry. Therefore:

- It is recommended that industry and the state government monitor changes to relevant policies, including visa programs, to understand how they may affect businesses.
- Industry may want to consider where a collective approach may be useful to managing risks (e.g. worker pay and conditions, public perceptions) regarding this important set of workers.
5.2 Potential areas for collaborative workforce development work

Our research confirmed that the challenge employers currently face in recruiting suitably skilled workers is impeding business development and growth in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry. There is therefore a need for stakeholders to discuss what aspects of this challenge can be addressed at the individual business scale, and what aspects would benefit from collective action at the regional industry scale. The observations and implications above point to areas of potential collaboration in workforce development for the industry.

A. **Targeted linkage development with the training sector to ensure that training scope and delivery meet industry needs, including:**
- Identifying how skills development through the VET system can be integrated with on-the-job training.
- Developing a skills development focus for employers in strategic workforce planning and human resource management for those in the industry who do not currently have these skills.
- Connect with the universities delivering relevant courses to identify opportunities to have input into course content and delivery.
- Work with universities to develop opportunities for students to gain horticulture industry exposure (for example through internships and work experience placements).

B. **Develop a collective understanding of common jobs, pay scales and associated position descriptions as a way to develop mutual understanding of expectations by employers within the region and industry.** *(The collective discussion will be beneficial even for employers who do not currently use position descriptions.)*
- This may illuminate some of the issues associated with different expectations regarding managerial roles, i.e. some relying on more ‘doing’ than others.
- Clarity regarding jobs, pay scales and position descriptions will help employers with their strategic workforce planning.

C. **Establish a regional industry approach to enhance the availability of career paths in managerial roles.**
- This could be an industry-led program to develop future managers for the region’s fruit businesses.
- Learning from the experiences of existing management traineeship programs, as well as linkages with the VET system and universities, will be useful inputs to developing such an approach.

D. **Industry-directed environmental scanning and research**
- Environmental scanning by industry and partners to identify changes that may affect the industry workforce and workforce development now and into the future is important for fruit businesses. This scanning needs to include consideration of factors that may influence the skills that will be needed (e.g. technology, supply chain structure, social licence, policy and regulation) and factors that may influence access to the workforce (e.g. visa programs and community perceptions of workforce pay and conditions).
- The models representing jobs and career paths in the Goulburn Valley fruit industry developed in this study can be used to think about the range of possible skills acquisition pathways that are available to meet industry needs. This can then inform the direction of collective action to support workforce development by industry and partners (especially for A and C above). Some questions that can be considered include:
  - What jobs in the fruit industry are suitable for university graduates, and what skills would the industry like these graduates to have?
  - How do the skills required of the various jobs match up to the competencies included in different levels of VET (Cert III, Cert IV, Diploma) and University qualifications? Are there any important competencies that need to be covered that current aren’t included in these qualifications?
  - What is the best mode for delivery of VET training, given employers’ preference for on-the-job learning and orchard-specific knowledge? (But noting also that employees’ preferences may differ from those of employers)?
  - What is the role for industry-specific management traineeships and graduate programs?
- Our research revealed a number of gaps in knowledge that need to be understood further to adequately respond to the workforce development needs of the Goulburn Valley fruit industry. These include:
  - Research to understand fruit industry jobs and careers from the perspective of employees. What makes fruit industry jobs attractive or unattractive? How do employees experience the human resource management practices of employers? What is the perspective of employees on career paths in the industry?
- Research on employers’ current human resource management policies and practices, to assess any skills gaps and/or practices that could be improved;
- Research to identify the barriers to moving from non-managerial to managerial career pathways so that these barriers can be minimised where possible.
6 References:


Appendix A: Questionnaire Instrument
Questionnaire: Skilled Workforce Demand in the Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry

Developed by Michael Santhanam-Martin, Lisa Cowan and Aimee McCutcheon for the Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry
Systemic Workforce Issues Scoping Study, October 2016

Introduction

1. What kinds of activities are carried out by the businesses you own or manage? (tick all that apply)

- [ ] Grow fruit
- [ ] Pack fruit
- [ ] Store fruit
- [ ] Market fruit
- [ ] Transport fruit
- [ ] Provide labour on contract to other businesses (such as pickers & packers)
- [ ] Sale of products/inputs (e.g. fertilisers) and provision of advice related to these products
- [ ] Provide technical or business advice not associated with product sales
- [ ] Provide contract services (e.g. fencing, irrigation installation, pruning, orchard redevelopment)
- [ ] Other, Please specify:____________________________________________________________________

2. For fruit growers only: what is the total size of your orchard, in hectares? Please include orchard blocks that you are leasing as well as block that you own, and also include newly planted blocks. Where is your orchard? What fruits do you grow and for which markets?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hectares OR Acres</th>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Fruits: (list all)</th>
<th>Markets: (processing, fresh, export. List main market first)</th>
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</table>

3. What was the total gross turnover of all the fruit industry businesses that you own or manage for the 2015-16 financial year?

- [ ] $0-$500,000
- [ ] $500,000-$1.5 million
- [ ] $1.5 million -$3 million
- [ ] $3 million - $5 million
- [ ] $5 million -$10 million
- [ ] greater than $10 million
4. In your industry, how would you describe your business:

A very small/micro business  1  2  3  4  5  A very large business

**Employment in Your Businesses**

5. How many people including yourself worked in your fruit industry businesses during the 2015-16 financial year?

| people |

**Interviewer:** *Explain our usage of permanent and casual workers: Permanent workers work in on-going roles that can or will last 12 month or more. Casual workers work on a short-term or seasonal basis.*

6. Which of the following methods of engaging workers were used in your businesses in the 2015-16 financial year, and for how many workers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In 2015-16 did other members of your family work in your businesses?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>How many?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 2015-16 did you directly employ <strong>permanent</strong> workers (these are workers on your payroll)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>In 2015-16 did you directly employ <strong>casual</strong> workers (these are workers on your payroll)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>In 2015-16 did you have <strong>permanent</strong> workers who are engaged through a labour hire contractor (these workers are not on your payroll)?</td>
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<td>In 2015-16 did you have <strong>casual</strong> workers who were engaged through a labour hire contractor (these workers are not on your payroll)?</td>
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<td>In 2015-16 did you have <strong>permanent</strong> workers who you engage as independent contractors (paid on invoice)?</td>
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<td>In 2015-16 did you have <strong>casual</strong> workers who you engage as independent contractors (paid on invoice)?</td>
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</table>
7. Permanent workers

Complete the table for all permanent roles in the interviewee’s business(es)

(a) Role descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role/Job title</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Major tasks associated with the role</th>
<th>Method of engagement</th>
<th>Ave. hours worked per week</th>
<th>Gross pay ($/hr or total annual salary excluding superannuation)</th>
<th>Non-salary benefits (e.g. housing, phone, vehicle). (list)</th>
<th>What training and experience background do you look for?</th>
<th>Time to train in your business?</th>
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COMPLETE ADDITIONAL COPIES OF THIS PAGE AS REQUIRED
(b) How many times over the last 12 months have you recruited or tried to recruit new permanent workers?

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<tr>
<th>Times</th>
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(c) Were your recruitment efforts successful? What are currently the greatest challenges or problems you face in recruiting and retaining new permanent workers for your business(es)? Which roles are difficult to fill and which are easier?
8. Casual workers

Complete the table for all casual roles in the interviewee’s business(es)

(a) Role descriptions

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<th>Role/Job title</th>
<th>No.</th>
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<th>Method of engagement</th>
<th>Ave. hours worked per week</th>
<th>Gross wage ($/hr or $/day)</th>
<th>Non-salary benefits (e.g. housing, phone, vehicle). (list)</th>
<th>What training and experience background do you look for?</th>
<th>Time to train in your business?</th>
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COMPLETE ADDITIONAL COPIES OF THIS PAGE AS REQUIRED
(b) How many times over the last 12 months have you recruited or tried to recruit new casual employees?

| times |

(c) Were your recruitment efforts successful? What are currently the greatest challenges or problems you face in recruiting new casual workers for your business(es)? Are many of your casual employees return employees who have worked for you before? Which roles are difficult to fill and which are easier?
**Recruitment plans**

9. Are you **currently**, or do you **expect** during the 2016-17 financial year to be, looking for new **permanent** workers (either as employees, via labour hire or as independent contractors?)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>If “Yes” go to Question 10</th>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>If “No” go to Question 12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. If ‘yes’: What type of **permanent** workers are you currently looking for(expect to be looking for?

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<tr>
<th>Job title/role</th>
<th>How many?</th>
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</table>

11. What would be your preferred method of engaging these workers, and why? (e.g. direct employment, labour hire or independent contractor).
12. Are you currently, or do you expect during the 2016-17 financial year to be, looking for new casual workers (either as employees, via labour hire or as independent contractors?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>If “Yes” go to Question 13</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>If “No” go to Question 15</td>
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</table>

13. If ‘yes’: What type of casual workers are you currently looking for/expect to be looking for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job title/role</th>
<th>How many?</th>
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14. What would be your preferred method of engaging for these workers, and why? (e.g. direct employment, labour hire or independent contractor).
15. What methods do you use to find workers for your businesses? (tick each of the methods below that the interviewee mentions).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion/Development of existing staff</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertise in local and regional newspapers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertise in the Weekly Times or other state-wide agricultural newspapers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Online networks (e.g. Linked in, Facebook, Twitter)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising online (e.g. Seek.com, Gumtree, other)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertise in fruit industry publications</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking the Job Network – Government-funded employment agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using local “word of mouth” – e.g. community and sporting contacts, personal contacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using farm consultants or specialist farm employment services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using other private employment agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (Please state........................................................................)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
16. (a) Do you have written job descriptions for permanent positions/roles in your business(es)?

[ ] None         [ ] Some         [ ] All         [ ] don’t have permanent positions

(b) Why do you have that approach to job descriptions for permanent roles? What is in these documents?

17. Do you have written job descriptions for casual positions/roles in your business(es)?

[ ] None         [ ] Some         [ ] All         [ ] I don’t have casual positions

(b) Why do you have that approach to job descriptions for casual roles? What is in these documents?
18. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the fruit industry workforce in the Goulburn Valley, and your experiences of finding and retaining the people you need to run your business(es)?
Wrap-up questions

19. Are you willing to provide us with contact details (e.g. telephone number or email) for skilled employees in your business, so that we can learn more about their experiences as workers in the fruit industry?

Yes  
No  

20. Would you like to receive a summary report about this research?

Yes  
No  

If interviewee answered Yes to Question 18 or 19:

21. Can I have your contact details?

Name:  
Email or postal address:  
Telephone number:  

Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:
Santhanam-Martin, M; Cowan, L

Title:
Understanding Skilled Workforce Issues in the Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry

Date:
2017

Citation:

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Published version