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Author/s:

Fatupaito, A;Utuva, L;Tauave, S;Alofipo, A;Meleisea, M;Schoeffel, O;Arthur, T;Alexeyeff, K

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Samoa's New Labour Trade

Angela Anya Fatupaito, National University of Samoa

Leva'a Samoa James Utuva, National University of Samoa

Sa'u Emo Tauave, National University of Samoa

Alofipo Siligamanaia Alofipo, National University of Samoa

Malama Meleisea, National University of Samoa

Penelope Schoeffel, National University of Samoa

Tiffany Arthur, University of Guyana,

Kalissa Alexeyeff, University of Melbourne.

Abstract

This article explores the context of aspirations to become seasonal workers in New Zealand or Australia and the experiences of those who worked in New Zealand under the Recognized Seasonal Employer scheme. It is based on detailed interviews with 24 people who were seasonal workers or who aspired to become seasonal workers in 2020, and on other relevant sources. The focus of the article is the recruitment processes and the economic, social and historical contexts of seasonal work in Samoa.

Keywords: Seasonal workers, Samoa, Recognized Seasonal Employer, Seasonal Worker Program, Pacific Labour Scheme.

On July 21, 2021, as reported in the Samoa Observer newspaper (Wilson, S. 2021) a surging crowd of over a thousand anxious Samoan men and women wrecked the windows and doors of a church hall where seasonal worker registration was being conducted. A prominent member of parliament Olo Fiti Va'ai was reported by the same newspaper on 23 June, 2021 as saying that such desperation revealed the high level of unemployment, noting the need to create employment in Samoa, and that: "we should not encourage our people to go overseas and resort to this kind of thing to earn money for their families". According to the this newspaper report, the unemployment rate in Samoa is 8.87 per cent, but although that figure refers to the year 2020 (Macrotrends 2021) it probably does not include those who have lost jobs due to the demise of Tourism since the border was closed in March 2020 to protect the population from Covid 19. Thousands of Samoan families now depend on subsistence farming and fishing and on remittance money from its large overseas diaspora (see for example Bedford & Hugo 2012). The urban poor, who lack means of subsistence living, are particularly hard hit. In early 2021 Radio New Zealand News quoted Samoa's Minister for Labour that 3400 seasonal laborers were engaged overseas at that time, and that in 2019/2020 nearly USD\$80,000,000 had been earned by seasonal workers.

The government of Samoa evidently sees the seasonal worker programme as a means of economic salvation for the country.

This article does not claim to provide a comprehensive review of the many studies of seasonal work and workers in Samoa or the Pacific Islands (see Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020, Underhill-Sem and Marsters 2017, and Immigration New Zealand, 2021)

We offer a snapshot of Samoan perspectives on seasonal work based on 24 detailed interviews conducted in the Samoan language by five of the authors (lecturers and a graduate student at the National University of Samoa), using their own social networks to identify their interlocutors. The focus of the enquiry was to identify how these workers came to be recruited and their perception of the costs and benefits of seasonal work. They were from many different villages and included men and women (mostly men are recruited) and included young untitled men as well as men with matai titles. For some, seasonal work has become a regular annual part of their life while others had worked only one season. Some had applied to go but had missed out. The interviews were translated into English by one of the interview team members. All those who had been seasonal workers had gone under the New Zealand Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) programme to work in orchards. None had been to Australia.

Seasonal work has long history in Samoa although in its present form, it has been in operation for only the past 14 years. In the 1870s, about twenty years before Samoa was formally colonized, the first commercial coconut plantations were established in Samoa and indentured workers were recruited, mainly by German interests, from the Solomon Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago of what is now Papua New Guinea. By the turn of the century indentured workers were also recruited from China and from 1903 to 1913, a total of 3,868 Chinese labourers were brought to Samoa (see Leung Wai, this issue). Samoans were found to be unreliable for plantation labour, likely to leave if they are tired of the work and when they had other concerns, such as the civil wars of that time. Removing labourers from their homelands was an efficient solution as the workers were necessarily confined to their workplaces and, being foreigners, could not escape into the local population. When Germany formally colonized Samoa in 1900 the administration allowed the large German plantation company a monopoly over imported indentured Melanesian labour and forbade the recruitment of Samoans as plantation labour; this was partly to deny British and American planters competing with German interests a supply of labour and partly, or so it was claimed, to protect Samoans from exploitation. When Samoa became a New Zealand territory, seized from Germany in 1914, labour recruitment ceased and most but not all foreign labour was repatriated. The German plantations became the property of the New Zealand government and its Samoan administration as 'reparation estates' (Meleisea, 1980). The resulting labour shortage meant that by the 1920s Samoans were employed, mainly as short-term contract labour, a practice that continued until recently, whereby the government-owned Samoa Trust Estates Corporation recruited temporary teams of workers through their churches, to weed and harvest crops. Churches that were raising money to build a new church, meeting hall, or a house for their clergy, organized teams of their parishioners as temporary plantation workers on contracts.

The RSE policy was approved by the Government of New Zealand in 2006 and commenced in 2007; however churches were already sending seasonal fund-raising work groups to New Zealand, albeit in much smaller numbers than those recruited into the present system. It was the first entry point to seasonal work for a number of the workers we interviewed. This was organized by church congregations in Samoa

in partnership with church counterparts in New Zealand of the same denomination, who 'hosted' the work groups.

The RSE policy aimed to achieve a 'triple win' for the migrants, their countries of origin and for the destination countries (Ramsamy et.al. 2008) but to assist producers of seasonal fruit and vegetable crops to overcome seasonal labour shortages. Recruiting workers for the RSE is now carried out by a number of agents in Samoa, but for the past ten years or so, all recruitment has been subject to oversight by the Government of Samoa. The impact of the policy on participating Pacific Island countries has been subjected to some criticism in the extensive literature on the subject, such as its potential effect of diverting labour away from domestic agricultural production and businesses, and its resonances with the colonial labour trade, and the creation of a new form of external dependency (e.g. Craven 2015) but most studies have mainly emphasized its benefits. Wages earned from seasonal work are much higher than those paid in Samoa, even for skilled work. Benefits include increased flow of remittance income to participating Pacific Island countries, and the benefits to households from the savings brought back for purposes such as building houses, buying cars or funding a small business, or the earnings remitted to households with little or no other cash income (see Bedford, Bedford and Ho: 2009).

Recruitment

There are several pathways to signing on for seasonal work in New Zealand and Australia. The first is by joining the government of Samoa's 'Work Ready Pool' under the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labor (MCIL). The government screens applicants to ensure they have passports, clean police records and are in good health, and are ready to join a group when seasonal work contracts overseas are offered through MCIL. There is a shorter path when a worker has become known to an overseas employer, is registered with MCIL, and returns to the same employer for subsequent seasons. Another way is for a New Zealand (or Australian) approved employer to contract a government-licensed agent to recruit workers to their specifications and organize their work trips. Church recruitment falls in that category.

Selection criteria

According to MCIL there is a strict 12 step set of procedures (Figure 1) for workers applying to go to Australia as seasonal workers under the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP), or as low or semi-skilled workers under the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS). For employment under the PLS, which to date has mainly been in meat processing, workers are offered contracts for up to three years and must provide testimony from their families that they agree that the worker may go. Men and women are eligible, between 21 and 40 year of age who are literate in English with high levels of cardio, mobility and strength-tested fitness, as well as the usual health requirements and police clearance. "Previous experience with animals or knives is an advantage" according to the MCIL official interviewed.

For agricultural and horticultural work in Australia or New Zealand under the SWP and the RSE, contracts for up to seven months (RSE) and nine months (SWP) are offered, with similar selection criteria. Those applying directly to MCIL must bring their own pen to complete the forms, photo ID such as a passport or driver's license, and references from their village mayor and church minister. Applicants are interviewed, and are expected to have a phone number and email account or a Facebook Messenger

account for contact. MCIL does not provide training except the pre-departure orientation to prepare workers before they leave. We were unable to obtain details of how interviews affect selection criteria, or the content of pre-departure briefing. Figure 1, although it illustrates what is required for work in Australia, also mostly applies to seasonal employment in New Zealand.

Figure 1: Work in Australia – Recruitment Process Flier



Employers are screened and approval to recruit Samoan workers for the seasonal work schemes and the PLS, is done by the relevant government agencies in Australia and New Zealand. For workers who are recruited by private agents, MCIL reviews and processes the visa application, including the offer of employment.

One of several well established and widely known non-government recruitment programs in Samoa is that operated under the Poutasi Development Trust (PTD), an organization that manages a number of village development projects and is led by a local businessman who holds a highly ranked chiefly title in Poutasi village. There the training for the RSE Scheme is done by the PTD's three supervisors; themselves experienced seasonal workers, in twice weekly training sessions over three months. The candidates must be 21 years upwards and must pay \$50.00 to register, a payment which does not guarantee selection. Training sessions are held in the village hall in Poutasi and includes physical fitness sessions. Applicants are evaluated for obedience to instructions, timely attendance and neat appearance.

The whole application process is expensive by local wage standards (the minimum wage in Samoa was SAT\$2.30, and recently rose to SAT\$3.00 – USD\$0.89), especially for first time workers, for passports as well as fees for visas, medical and police clearance certificates. According to the RSE Impact Study (Bedford, Bedford and Nunns, 2020), upfront costs for participation in 2019 averaged NZ\$530 for Samoan RSE workers. This excludes the worker's half share of the airfare which is usually deducted from the worker's wages once he/she has started work in NZ.

The PTD has earned a good reputation and supplies a number of large orchards in New Zealand year after year and is now also getting contracts from Australia. An interesting aspect of the PTD system is that it created a small internal migration trend whereby aspiring workers have moved from their home villages to live with relatives in Falealili district where Poutasi village is located, hoping to be chosen to join one of the teams organized by PTD. Previously the PTD required those seeking to be recruited to live in the district, so they can attend training. However recently the PTD has made it known that they will consider candidates from anywhere in Samoa, but those hoping to be chosen must attend training. The following statements are from interviews with young men who had registered with PTD and attending training, recorded in 2017 by Arthur (2019)

I am from Samusu Aleipata, I am staying at Tafatafa [Falealili] because of the training. I am out of school from year 13 and there is no more finance for my school fees at Wesley College. If I am chosen to go to New Zealand at Johnny Appleseed I want to buy a car [and] a house for my family.

I am from Lalomalava Savai'i and I stay in Sapoe village here in Falealili with my dad's relatives. I am training to go to Australia. I want to help my family and the church. I was in year 12 of school and I dropped out because my father died in 2011 that same year and I couldn't continue school. I am the man of the family and I have to help my mom and my brothers and sisters If I get the chance I want to stay in the programme for life, when I have enough to support this family.

Church Working Groups

Six men and one woman among the seasonal workers we interviewed in 2020 found their initial pathway to seasonal work through their church. One of the most experienced workers, who had worked for ten seasons in New Zealand orchards, explained that his church had sent several groups and gained experience with the paperwork and organizational and legal requirements. After his first contract organized by his church, he realized that seasonal work was a way to earn and save money to build a house, so he decided to sign on through the MCIL recruitment process. Four other men and one of the women we interviewed also began seasonal work to raise money for their church, but thereafter worked successive contracts through MCIL.

Some were open about their disappointing experience of working for their church and compared their experience unfavorably with that of working through the MCIL system.

"What disappointed me was that the things that were said to us here are much different than what we were told while we were in New Zealand. I like our team and the work we were doing, but all these deductions plus the \$300 that was sent to the church makes me want to give it up and come back home. I was hoping to buy a family car and buy a piece of land for us."

"My first trip was in 2015, we went to pick onions in West Auckland. There were eight of us and I'm telling you I was so glad when I was accepted in the team. We had church fundraising to fund [the costs of] this trip. I paid SAT 100 to join, I paid for my visa and police report and medical and half of my airfare; the church paid the other half. We also took some ietoga [ceremonial fine mats] for church members in NZ ... but that first trip was a big loss, I worked hard for a small pay. When I compare what I got in NZ I think I

earned better money here in Samoa. But my next two contract were through the government scheme, that's when I knew the difference, a big difference, I managed to save enough money and also [enough to] remit to my family when they called."

"The first trip ... we were received by a church family member. We all stayed in their house, eleven of us plus one couple. It was very uncomfortable squeezing in that house. There were a lot of problems arising from that place, we went to work early in the morning came back late, got home, there's no food, our beds weren't made and the lady told us to go cook the food, [and] we have many deductions including food, house rental and other expenses."

"We were used by our congregation and our pastor all this time. These people who recruited us for this work used us for their own benefits. ... None of my team members wanted to go again because we all know we were being used ... after all the deductions I only received about NZ 100.00 each week."

A woman, who left her young child with her husband and mother told us that her first contract was organized by her church, but thereafter by MCIL.

"The difference between the church and government groups is that I have to be a member of the church to be eligible to be in it, and everything was paid for by the church, that is the reason why I converted to that church so that I can have a chance to go. There was a church member that liaises with horticulture company personnel about this type of work in NZ, and they called our church to organize a group. When we got there, church members offered us a place to stay and we paid them rent."

One of our interlocutors told us that teams of seasonal workers had been recruited from within their village and the organizers had required each worker to donate NZ\$500 to the village on their return from their first season and NZ\$1,000 after their second season. He, like a number of others interviewed, spoke of recruiters who used their selection powers and funds raised from those returning, to build political reputations for themselves. One of the women we interviewed said that none of the men from her family were chosen by their local MP, a seasonal workers agent, because her family was known to have voted for his rival.

Motivations

Most Samoans are socialized to values of strong family solidarity, in which there is an ideal that young adults owe loving service (alofa) to their families and, through their family, to their church and their village. Of our interlocutors, most spoke of their seasonal work in those terms. They described the hardships and disappointments they experienced as seasonal workers and their self-denial (by saving their earnings rather than spending it on themselves). They complained about the strict rules imposed, including curfews, bans on alcohol and cannabis, also about wage deductions. Apart from the deductions for their half share of the airfare, tax, accommodation, food and transportation, there were deductions for many of the items they used, in some instances even including bedclothes and towels. According to MCIL all deductions are listed in the worker's contracts, but this did not seem clear to most of our interlocutors. Many mentioned health insurance deductions, and wondered why it was not refunded to

them if they did not use it. One man said to get his money's worth he feigned illness so he could get free medicine to take home.

In Samoa agricultural work involves periods of intensive activity for clearing land, planting, weeding and harvesting, but regular eight hour daily, six day weekly schedules were unfamiliar to many young men. Many of our interlocutors commented on the cold weather, early morning starting times and long hours of heavy labour:

"My first week on the job, I'm honestly telling you, that I almost gave up; I went to work in the morning crying. I never knew it was that hard working in New Zealand doing that kind of work ... I thought Samoa is much better than NZ."

Some spoke of their regular financial contributions to family at home: one of our women interlocutors said she needed to support her mother and family members who had no other source of cash income

"I was wishing to build a new house but because my mother always called to send some money, I always sent SAT\$800 weekly. My dreams weren't fulfilled because of that. Most of my team mates do the same, sending money back home almost every week to their families. We get our paycheck of SAT\$800 or \$900 a week after deductions, like the rent, the vehicle we are using to take and pick us up from work, [and] meat supply from the company every week which is paid by deductions."

Other spoke of what their savings had done for their family when they brought the money home, telling us proudly that they had become seasonal workers to serve their family. Returning workers who build a new house, buy a car and give generous church donations all contribute to the social status of their family, regardless of whether they have high rank according to traditional ancestral criteria. One told us that apart from caring for his elderly parents, his church and his contribution to ceremonies (*fa'alavelave*) his earnings also bought appliances for his family home, an extension of their house, a car and fencing for cattle enclosure on family land.

"I was influenced by friends about the job, they talked of how beneficial this scheme is to the development (atina'e) of their family and that's why I wanted to join the scheme. One of my friends recommended me to their leader and that's how I got in..."

"I returned from my second trip and bought a second hand car for my family to take the kids to school and after and take my parents to where they want to go instead of them catching the bus. There were many things I dreamt of to achieve while I worked as a fisherman. My family lived in poverty and I felt sorry for my parents and the struggles we faced every day and that's the reason why I wanted to go and I thank God I made the right decision. I felt so happy just by looking at what I managed to buy for my family with the money I bought with me on my return."

"... I have built this small house for me and my wife and kids and the new toilet. My other trip I came back and bought new iron roofs to reroof my parents' old house. In another trip I extended the front of our house. My last trip last year I came home early because of my mother's funeral and I brought NZD\$6,000

and I spent it all on the funeral. I'm waiting for the next trip and I'm looking at buying a family vehicle and to finish the toilet.

Repatriation for misconduct

One man told us that his dreams of future prosperity were not fulfilled because he was sent home for fighting with a coworker, which means he won't be eligible to go again:

"When I joined the seasonal work, I dreamt of fixing and supplying many things for my family in order to drive them out of poverty. I dreamt of buying a family car, because ... another big expense is bus and taxi fare. I also want to buy a freehold land for us but I'm so sad that my dreams are not fulfilled."

Those who live in villages (but not those from non-village suburban areas) face disgrace and penalties from local leaders if they are deported from seasonal work. If a worker is repatriated they may be stood down for a year or up to five years, depending on the severity of the offence and some may be black listed on the MCIL Internal Recruitment Database (IRD). As well as wrongdoing such as fighting or drunkenness, they may be deported for being disrespectful to their employers. Most of our interlocutors mention that fears of bringing shame on their family and village if they were deported for wrongdoing was a strong motivation to obey the rules while serving their seasonal contracts:

"When you disobey the rules you are warned, and if you continue to disobey these rules, your chance of working in this company will be terminated, they threaten us with these words"

"There was one Samoan employee who got fired because he disrespected an order given by the palagi [white person], that's why the company prefers people from Vanuatu because they never answer back when an order is given."

"We were instructed before leaving Samoa not to get into troubles to ruin the image of Samoa. We are not allowed to laugh out loud as the palagi don't like it. The strictest rules reiterated to us by our team leader are not to answer back to a palagi because some palagi are very discriminating ..."

"The company's rule that is very crucial to all of us is not to drink beer, you are warned when they caught you for first time, caught second time and you will be deported back to Samoa, another is avoiding having affairs between coworkers. It is acceptable to those who are single but not to married ones."

The disgrace of deportation can result in further punishment once back in Samoa because it not only shames the family but may affect other from the village hoping to be chosen to go. The practice of some villages being banned from sending workers is currently under government consideration. One of our interlocutor's spoke of a man who was deported for theft:

"... so he was deported back and his contract was terminated. He was punished by the village matai and the village was also penalized for five years. No more seasonal groups or anyone from the village is allowed to go to any seasonal works."

Others describe the shame of being punished by the village. The usual form of punishment is a large fine by the village council which must be paid by the offender's matai if the person being punished is not a matai.

"When you do something bad or break any rules, you will be deported back to Samoa straight away ... When you get here, not only the village matai punish you but you also have a black mark in your record."

"... if you break any rules or do something bad, not only that person will be penalized by the government, punished by the village, punished by the NZ company but they will be on suspension for five years. It's very serious and also it might affect the opportunities for other people [from the same village] who want to go."

Missing Out

The eagerness among young adults to become seasonal workers has created opportunities for fraud in Samoa. One woman from a peri-urban village told us that she and her husband depended on subsistence agriculture and her husband's occasional fishing for their livelihood. She spoke enviously of a relative who had worked in New Zealand, and coming home, had built a new house, and bought a car, a chainsaw, and fishing equipment for his family. Longing to go too, she and other members of her church had been tricked by a false recruitment scheme. They paid the organizer a total of almost SAT\$100 (USD\$89), for consultation fees, and to obtain other paper work for such as a police report, a medical certificate, their passports and visas. She and her husband were also instructed to prepare a cooler of food to take for the church group in New Zealand. Having no money themselves, they borrowed the money from her brother in New Zealand because, as she said "... we didn't want to miss this great opportunity to help develop our little family out of poverty."

However it turned out that the organizer of scheme had left Samoa and returned to New Zealand, where they later heard he was in prison. "We were mocked by the villagers because of not going" she told us sadly, and recounted her second unsuccessful attempt: "I have a relative who organized a seasonal group and we went to see him and he interviewed us, but he prioritized his family first before others." It seems probable that those who can't speak much English are less likely to be chosen.

Another disappointed man told us he supports his family on SAT\$140 per week working for a contractor in Apia mowing lawns. He described a friend who worked three seasons in New Zealand and has funded a small shop for his parents, furniture and appliances for their house and a car for his father, and who plans to save money to buy a section of land and build a house. He sought a way to do likewise, and applied to an agent who used Facebook to advertise. Sadly, it took him some time to discover this purported agent was a fraudster, who collected SAT\$80.00 in fees from him and other applicants, claimed to have found work for them in American Samoa. The fraudster held meetings and provided training including "rules like no telephone allowed in the workplace, theft, alcohol forbidden, infidelity and the usual rules overseas."

Others, similarly desperate to be chosen, who apply through unorthodox sources, run serious risks of exploitation. One man told us how he applied for what he thought was seasonal work in the USA, unaware

that no such scheme was approved by government of Samoa or the USA. He applied three times; the first time through a member of his church who told him there were opportunities to go to America “to work for Coca-Cola and on a cruise ship” but he got no answer to his application. The second time he applied to go with a group to Australia, thinking it was the MCIL-approved SWS, and paid a total of SAT \$250 for purported registration costs but the applicants were eventually only offered work at the recruiters own house. This unsuccessful applicant told us that he needed money “to buy a piece of land for my family to move to, we live in an unsafe place where every time it rains, the river gets flooded and it flows right at our house, not only that but we can’t cross the river to go shopping, work or the kids to school.” Finally he was chosen for offshore contract work with some other men, to go to American Samoa, where they were promised USD\$5000 (SAT\$11,500.00) per month to work on a fishing boat. Their trip ended badly and they were not paid. “When we got back from fishing, we heard rumors spreading about us saying that we have beaten the captain of the fishing boat and it tarnished our reputation, and worst, it reached our families back home.”

It seems likely that many people who get information by word of mouth may confuse RSE, SWS and PLS with other offshore employment recruiting activities. One of these recruits graduates from the National University of Samoa School of Maritime Training to work on ships and is approved by government through MCIL.

Others told us of their disappointing attempts to become seasonal workers by applying through the government agency. A man from an urban village, employed as a school groundsman said his family depends on his wages as they have no land for planting. He said he has applied to MCIL unsuccessfully three times, with all his paperwork in order, but was never able to find out why he had not been chosen. He plans to keep on applying. His friends, who were chosen, told him that “the job is of no use to someone lazy”. The youngest applicant we interviewed was aged 19 and told us that he applied to MCIL without success. He did not know why he was not chosen because was told that is good work for those like him, who don’t smoke or drink. One man, a bus driver from an urban village, complained that he had applied for to MCIL twice without success.

“I look like a failure and a loser and that really saddens me. I was the first to process papers when I first heard of the seasonal works in our village. ... I have waited for this moment for so long and it’s like a dream come true so I can buy all the things I dreamt of - I look at the future of my children and to buy a family vehicle and a small shop, but all these dreams disappeared because I wasn’t picked. I’m so embarrassed every time I walked around the village, the villagers mocked me of not going, but this doesn’t stop me. ... Unfortunately, the village decision is very biased. ... The village mayor said that I can’t go because I might get in trouble and tarnish the village name. ... one man was returned because he was caught under the influence of alcohol. He and his family were punished and also were eliminated from the team.”

Labour Force Impact in Samoa

It is often said anecdotally in Samoa that the seasonal worker scheme robs Samoa of labour to develop its own agricultural industries. As Taua’a (2016:193) found in her study of Samoa’s informal trading economy:

“Efforts to earn cash from small informal enterprises are likely to be connected to the lack of significant opportunities to earn cash from agriculture, despite the opinions of politicians and some members of the public that informal vendors should return to the land.” Some Seasonal work recruiters claim that male seasonal workers are required to plant taro (a staple food crop) for their families before they leave, but even if this is true, which we doubt, it leaves unanswered the question of who will weed and care for the *maumaga* (taro plantation) while the worker away.

Despite concern that seasonal work is harming Samoa’s economy, agriculture cannot compete with seasonal work as a means of earning money. Samoa’s agricultural censuses of 1989, 1999 and 2009 present a picture of increasing agriculture for subsistence or semi-subsistence rather than commercial export-oriented purposes (Table 2). The 2015 Agricultural survey found most households were producing crops for subsistence and minor sales of surplus production. There has been an apparent decline in commercial agriculture, for example cocoa comprised 9.8% of cultivated landholdings in 1989, 7.5% in 1999 and 6.7% in 2009. In our observation, Samoa suffers from cycles of overproduction of staple food crops so prices fall, followed by underproduction and rising prices, followed by overproduction, year after year.

Table 1: Agricultural activity in households

Type of agriculture	1989 (%)	1999 (%)	2009 (%)	2015
Subsistence	19.0	30.0	34.0	64%
Mainly for home consumption	49.0	39.0	31.0	32%
Mainly for sale	5.0	5.0	3.0	4%

Samoa Bureau of Statistics: Agriculture Census 2009 & Agricultural Survey 2015

A survey of cocoa grower in 2016 (Schoeffel and Meleisea-Ainu’u) found many growers registered with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries were elderly, and there were comparatively few young women or men who were taking the lead as growers. According to the growers interviewed young men typically sought casual work for daily wages and food in preference to establishing their own plantations. This may be because Samoan customary values accord leadership roles to elders, including control over customary land, income from it, and assets. Another factor is lack of access to suitable land. The National Agricultural Survey conducted in 2014 found that few farming households employ labour for farming or fishing; of those for whom crop production was an important part of their livelihood only 12% worked more than thirty hours a week, while those for whom crop production was a small side-line activity worked less than five hours a week (2015:47-48).

Conclusion

Our interlocutor’s accounts of their experiences reflected the ambivalence among Samoans about seasonal work: the hardships and semi-institutional restrictions of seasonal work; the fear of being repatriated in disgrace, if chosen, or the shame of not being chosen to go. Also the challenge of self-denial required for saving their earnings, and confusing business of calculating expenses versus actual take-home pay. Seasonal work is seen by many as simultaneously demeaning and essential to Samoa, to their own status, and that of their families and communities. There are now widespread expectations in Samoa that every family may have a car, a modern house, home appliances such as a washing machine and television

set, and a high profile in their church won by generous donations. Some even hope to buy freehold land to escape the restrictions of village life. All it takes is getting chosen to go and work overseas.

It is doubtful that the mass exodus of young adults, so far mostly men, has a negative impact on agriculture; for commercial agriculture has been in steady decline for many years. Samoa has few large industries to employ workers, especially since the Yazaki car-parts factory closed, and the new minimum wage of SAT\$3.00 per hour will barely feed a family at the prevailing prices of food, let alone fund their material aspirations. There is no doubt, however, that the seasonal work schemes may have a negative impact on non-agricultural businesses in Samoa. In an informal discussion with three proprietors of medium sized businesses (employing work forces of 10-20 people), one of our team was told of their despair when trained workers quit their jobs to become seasonal worker. Even though these business proprietors said they paid well above minimum wages for those who had learned skills on the job, they could not compete with the minimum wages offered in Australia or New Zealand, or the thrill of going to work overseas and, in the prevailing tightly controlled working conditions, possibly accumulating a lump sum of SAT\$10,000 or more to bring home.

The Government of Samoa has developed supposedly triple win labour migration policies that are boosting Samoa's economy and enriching its middle-class purveyors of consumer goods. Although tourism is still paralysed by the Covid 19 border closure, the demand for temporary and comparatively cheap labour in Australian and New Zealand seems to be booming again. Ways have been found to facilitate seasonal; worker mobility, and remittances continue to flow in. After more than fifty years of global economic influence since Samoa become an independent state, most Samoans today, whether rural or urban, see their horizons for living as including the wider environments of New Zealand, Australia and the United States. The new labour trade has its roots in the Samoan perceptions of the good life and is motivated by the desire for money and the potential increase in social status that is conferred by having money. This is a rational goal when there are no other comparable opportunities. Further research might confirm the our impression that the money flowing in from seasonal workers savings, often as considerable lump sums, are not typical of remittances patterns in the past for family support and fa'alavelave. Thus another impact of the schemes is the benefits to local businesses, particularly those selling home appliances and furniture, hardware and building materials, and second hand cars and vans.

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