**HARVEST FORCE – Program Overview**

**What is Harvest Force?**

Western Australian grain farmers are forecasting an excellent crop this year, apart from a few areas heavily impacted by frost. However, without access to skilled seasonal foreign labour, there are major labour supply concerns from growers and many header and tractor cabins will be empty without a practical solution.

Harvest Force is a partnership between GrainGrowers, the WA government’s Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), Agribusiness Australia, Elders, Nutrien Ag Solutions, CSBP, CSBP Fertilisers and WA Farmers. The organisations have come together to help address the labour shortage with farm-familiar agribusiness professionals.

This mutually beneficial approach helps source the workers required to help with the WA harvest, while providing the opportunity for agribusiness professionals to connect with local farmers and experience harvest first-hand.

**The problem**

There are projections for major harvest labour shortages expected across Australia and research to date indicates the issues will be most pronounced in WA, with WA Farmers projecting the industry to be short around 1,000 workers (including header and chaser bin drivers).

In a recent GrainGrowers policy survey ‘Labour/Skills shortage’ was identified as the number one issue for WA grain growers (47%) and is in the top three issues identified nationally (27%).

Traditionally, seasonal harvest labour needs in WA (and to a lesser extent in other states) are filled by skilled farm workers with a farming background from the Northern hemisphere (in the past has included North America, UK and Europe). This is currently not possible due to the COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

**The solution**

Leading agribusinesses Elders, Nutrien Ag Solutions and CSBP will grant 2-6 weeks leave without pay for many of their employees during the harvest period – from October 2021 to January 2022.

Employees and farmers will both register with the [Harvest Force program.](https://www.graingrowers.com.au/news/harvest-force)

Agribusiness employees will then be matched with a farmer who is in need of labour. Once matched, both parties will connect and go through all the necessary employment requirements associated with a casual worker, before stepping foot on farm for the harvest.

**Program details**

The project is open for any grain farming business requiring harvest staff in WA. The project is being coordinated by GrainGrowers with support from an external provider. GrainGrowers has coordinated overall project design in consultation with other project partners. The agribusinesses (Elders, Nutrien, CSBP) are coordinating with their internal staff.

Support material will be provided to farmers to ensure they have adequate knowledge and protection in place for the worker and their business.

**FAQs**

**Who is coordinating the project?**

The project is being coordinated by GrainGrowers. GrainGrowers has coordinated the overall project design in consultation with other project partners.

Agribusinesses (Elders, Nutrien, and CSBP) are coordinating with their internal staff.

Administration of the project, including connecting farmers with agribusiness workers will be undertaken by GrainGrowers with support from an external provider.

**Who connects the farmers and agribusiness workers?**

A collaborative approach, in the first instance some agribusiness employees have existing connections with farmers in their local area making the matching process relatively straightforward. Agribusiness employees searching for a farm to work out will be matched by GrainGrowers with support from a third-party agricultural recruitment agency,

Agribusinesses communicate the opportunity to their staff, with all participants (farmers and agribusiness professionals) registering through the online forms at <https://www.graingrowers.com.au/news/harvest-force>

The project is open for any grain farm business requiring staff in WA.

**When does the project run?**

HarvestForce is operating for the WA grain harvest – from October 2021 to January 2022.

Agribusiness professionals, in consultation with their employer have the opportunity to take between 2-6 weeks leave without pay to participate in the project and work on farm during harvest.

**Where is the project operational?**

The project is currently limited to farmers and WA agribusiness professionals in WA. While there are labour and workforce pressures in other states, research has demonstrated the issue is most magnified in Western Australia.

**Who pays the workers?**

The participating agribusinesses will provide their staff with unpaid leave for a set period (2-6 weeks).

The farmer/farm business then pays a wage to the worker, as per standard harvest wages and commensurate with experience (depending role this may vary $30-$55 / hr).

**Will the workers have the skills?**

Many of the agribusiness workers will have grown up on a farm, previously worked on a farm or at least be farm familiar. Agribusiness workers will disclose their level of heavy machinery competence as part of the registration process to ensure a match between roles and candidates. A level of on-site training specific to the machinery and farm operations will be necessary and applied on a case-by-case basis.

**Who wears the workers liability risk?**

The workers are formally on leave from their agribusiness employer and will be employed directly by the farmer, as such liabilities will need to be covered by the farm employer.

To help support, standard support material will be provided to farmers to ensure they have adequate protection in place for the worker and their business.

An induction document with links to supporting material will be provided to farmers and agribusiness employees to ensure both parties have adequate protection in place for the worker and their business. GrainGrowers and the agribusiness partners accept no liability.