

## Fair Work Ombudsman returns to Caboolture Strawberry Farms

2 September 2013

The Fair Work Ombudsman is returning to Caboolture Strawberry Farms this week to ensure businesses are meeting their workplace obligations and is encouraging employees with concerns to come forward.

This return visit follows farm visits conducted last month which identified potential breaches, including underpayments of wages to the largely foreign workforce.

Fair Work Ombudsman, Natalie James, said employers who had been visited last month and who had not rectified problems identified by Fair Work Inspectors could face on the spot fines of up to \$2,550 or further action - including legal action where penalties of up to \$51,000 apply against businesses and \$10,200 against individual employers - for each breach of workplace law.

"The visits conducted last month had an educational focus, helping employers with information they need to meet their obligations under workplace law, particularly in relation to payments to seasonal workers," Ms James said.

"Now we are returning to ensure the message has got through and that employers have taken notice of the information provided to them."

Ms James said the focus on strawberry farms around Caboolture was prompted by specific complaints of underpayment of wages and had already identified a number of common issues, including:

- Employers not paying at least the minimum hourly rate of \$16.37 per hour for permanent, adult employees and \$20.40 per hour for casuals
- Employers not providing payslips to employees within one day of payment of wages/payslips not containing all the legally required information
- Employers failing to make written piecework agreements with employees who are paid piece rates
- Employers failing to provide a copy of piece work agreements to their employees
- Employers failing to keep time and wages records, particularly for casual employees
- Employers failing to give new employees a copy of the Fair Work Information statement
- Employers making unlawful deductions to employees' wages for accommodation and travel expenses.

"These are all important issues which need to be addressed," Ms James said.

"For example, providing pay slips within the legally required timeframe of 24 hours of payment and with the legally required information such as hours worked and rates applicable to those hours, is essential to allow workers to check that they've received everything they should.

"We are also keen to speak to employees who believe they aren't being paid correctly. Some workers were reluctant to speak to us during our recent visits, although a number followed-up by contacting our Infoline."

Workers can make an appointment by calling 07 4699 5856 or emailing [cwq@fwo.gov.au](mailto:cwq@fwo.gov.au) or alternatively, visit staff at a 'pop-up' information post in the car park outside the Hi-Mart Asian supermarket on Dickson Road, Caboolture on Tuesday, 3 September between 4.30pm and 6.00pm.

Employers and employees can contact the Fair Work Ombudsman on 13 13 94 or, if a translator is required, on 13 14 50 or visit [fair-work.gov.au/horticulture](http://fair-work.gov.au/horticulture) ([www.fairwork.gov.au/pay/minimum-wages/piece-rates-and-commission-payments](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/pay/minimum-wages/piece-rates-and-commission-payments)) where there is information specifically on seasonal harvest work.

## Contact us

Fair Work Online: [www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au)

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50

Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

For TTY: 13 36 77. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

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