

Spot checks reveal high compliance rates on Atherton Tablelands – but many workers still underpaid

7 April 2014

Random audits of fruit and vegetable farms in Far North Queensland have revealed strong compliance with federal workplace laws, the Fair Work Ombudsman announced today.

Fair Work inspectors visited 11 properties in the Atherton Tablelands region in December to ensure that seasonal workers were receiving their proper entitlements.

Nine of the 11 (82 per cent) were found to be fully compliant with workplace laws.

Inspectors checked the books of banana, avocado, onion, mango and potato farms employing large numbers of overseas workers.

On one farm, Fair Work inspectors found that 64 employees had not been paid superannuation entitlements totalling \$54,000.

The employer agreed to back-pay the contributions, and the matter was referred to the Australian Taxation Office, which has jurisdiction over superannuation.

In a separate case, another employer was found to have short-changed 59 of its employees a total of \$18,534 as a result of failing to pass on a minimum wage increase last July.

The two properties also contravened workplace laws by failing to issue sufficiently detailed payslips to their workers.

Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James says the high compliance outcome is encouraging, but some employers still need to pay greater attention to pay rates.

Ms James said employers contacted by Fair Work inspectors appreciated the opportunity to better understand their obligations and the resources available to help them.

One employer wrote a follow-up letter, stating: "Thank you for your time, it was a very efficient procedure and it is welcoming to know that your agency is here to help."

Auditing in the Atherton Tablelands region followed a number of complaints from seasonal fruit and vegetable pickers and packers, including young backpackers.

Spot checks around Caboolture last year found that more than 100 seasonal workers had been short-changed about \$32,000.

Last month, Fair Work inspectors visited strawberry farms in Victoria's Yarra Valley to ensure pickers and other seasonal workers are receiving their full entitlements.

Any employer or employee seeking free advice and information about workplace laws can call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94 or use the free tools and resources available at www.fairwork.gov.au/horticulture (www.fairwork.gov.au/pay/minimum-wages/piece-rates-and-commission-payments) . A free interpreter service is available on 13 14 50.

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Contact us

Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

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