

Fair Work Inspectors to visit Granite Belt orchards to check seasonal worker pay packets

14 April 2014

Fair Work Ombudsman inspectors will visit apple and pear orchards in the Granite Belt region of South-East Queensland this week as part of an ongoing focus on seasonal harvest workers.

They will make unannounced visits to properties selected at random to speak with growers and labour hire contractors about their obligations under federal workplace laws.

They will also encourage pickers and packers to come forward to ask any questions they have about their pay and conditions.

Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James says improving awareness is the main focus of the visits, but any non-compliance issues that come to light will be addressed.

"We can tell a lot about an employer's level of compliance by talking to them and their workers, but we'll look at time-and-wages records if we need to get a clearer picture," she said.

As part of the pro-active education campaign, inspectors will deliver a free presentation for employers at the Applethorpe Research Station at 6 o'clock tonight.

The presentation will cover pay and conditions under the Horticulture Award 2010, including piece-rate agreements, and pay-slip and record-keeping obligations under the Fair Work Act.

Employers do not need to register in advance to attend the presentation.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has enlisted the support of key stakeholders, including Apple and Pear Australia Limited, to help promote the presentation and orchard visits.

Ms James says the Fair Work Ombudsman continues to receive underpayment complaints from seasonal harvest workers and many are substantiated.

Last year, the Agency finalised 11 complaints from workers at apple and pear orchards in the Granite Belt region and recovered a total of \$15,400 for nine workers at three businesses.

Over the next few years the Fair Work Ombudsman will visit dozens of fruit and vegetable farms throughout Australia as part of its focus on the entitlements of seasonal harvest workers.

"We want to ensure employers understand and meet their workplace obligations and we're also seeking information about industry factors that influence compliance levels, Ms James said.

"This knowledge will help us to better target our education and campaign activities, particularly in relation to the overseas workers employed in this sector."

Employers and workers seeking information can visit www.fairwork.gov.au/horticulture (www.fairwork.gov.au/pay/minimum-wages/piece-rates-and-commission-payments) or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. 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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Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

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

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