

Audits of Hunter Valley vineyards this week

13 January 2014

Inspectors from the Fair Work Ombudsman will visit up to 20 vineyards in the Hunter Valley this week to check employers are paying grape pickers correctly.

Vineyards in the Cessnock, Muswellbrook and Singleton areas will be audited.

Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James said Fair Work Inspectors will check employers are paying workers their full entitlements, keeping proper employment records and issuing employees with pay slips.

"We are conscious that the fruit picking industry, including the Hunter Valley sector, attracts many foreign workers such as backpackers who can be vulnerable if they're not fully aware of their workplace rights or are reluctant to complain," Ms James said.

"That's why we place a high priority on conducting proactive activities aimed at ensuring these workers are receiving their full lawful entitlements."

In cases of non-compliance, the preference of Fair Work Inspectors will be to assist employers to voluntarily rectify issues and educate them about the free resources available at www.fairwork.gov.au they can use to ensure ongoing compliance.

Ms James said Inspectors will also encourage pickers to come forward with any queries.

"Inspectors will visit backpacker hostels where pickers may be staying to speak directly to them and provide them with information about their workplace rights," Ms James said.

In recent years the Fair Work Ombudsman has investigated hundreds of underpayment complaints in the fruit picking industry nationally and recovered thousands of dollars in back-pay for underpaid workers.



Ms James said common non-compliance issues in the industry include:

- Underpayment of minimum hourly rates, overtime and penalty rates,
- Unlawful deductions from employees' wages for travel and accommodation,
- Failure to keep time-and-wages records, particularly for casual employees,
- Employers failing to keep piece rate agreements for workers paid piece rates, and
- Detailed pay slips not being provided within one day of pay day.

The audits follow Fair Work Inspectors holding an information session in the Hunter Valley in November last year to provide employers with information on their obligations under the Wine Industry Award 2010, as well as templates and educational fact sheets.

Employers and workers seeking information and advice should visit www.fairwork.gov.au or contact the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. Small businesses calling the Infoline can opt to be put through to the Small Business Helpline to receive prioritised service.

A free interpreter service is available on 13 14 50 and information on the website is available in 27 different languages.

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Contact us

Fair Work Online: 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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