



By Gabrielle Easter

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## Worker exploitation 'systemic'

An undercover investigation has unveiled the exploitation of illegal workers on farms supplying Australian supermarkets



**A** joint investigation by Fairfax and the ABC has found workers paid as a little as A\$9 per hour to pick and package produce destined for Australia's retail shelves.

The investigation unveiled worker exploitation by labour hire contractors, including contractors used by Woorinen-based stonefruit grower-packer-marketer Cutri Fruit, with undercover journalists reporting underpayment, poor living conditions and at times a disregard for visa regulations for migrant workers.

Cutri Fruit has responded to the programme, with CEO of Cutri Fruit, Gaethan Cutri, stating that the company "would never knowingly exploit illegal workers from foreign countries".

"Following the allegations made by Fairfax journalists last week we have issued a letter restating the terms of our agreement and asking for immediate proof of compliance," he said. "Cutri Fruit will also implement a broader

independent audit this month to assess if there are any undetected issues," Cutri said.

The former lawyer said Cutri Fruit used three contractors to supply part time and seasonal temporary work, with two contractors terminated earlier this year due to concerns about their employment practices.

"Our part time and seasonal temporary workforce are engaged through contractors, as has been industry practice for decades," Cutri said. "We are aware of anecdotal evidence that some contractors act illegally and have set out to only use the known best contractors."

The investigation has caused uncertainty around the leading growers' contracts with Australian supermarkets.

Coles has told the ABC it will launch its own investigation and refer the allegations to the Fair Work Ombudsmen; Woolworths has also said it would refer any supplier breaching laws to authorities; and Costco has said it will

halt purchases from Cutri Fruit until the company's practices have been audited.

Allan Fels, chief of the Australian government's 'migrant worker taskforce', said major reforms are needed.

"There is enough evidence to say that it is systemic," Fels told the ABC. "Significant numbers are really exploited."

Cutri Fruit has been contacted for further comment.

### Mornington Peninsula farm raided

The National Union of Workers (NUW) has raided Mornington Peninsula-based vegetable farm, and supplier to Coles and Woolworths, A&G Lamattina and Sons, asking for employment records for all workers on the site, reports ABC.

Tim Kennedy, national secretary of NUW, said workers told him they were paid as little as A\$10 per hour. Only the second time NUW has been granted power by the Fair Work Commission to conduct a raid without notice, Kennedy

said there were “serious concerns about exploitation of workers in the fresh food supply chain”, and it was time supermarkets accepted some of the responsibility.

A&G Lamattina and Sons is working with Fair Work Australia to investigate the allegations, it said in a statement to Fairfax, adding that it was fully compliant with all regulations.

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<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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