



By Matthew Jones

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NZ opens quarantine-free travel for RSEs

Pacific Island workers to arrive from October, alleviating some labour strain



Over 14,000 RSE workers normally come through New Zealand each year

Seasonal workers from Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa will be able to travel to New Zealand quarantine-free from October.

Additional health measures will be in place to manage the risk of Covid-19, including the requirement that the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers be vaccinated.

The announcement comes after [considerable discussions](#) between New Zealand's federal government and industry.

"We want to provide certainty to the horticulture industry that we are moving forward with safe quarantine-free travel for RSE workers in time for the upcoming picking season," said New Zealand agriculture minister Damien O'Connor, who confirmed the quarantine-free travel arrangement late last week.

O'Connor said the move reflected the important benefits that flow from New

Zealand's RSE scheme. Up to 14,400 RSE workers normally come through New Zealand each year, with approximately 10,500 being in the country at peak harvesting times pre-Covid.

Nadine Tunley, chief executive of HortNZ, said the announcement provided relief to the New Zealand horticulture industry.

"Confirmation that our RSE workforce can travel is a positive step that will give growers some confidence about labour for the coming season. It will go some way towards winter pruning being completed and the coming season's harvest being picked," Tunley explained.

Despite the increased movement of RSE workers from the Pacific, Tunley said the horticulture industry will still be short of seasonal workers to complete its upcoming harvests.

"That's why the whole industry is behind additional programmes to attract more New Zealanders to horticulture," Tunley said.

New Zealand's apple and pear industry was hit hard by the labour shortage last season. It is now working with the government on a programme to support industry innovation and productivity growth.

"The government challenged us to develop an Industry Transformation Plan, focussed on attracting and growing a permanent New Zealand labour force, better managing our seasonal peaks, and driving innovation and automation," said Alan Pollard, chief executive of peak industry body New Zealand Apples and Pears (NZAPI).

"With the support of local government leaders and regional MPs, we have delivered a draft plan to government that supports the industry's aspirations while ensuring long term sustainable and rewarding careers for New Zealanders."

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