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## **Labour matters in Australian agriculture**

'Farmers, who are the managers of Australian farm businesses, are generally very good at managing the vagaries of Australia's fickle climate, and coaxing high quality plant and animal products from Australia's sometimes challenging soils. Increasingly, however, success in farming also requires good people management skills, as the average size of farms expands and the farm workforce becomes dominated by employees, rather than owner-operators' says Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

'Despite the increasing importance of farm employees, it is probably fair to say that most farmers do not choose to be managers of people when they choose a career in farming.'

'Managing people well can be important in ensuring farm businesses achieve long lasting profitability and productivity.'

'Even for farm businesses with relatively low reliance on labour, improvements in labour productivity are still an important objective and adopting a more professional approach to managing people can reap short and long term benefits to most farm businesses.'

'At a time when digital technologies are bringing about rapid changes in the way farms are managed in Australia, it seems evident that the future skill requirements of the agricultural labour force will need to change. To successfully achieve this it will be important to have a good understanding of the characteristics of the current labour force, and trends evident in that workforce. The paucity of available statistics about Australia's agricultural labour force will not make this task an easy one,' says Mick Keogh.

This Winter 2015 edition of the *Farm Policy Journal*, 'Labour matters in Australian agriculture', contains papers contributed by a range of Australian industry experts, addressing the different matters around farm workforce management, these include:

- Labour utilisation trends in Australian agriculture, by Mick Keogh and Gaétane Potard, Australian Farm Institute
- More than workforce shortages: how farm human resources management strategies will shape Australia's agricultural future, by Associate Professor Ruth Nettle, University of Melbourne
- Improving skills and capacity in the Australian grains industry, by Adam Tomlinson, Australian Farm Institute
- The long (and winding) road to safety, by Simon Winter, External Research Manager, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC)
- Measuring the efficiency of horticultural labour: case study on seasonal workers and working holiday makers, by Robert Leith and Alistair Davidson, ABARES

The Winter 2015 quarter *Farm Policy Journal* is available online at the Australian Farm Institute website [www.farminstitute.org.au](http://www.farminstitute.org.au) or by phoning (02) 9690 1388.

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