

25 September 2025

2025 Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL)
Jobs and Skills Australia
coreskillslist@jobsandskills.gov.au

RE: AUSVEG Submission – 2025 Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL)

Dear Jobs and Skills Australia,

AUSVEG welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2025 Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL). AUSVEG is the prescribed peak industry body for Australia's vegetable, potato and onion growers, representing more than 3,600 farm businesses that produce approximately 3.8 million tonnes of vegetables annually, with a farmgate value of \$5.7 billion. Our members operate in every state and territory and employ the largest workforce of any agricultural sector.

Industry Conditions and Workforce Challenges

Australia's vegetable industry is at a critical juncture. Results from the July 2025 AUSVEG Vegetable Industry Sentiment Survey reveal that two in five growers are considering leaving the industry in the next 12 months, with a further two in five indicating they would also do so if they had a viable exit strategy. These findings reflect an industry under sustained pressure from rising input costs, challenging market conditions and a lack of workforce availability.

In addition, 62 per cent of growers report being financially worse off than they were 12 months ago, and 53 per cent expect their situation to worsen by July 2026. Unless this trajectory is reversed, there will be significant consequences for domestic food security, as 98 per cent of fresh vegetables consumed in Australia are grown locally.

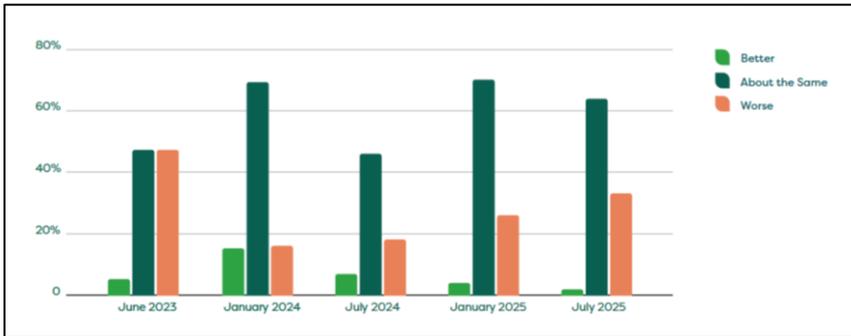
Labour shortages are among the most significant pressures facing growers.

Sixty per cent of vegetable enterprises report experiencing workforce shortages across full-time, part-time and casual positions, and one-third expect the situation to worsen over the next 12 months. These shortages span the entire spectrum of skill levels, from skilled and semi-skilled supervisors and machine operators through to harvest labourers and packing shed staff, with many growers reporting difficulty recruiting and retaining even entry-level workers.

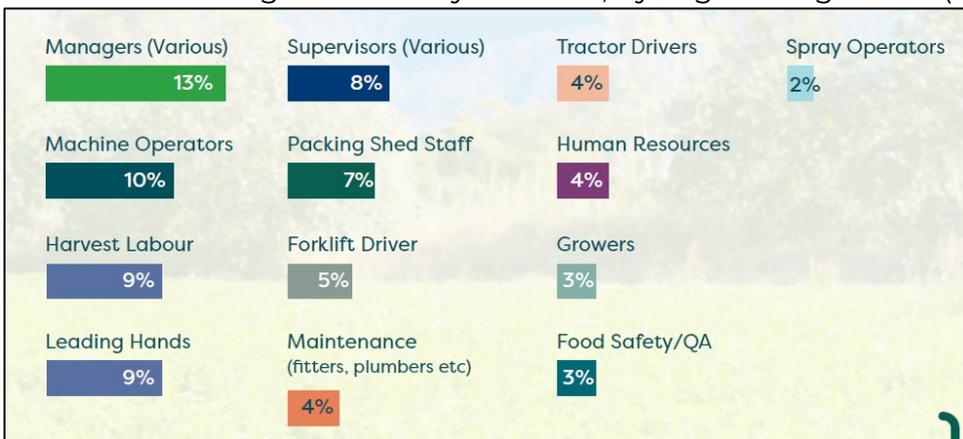
Survey results show that labour costs represent an average of 38 per cent of a grower's cost of production, rising to 67 per cent for the top ten per centile of growers, making labour availability and productivity a key driver of farm viability.

Workforce Shortages – Key Evidence

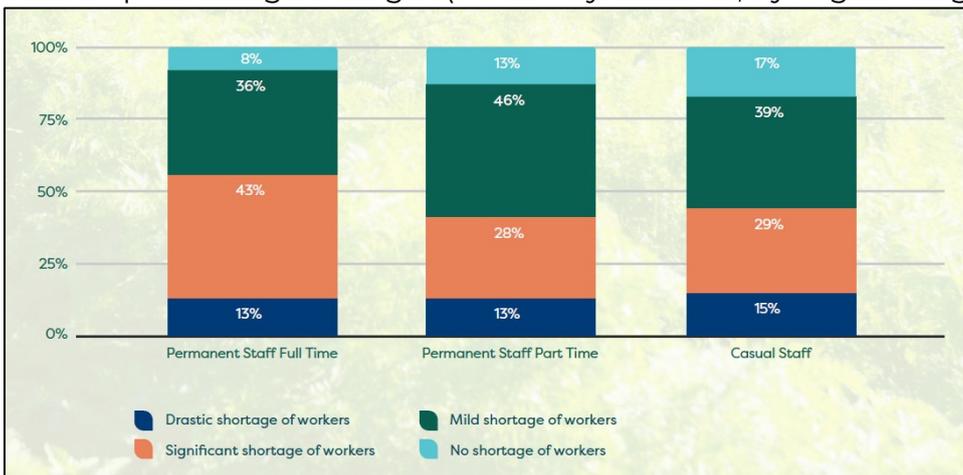
Future outlook for workforce shortages (July 2025):



Workforce shortages ranked by demand, by vegetable growers (July 2025):



Roles experiencing shortages (ranked by demand, by vegetable growers (July 2025):



These findings are based on AUSVEG’s national Industry Sentiment Survey, which is conducted biannually and collects data from small, medium and large vegetable enterprises across all states and the Northern Territory. Respondents to the July 2025 survey collectively represented \$2.3 billion in annual turnover, or 40% of total vegetable production in Australia.

With survey results also showing the average age of the most senior manager and/or decision maker in vegetable growing businesses is 57 years, the sector is also facing the prospect of significant loss of generational expertise and experience, placing

further pressure on the long-term sustainability of the sector, and highlighting the importance of securing skilled workers into the future.

Occupations of Interest

To ensure the ongoing viability of the vegetable industry and to secure Australia's food supply, AUSVEG strongly supports the retention and inclusion of a range of key horticulture-related occupations on the CSOL. These roles are critical to horticultural production, post-harvest quality control, irrigation management and the broader supply chain. We recommend that the following OSCA 2024-benchmarked occupations be retained on the list:

- 343134 Horticultural Supervisor or Specialist
- 151236 Vegetable Grower/ Vegetable Farm Manager
- 741131 Agricultural and Horticultural Mobile Plant Operator
- 342931 Nurseryperson
- 741331 Forklift Driver
- 381233 Industrial Electrician
- 351433 Diesel Technician
- 332231 Fitter (General)
- 363131 Plumber (General)
- 342431 Irrigation Technician
- 111331 Human Resources Manager
- 151234 Production Nursery Grower
- 842231 Horticultural Nursery Assistant
- 111631 Quality Assurance Manager
- 311138 Primary Products Quality Assurance Officer

These roles represent the most significant workforce pressure points identified by vegetable growers in July 2025. Many of them are located in regional and remote growing regions, where domestic labour supply is limited and competition from other industries such as construction, mining and transport is intense. Ensuring these roles are accessible through the employer-sponsored migration system will allow growers to maintain production, ensure quality, and protect domestic food security.

Conclusion

Failure to secure a reliable workforce will further erode the viability of Australia's vegetable sector, risking the closure of farms, reduced domestic production and increased reliance on imports at a time when global supply chains are volatile. The occupations listed above represent the backbone of the industry and must remain accessible through employer-sponsored skilled migration programs to address persistent shortages.

For further information

Sincerely,