

NURSERY PAPERS

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NURSERY INDUSTRY CAREER PATH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

SUMMARY

The nursery industry faces challenges with attracting and retaining staff, and providing opportunities for professional development. The industry's high staff turnover rate and perceived limited career pathways, make it difficult to source qualified entrants and retain existing ones.

To help address the employment issue and provide a clear response roadmap for industry, RM Consulting Group (RMCG), in partnership with Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA), has developed a strategy to help build and sustain the interest of those working, or looking to work, in Australia's nursery industry across various levels.

The strategy outlines a five-pillar approach to foster a more sustainable workforce for the industry – promoting growth and innovation through:

1. Industry promotion and awareness
2. Policy parameters
3. Training system
4. Human resource management practices
5. Defined jobs and career pathways

BACKGROUND

Nursery is one of the largest industry sectors within Australian horticulture and is the starting point for all horticultural plant production across the country.

The industry is valued at more than \$2.4 billion and employs approximately 25,000 people in more than 1,600 small to medium enterprises.

On average, production nursery businesses nationally employ 15-16 people, but this ranges from single operator organisations to those with more than 200 employees.

Like many other agricultural industries, it faces major challenges around high staff turnover and attracting and retaining qualified employees.

Remuneration, employment conditions and limited opportunities for career growth and progression are among the biggest barriers to attracting and retaining a skilled workforce for the nursery industry.

The industry has lost a generation within its workforce, with more than 85% of the current workforce above the age of 40 years.

These challenges require action to secure an immediate, as well as a long-term skilled, committed workforce to ensure the continued success of the industry.

Developing Career Pathways is one of the five outcomes for the nursery industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) using levy funds.

This highlights the importance of this issue to the industry and why it is being addressed with a separate strategy.





WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

RMCG's findings confirm there are key employment challenges within the industry:

INDUSTRY INHERENT CHALLENGES

- poor promotion of the industry
- lack of clear career pathways
- poor promotion of horticulture and the diverse career opportunities such as logistics, business management, IT and engineering
- lack of engagement with the education and training sector and promotion of training
- lack of regional level collaboration to build skilled and adaptive labour pools
- seasonal and casual/part-time nature of the work inhibiting job security
- industry image including employment conditions, remuneration and skilled supervision
- reluctance by the local industry to engage skilled migrant labour
- small to medium enterprises cannot afford to employ several specialists

CHALLENGES FROM THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR

- low number of people attaining agriculture and horticulture qualifications
- availability of training courses delivered by experienced teachers in production areas
- lack of course promotion by training sector
- difficulty training multi-skilled staff
- difficulty finding apprentices

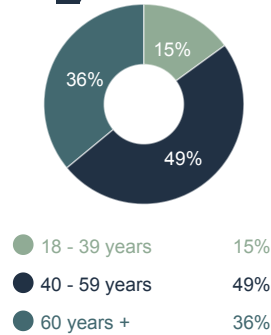
LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

- competition with mining and other primary industries who offer better pay
- perception of manual, repetitive nature of the work performed outdoors
- remote locations of some agricultural businesses and the quality of services provided in rural areas, including schools, childcare, hospitals and transport

Gender



Workforce Age



Employment

25,000 people are employed in 1,651 nursery businesses on a full time, part time and casual basis

- 50% Full Time
- 17% Part Time
- 32% Casual/Seasonal Roles

78% Nursery Labouring

13% Administrative

9% Other

Where the nursery Industry operates

83% OF THE NURSERY INDUSTRY OPERATES FROM THE EASTERN STATES OF AUSTRALIA

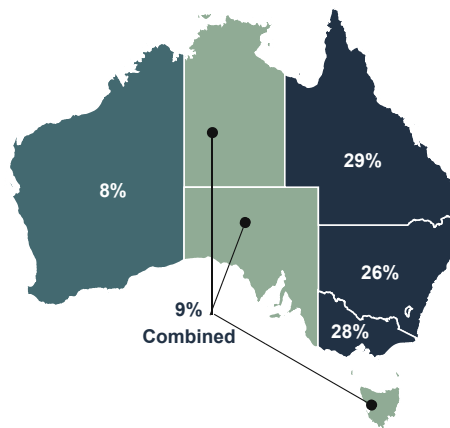


FIGURE 1: Australian nursery sector demographics (gender and age demographics based only on respondents to 2018 Nursery Industry Statistics survey).





DEFINING A SKILLED NURSERY WORKFORCE

RMCG has made a clear distinction between skilled and semi-skilled employees for the purposes of the strategy. This includes positions that require independent decision-making or skilled jobs ('deciders') and jobs which are carried out under instruction by semi-skilled or non-managerial jobs ('doers')¹.

Deciders tend to be engaged in managerial positions that require strategic thinking, risk management and planning skills, combined with sound technical knowledge to make every day business decisions.

The nursery industry career path development strategy is focused on the attraction, retention and development of skilled employees that fall into the 'decider' category. It is well acknowledged that the Australian nursery sector has a shortage of skilled workers, particularly at a supervisory role level.

RESEARCH

RMCG has undertaken extensive consultation across the Australian nursery industry to inform the strategy. This included consultation with growers, national and state peak industry bodies, tertiary and vocational education training providers and government agency representatives.

Following a baseline desktop review, the experiences and challenges faced by the nursery industry were established through several engagement approaches including stakeholder interviews, an online survey and industry consultation workshops and validation through a presentation to the industry Strategic Investment Advisory Panel. The findings from the desktop review and consultation were used to confirm the extent of the challenge the industry is faced with and informed the development of the strategy and action recommendations.



CAREER PATH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Following the extensive consultation period, RMCG developed a strategy and guiding framework for career path development to support the delivery of the Nursery SIP priorities and address ongoing industry challenges.

The strategy provides a clear roadmap for successful career path development in the short to medium term. There are plans to update the plan every three years to ensure it is relevant to the career market.

STRATEGIES	TACTICS
1. Industry promotion and awareness	Active and passive promotion, positive messaging and capitalising on existing industry brands e.g. Vision 202020, Green Cities Fund
2. Policy parameters	Advocating and promoting the value of the nursery sector for government support e.g. encourage government incentives for training placements, courses, apprenticeships
3. Training system	Supporting the targeted design and delivery of training programs that support the upskilling of the nursery industry at several levels e.g. collaborate with tertiary and VET training institutions on course delivery
4. Human resource management practices	Ensuring adequate employment standards across the nursery industry e.g. develop templates for best practice HR management
5. Defined jobs and career pathways	Demonstrating dynamic career opportunities within the nursery sector to those in horticulture and other relevant sectors e.g. job role case studies

1. Santhanam-Martin M and Cowan L (2017) *Understanding Skilled Workforce Issues in the Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry*, University of Melbourne and Agriculture Victoria

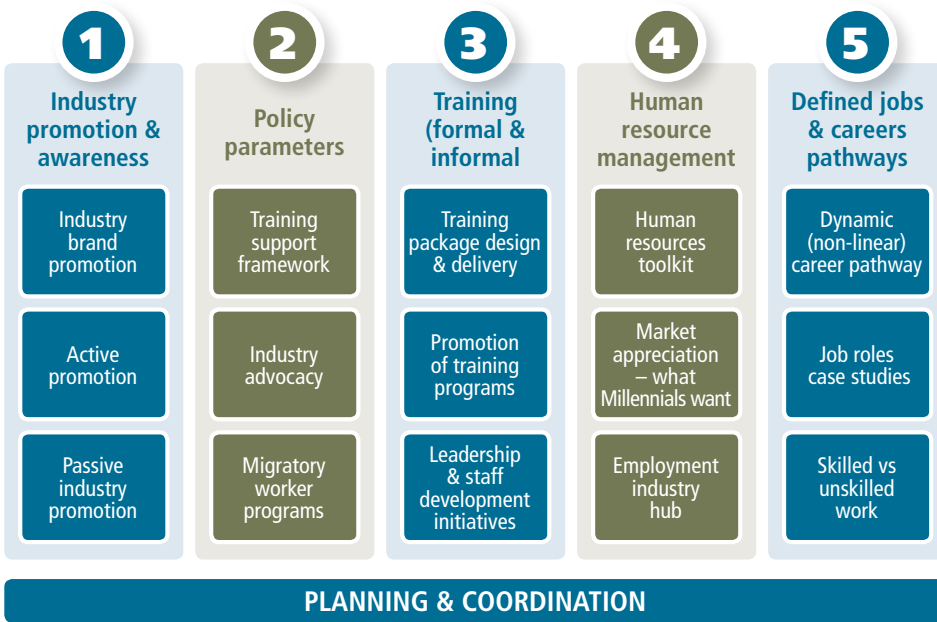


FIGURE 2: Five-pillar strategy to attract, retain and develop skilled nursery industry workforce.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

A coordinated delivery effort, through engagement with multiple stakeholders, will underpin the implementation of the strategy.



Each pillar requires an action plan and desired outcomes, timeframes, Key Performance Indicators and responsibilities.

A dedicated resource (preferably hosted within the national peak industry body) would be responsible for strategy implementation. Oversight of this position should be provided through an industry organising committee made up of growers and key industry stakeholders

Strong partnership development with core delivery partners including education and training providers, as well as service providers is essential to deliver the strategy.

RMCG recommends strategy implementation funding should be secured through the nursery research and development levy as a core outcome of *better career development* (Nursery Strategic Investment Plan 2017-2021).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NURSERY INDUSTRY

Skills beyond just plant production are required for the future of the nursery industry in Australia including supply chain management, technology and product innovation. This includes a range of responsibilities in the areas of biosecurity, workplace health and safety, chemical management, customer relationships and environmental sustainability. There is a need to secure a continued pipeline of well-trained experts to support the capacity and resilience of the industry into the future.

The nursery industry career path development strategy provides a strong framework for the industry to collaborate and address the ongoing challenges and barriers to attracting a skilled workforce. It's an opportunity for the industry to promote stories of growth and innovation to the wider community and attract the best people to create a stronger and secure workforce.

The Review of Nursery industry career pathways (NY17002) project has been funded by Hort Innovation using nursery industry levies and funds from the Australian Government.

MORE INFORMATION:

New project to help future proof the Australian nursery and garden workforce: <https://yourlevyatwork.com.au/new-project-to-help-future-proof-the-australian-nursery-and-garden-workforce/>

LINKS TO RESOURCES

Santhanam-Martin M and Cowan L (2017) *Understanding Skilled Workforce Issues in the Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry*, University of Melbourne and Agriculture Victoria

PAST EDITIONS OF NURSERY PAPERS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE on the Nursery & Garden Industry Australia website http://www.ngia.com.au/Section?Action=View&Section_id=46