

# Fair Farms gains momentum

Marsha Aralar, Fair Farms National Program Manager, Growcom

A farm's most valuable asset is its people. Growers are making the switch to the simpler, Australian training and certification that supports employers to prove ethical practices on-farm.

Growcom's Fair Farms program is seeing excellent take-up from across the berry industry with more than 130 berry businesses starting the certification process and twelve fully Fair Farms certified already. The businesses that have already completed the process range from the small family operation to the large multi-state organisation, but with one key characteristic in common; a keen interest in ensuring they are operating with good workplace practices.

While audits are a fact of life as customers' expectations on growers increase, the Fair Farms program was developed to provide growers with an alternative to SEDEX with an Australian-made training and certification program designed to help farmers in the horticultural sector engage in fair and ethical work practices.

It provides growers with employment best-practice standards, in a straightforward, less expensive, and auditable process that farmers can use to demonstrate that they conform to the law and treat workers well.

Brendon Hoyle operates two strawberry farms in south east Queensland spanning both the summer and winter seasons. For Brendon and his business partners in Ashbern Farms, aligning their business with the Fair Farms standard was a simple decision to take. "The program provides a clear, industry relevant framework to follow and as a standard that is supported by our customers, it makes good business sense too."

Fair Farms National Program Manager Marsha Aralar said since June 2020 the program has experienced a 230 per cent increase in registered participants, and those who had completed their online self-assessments had more than quadrupled ahead of the formal auditing process.

"Strong uptake of the program so far indicates growing intent along the supply chain to demonstrate fair and equitable work practices and eradicate exploitation," Ms Aralar said.

"Fair Farms is about giving producers easy and affordable access to the resources they need to understand and conform with the laws that underpin the treatment of workers.



**It's about levelling the competitive playing field by raising awareness and commitment to good work practices while reducing the burden of unnecessary red tape for farmers.**

For those few bad seeds that do not do the right thing, Fair Farms will help weed them out and, through industry and community sentiment, eradicate them from the market.

"It's not fair for exploitative operators to achieve the same prices in market as those operators who are paying and treating their workers fairly," Ms Aralar said.

"Decent operators are fed up with being tarnished with the same brush as a few opportunistic operators."

Ms Aralar said that Fair Farms, which had been designed in collaboration with businesses along the supply chain, will become expected by consumers who want the produce on their tables to have been grown ethically and to the highest standards.

“Consumers don’t want wholesome foods produced through unwholesome work practices,” Ms Aralar said.

“With Fair Farms certification, growers will be able to show their commitment to fair and equitable work practices – and this will mean greater access not only to a more willing and able labour force, but to retailers, like Aldi, Coles, Woolworths and Metcash (IGA) who want to meet the needs of customers who increasingly demand products that have been ethically sourced.



**Ultimately, the Fair Farms program is about ensuring Australia has a strong, thriving horticultural industry which benefits not only individual farmers and the industry, but the broader community as a whole.**



## WHY CHOOSE FAIR FARMS?

- Australian owned and operated
- Designed by industry for industry
- Local support – only a phone call away. Brisbane based, serving all of Australia and supported by Berries Australia
- Supported by retailers (meets the responsible supply policies of Coles, Woolworths, Aldi, Metcash (IGA))
- Benchmarked against Australia’s employment laws, industry awards and practices.
- One published standard for all horticulture businesses with clearly defined requirements
- Written in plain English, similar layout to Freshcare and straightforward to follow
- Completion of online self-assessment takes approximately 1-2 hours – you only answer the questions that are relevant to your operation
- Questions are matched against the Fair Farms Standard and any local State/Territory legislation
- Results not shared with retailers. Results determine training needs, are not used to determine risk or need for audit (all participants seeking certification will go to audit)
- Fair Farms training is tailored to Australian legislation and industry standards in horticulture
- Clear rules for re-audit cycle (1, 2 or 3 years depending on audit outcome) published in the Fair Farms Audit Guide (available on our website)
- Annual membership fee: \$150 per site (ex GST)
- Demonstrates your commitment to ethical supply practices to help the berry industry as a whole and puts you in the global picture of the sustainability framework for all of Australian horticulture, in line with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (Global SDGs)

**You can learn more about joining Fair Farms online: [www.fairfarms.com.au](http://www.fairfarms.com.au)**