

Timorese women in Australian agriculture

Ann Robins, Pacific Labour Facility

Burlington Berries is one of many Australian businesses that has seen the transformational impacts of employing women through the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP).

Managing Director Kate Sutherland welcomed the diversity of skills and nationalities that SWP employees introduced to her business and said her decision to employ more Pacific and Timorese women had brought some great benefits.

"As a managing director with 4 daughters in the business, we are very focused on women, and it is exciting to watch them all succeed," said Kate.

"Horticulture lends itself to female employment. Women are often just as strong, especially mentally, as men, and that's what we need to see in our workers.

"They've often left their children behind with their mothers or sisters – it's a huge driver for a mother to leave her children to come and work. That's why I think they are such good workers, and we really value their input," she said.

Kate's experience reflects the findings from a 2018 Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) report, which suggests that a diverse workforce leads to business benefits, including increased productivity and innovation.

Standout employees Maria and Bela

Two standout women working for Burlington Berries are Maria and Bela from Timor-Leste.

Maria has worked in Australia for 3 seasons and is one of the fastest pickers at Burlington Berries, while Bela is a supervisor who speaks 6 languages and has shown strong leadership skills during her time with the business. "It's a matter of finding out our employees' skills and nurturing them, so they are in a role that they find satisfying.

But it's also good for us to challenge them and give them opportunities to benefit the business as well. It's not all about picking.

"Both of these women show leadership, motivate others, demonstrate timeliness and push through those early mornings. They're such motivated ladies and they've done a fantastic job," said Kate.

The benefits flow both ways. Bela is using the money she saves at Burlington Berries to support her parents and 9 siblings as well as prepare for her future. She hopes to open an electricity consultancy when she returns home and is saving for the \$10,000 license required to do this.

Similarly, Maria has goals of her own. She has a background in hospitality and is working in Australia to help support her family and save for her dream of opening a restaurant back home.

"With some of the money I have earned, I helped my mum to build our house. With the rest, I want to open a cafeteria and provide catering," said Maria. "To Burlington Berries, I want to say thank you, thank you so much. It's really helped my family... and my dream – it will come true."

The PLS allows employers to recruit low-skilled and semi-skilled workers for up to 3 years in any sector, while the SWP allows employers in agriculture and accommodation to recruit unskilled and low-skilled workers for 9 months.

To simplify participation in labour mobility, the programs have recently been streamlined so that new employers can join both through a single application form. The new streamlined approach is referred to as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme.

MARIA MADALENA SOARES

Seasonal worker
Burlington Berries Tasmania

For Burlington Berries, I say
thank you, thank you so much.

Maria is one of Burlington Berries' fastest pickers & is using the money she is saving in Australia to help realise her dream of opening a restaurant. Photo credit: Burlington Berries

The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is the Australian Government's new, streamlined approach to its highly valued Pacific labour mobility initiatives.

The PALM scheme allows eligible employers to recruit workers from 9 Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste when there are not enough Australian workers available.

There are 2 initiatives in the PALM scheme: the *Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP)* for jobs up to 9 months and the *Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS)* for jobs between one and 3 years. SWP workers can be employed in the agriculture sector across Australia.

In the accommodation sector SWP workers can work jobs based mostly in rural and regional areas. Through the PLS, workers can be employed in the agriculture sector nationally and in rural and regional Australia in all other sectors.

www.palmscheme.gov.au

PALM 
Pacific Australia Labour Mobility

You can see
more from these
talented ladies at
[youtu.be/
A6g5y08aXWs](https://youtu.be/A6g5y08aXWs)

Bela is a supervisor at Burlington Berries and has shown leadership skills throughout her time working in Australia. She is a trained geologist and speaks 6 languages.

Photo credit: Burlington Berries