

§ 9(2)(g)(i)

Proposed Changes to Essential Skills Policy

We operate a multi-species operation, farrow to finish pig, layer poultry and a small sheep flock and cattle herd § 9(2)(a). The major part of the farm is a farrow to finish pig farm of 290 breeding sows, producing about 500 tonnes of carcass pork annually for the local market. We employ three Filipino staff that manage the pig farm and feed formulation. Also employed are local staff including an overall herd/farm manager, a full time and a part time maintenance people, a senior stockperson to manage sows and their piglets and a general labour with special needs requirements. § 9(2)(a)

Most of our stock feed is purchased locally, 1200 tonnes grain, 60 tonnes meat and bone, 30 tonnes tallow and a whole range of other ingredients sourced from local New Zealand importers. While the principle to hire New Zealanders first makes good sense, the practical experience is that we find it extremely difficult to hire and retain New Zealanders with the appropriate skills and work ethic. Our last advertisement with Seek netted just 3 applications of which no New Zealanders that had applied.

The lack of suitable employees has negative impacts on animal welfare, places stress on other employees who do have the work ethics required and places a lot of stress on farm owners who are ultimately responsible for animal welfare and environmental compliance. In the past it has been extremely difficult to find employees with the required work ethics and H&S drug free standards. It is almost impossible to find staff of an appropriate calibre that is essential for what is a highly skilled farming occupation that requires experience, pig farming knowledge and a high degree of empathy for animals.

We have very little work for unskilled staff with no pig farming experience as that requires a lot of time and resources to bring their skill levels up to requirements. Our experience is the calibre of people we attract and say that they would like a job here mostly proves to be a futile and fruitless exercise eg; § 9(2)(a)

We have employed 3d Filipinos since 2007 and it is almost without exception they have had a tremendous work ethic, have been quick learners and need very little orientation on arrival with farm layout and pig farm management. New and changes to facets of management are enthusiastically and diligently employed so enabling changes to be carefully monitored. In other words, they are working on the same page as their owners. This has meant we have gone from being a very average performing pig farm to being in the top three in New Zealand. Consequently it means we do have the resources to fund improvements required to meet audit requirements and new capital works to increase efficiencies. It also means we as owners have a better quality of life confident in the knowledge that staff will be punctual in their attendance and work is carried out efficiently and with empathy for the animals. This is very important for us as owners who have 44 years of 7-day weeks with less days off than the average person has in a year.

Migrant workers currently fulfil all facets of work associated with pig farming including stock management and budgeting to ensure a consistent throughput of stock in our facilities, a very important KPI.

Breeding management, stock health, and management of pregnant animals, care of new borns, management of growing pigs through the different stages to final selection for breeding in the case of grandparent progeny or selection for processing in the case of terminal sire progeny. Feed formulation is also carried out on farm for all classes of stock. They are also involved in orientation and familiarisation training of any new staff.

Migrant workers (and I might add my parents are Dutch migrant workers from the 1950's) are mostly from a working class background often with previous overseas employment experience who have left young families behind to take up employment with us in New Zealand which sometimes meant up to two years before being reunited. Almost without exception they have expertise in livestock production, have tertiary qualifications from the Philippines, but perhaps more importantly is the commitment to familiarise themselves with our operation and learn quickly. Reliability is unquestionable including public holiday and weekend rosters. Christmas day all staff are in attendance voluntarily because in their words, "the boss needs time off too". I was pinching myself for years after we had Filipino migrants to make sure this was true. Previously it had been futile even asking and rostering weekends and public holidays and as owners invariably meant working long hours during these times.

It appears our migrant Filipinos have settled in well into New Zealand life, integrating into local communities and participating in community affairs outside of work. All our Filipino staff are at level four or above, but fall short in salaries paid under the new guidelines. At present wage levels are appropriate for pig farming. The wage levels being proposed would be difficult to afford for all our staff and if it came to fruition sourcing appropriate staff once again would be a massive problem!

Because of the temporary nature of the proposed visas, migrants will be looking for more permanent opportunities as uprooting their family won't be high on their list of priorities. Three years work here and then no visa for a year would negate a lot of the financial gains they had made.

Canada is currently offering very attractive opportunities for migrants. Attracting suitable staff is going to be made that much harder again and as employing suitably trained NZers is difficult we will be once again placed in a very tenuous situation.

Having suitably trained staff is essential when New Zealand is part of the global market and imports are running at very high levels from countries offering very attractive tax incentives to its producers.

Continually having to train new staff is not only costly in time, but also in terms of lower productivity, which is an inevitable cost of training staff.

The ability to bring family with them is obviously a big attraction for the majority of migrants as in our experience they are extremely family orientated with Christianity playing a big part in their lives. Having the ability to have family here is a no-brainer. No one likes to be apart from loved ones for a long period of time. It also means that most money earned would be sent back home to support family back in their home country. Our staff already considers New Zealand to be their home country.

Essential Skills visas are essential for our industry, a 7-day a week 52 week of the operation because skilled committed stockpersons are not available in New Zealand.

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