



Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) Submission to Jobs and Skills Australia – Core Skills Occupations List 2025

Proposed Inclusion: 363213 (Senior Dairy Cattle Farm Worker)

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Introduction

1. Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF), in partnership with Dairy Australia, welcomes the opportunity to provide this updated 2025 submission to Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) regarding the Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL).
2. Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) is the national advocacy body representing dairy farmers across all Australian states.
3. We seek the inclusion of a critical occupation for our industry: ANZSCO 363213 – Senior Dairy Cattle Farm Worker.
4. The industry directly employs approximately 33,500 people in farming and processing and underpins tens of thousands of regional jobs across supporting industries, like manufacturing.
5. The roles requested are skilled and well-remunerated (meeting/above **Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold TSMIT**), improve worker outcomes (safer rosters, supervision, retention), and underpin national food security.
6. Ensuring a skilled workforce for dairy farming is therefore not only crucial for dairy communities and farm productivity, but for Australia's agricultural output and food security.
7. Evidence from 2022–2025 shows persistent skill shortages, tight regional labour markets, and additive use of migration to complement domestic hiring.

Dairy Workforce Snapshot (Structure and Composition)

Indicator	Value
Average people working on farm	5.9
Full-time permanent	63%
Part-time permanent	11%
Casual	25%
Fixed term	1%
Non-English speaking backgrounds	13%
Direct employment (Census 2021)	~17,450
Payroll jobs at peak month (2023)	~9,490

Notes: Sources include Dairy Australia Power of People 2024 and JSA Food Supply Chain Workforce (2025).

8. ADF understands review windows typically fall August–December. The evidence herein addresses prior feedback on worker outcomes and domestic/migrant split.
9. ADF and Dairy Australia stand ready to provide supplementary data on request.

Executive Summary

10. The Australian dairy industry faces a well-documented and persistent shortage of skilled labor at all levels – from farm managers to experienced farmhands – that **cannot be met by the current domestic workforce**.
11. Dairy Australia's **Power of People 2024 workforce survey** found over three-quarters of dairy farmers are *concerned or very concerned* about workforce shortages, and this issue ranks as one of the top challenges across agriculture. An aging workforce (disproportionately over 55) and the shift to larger, more complex farm enterprises are intensifying demand for skilled workers beyond the supply of local entrants.
12. **Senior Dairy Cattle Farm Workers (ANZSCO 363213)** – recently classified at Skill Level 3 – perform high-skill tasks in breeding, milking, herd management and farm supervision (often known as dairy herd managers) abs.gov.au.
13. These roles are **inherently skilled** and vital to farm productivity, animal welfare, and biosecurity. They have been recognised in dedicated migration programs (e.g. the Dairy Industry Labour Agreement since 2014) due to industry need.
14. Industry efforts to recruit, train and retain local workers are ongoing and extensive (jobs boards, regional recruitment campaigns, school and TAFE programs, on-farm training, etc.), yet **acute labor gaps remain**. In key dairy regions, local labor pools are effectively exhausted – unemployment sits well below national averages, at **~1–2%** in major dairy areas like Shepparton/Northern Victoria and south-west Victoria.
15. In these circumstances, skilled migration for dairy roles is *genuinely additive*: it fills critical gaps without displacing local workers. Overseas workers are brought in **only because suitable local candidates are unavailable**, and they help farms maintain (or expand) production which in turn sustains additional jobs in processing, transport and services that depend on a thriving dairy sector.
16. New data from Dairy Australia's Power of People 2024 workforce survey reinforces the severity of the skills shortage and the increasing reliance on overseas labour: nearly **half of dairy farms (48%) report difficulty filling vacancies**, and **42% of farms that hired staff last year employed at least one overseas worker** – a stark rise from 18% in 2020 (see **Table 1**).
17. This trend underscores that migrant workers have become an essential supplement to the domestic workforce, especially for skilled and experienced farm roles. The sector is also a significant user of skilled migration visas in relative terms – as of Dec 2023, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing had ~3,060 primary skilled visa holders (making it the **3rd highest** sector by proportion of workforce). Critically, available evidence indicates positive outcomes for these workers: most **stay long-term in the industry**, often progressing to permanent residency and higher-responsibility positions, thereby contributing to regional communities and farm continuity thepeopleindairy.org.au.

Table 1. Recruitment Pressure and Overseas Worker Use (Last 12 Months)

Indicator	Value
Recruitment “easy” (very/somewhat)	26%
Recruitment “difficult” (very/somewhat)	48%
Average time-to-fill (most recent)	~9.6 weeks
Employed any overseas workers (among recruiters)	42%
– WHM/backpackers	31%
– Employer-sponsored (incl. 482/494)	17%
– PALM	1%
– Seasonal Worker	1%

Notes: Dairy Australia Power of People 2024.

18. **High Skill and Earning Profiles:** Both target occupations meet the skill and salary benchmarks expected of “core skilled” roles. **Dairy Cattle Farmers** (farm managers) are ANZSCO Skill Level 1 roles, often requiring formal qualifications in agriculture or extensive experience, and carry significant business management responsibilities jobsandskills.gov.au.
19. **Senior Dairy Farm Workers** are Skill Level 3 (Certificate III/IV equivalent plus experience) abs.gov.au – reflecting competencies in herd health, breeding programs, machinery operation, staff supervision and other specialised tasks.
20. These are **well-remunerated positions**: for example, a Level 8 farmhand under the Pastoral Award earns a minimum of **\$1,148 per week** base wage (≈\$60k/year) thepeopleindairy.org.au, and with typical overtime, penalty rates and provided benefits (such as accommodation), actual earnings frequently exceed **\$73,000** per annum. In fact, about **24% of dairy farms pay above Award rates** to attract or retain staff and ~25% provide free or subsidised housing thepeopleindairy.org.au.
21. The **Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT)** was recently raised to \$70,000; dairy visa sponsors readily meet this – these roles command salaries at or above this threshold, affirming their skilled nature and negating any perception that the industry seeks “cheap labour”.

Data – industry needing support

22. The dairy industry is the nation's third-largest rural sector, directly employing around 14,900 people on farms and supporting over 33,500 jobs across the supply chain.
23. The 2024/25 farm-gate value of milk is around **\$5.5 billion**, with export value near **\$3.0 billion**.
24. The national milk pool has fallen from **~8.8 billion litres in 2022/23 to ~8.3 billion litres in 2024/25**, tightening factory throughput.¹
25. Owner-operator dairy farm median age was **~56 (2016)**; median age of Australian dairy cattle farmers is now **48**.²
 - (a) the ABS states this is notably younger than the broader farming workforce (ABS ~58), reflecting higher labour intensity, technology adoption and family-business succession in dairy.
26. The pressures on dairy farmers from climate change to reduce emissions and ensure adaption is driving these changes and the need for more skilled workers.
- 27.

Table A — Snapshot of the Australian dairy sector (2024/25)

Metric	2024/25	Notes
Milk production	~8.3 bn litres	End-season estimate
Number of dairy farms	3,889 farms	Latest published farm count
Farm-gate value of milk	\$5.5 bn	ABARES 2024/25 estimate
Dairy export value	\$3.0 bn	ABARES 2024/25 estimate
Key export products	Cheese, powders, butter	Asia-Pacific focus

Table B — Comparison: 2022/23 vs 2024/25

Metric	2022/23	2024/25	Change	% Change
Milk production (litres)	8.8 bn	~8.3 bn	-0.5 bn	-5.7%
Number of dairy farms	4,163	3,889	-274	-6.6%
Farm-gate value (\$AUD)	\$6.1 bn	\$5.5 bn	-\$0.6 bn	-9.8%
Dairy export value (\$AUD)	\$3.3 bn	\$3.0 bn	-\$0.3 bn	-9.1%

Sources for 2022/23 baselines: DAFF "Dairy in Australia" (milk production 8.8 bn L; employment; farm-gate value \$6.1 bn; exports \$3.3 bn). **Sources for 2024/25:** Dairy Australia Situation & Outlook May 2025 (milk production ~8.3 bn L); ABARES Agricultural Commodities (2024–25)

28. The skills shortage is not an abstract problem – it is directly impacting dairy output and business decisions. Despite strong milk prices in recent years, **national milk production has been trending down**, (a 5% contraction year-on-year). One major reason cited for this decline is **labour availability**.

¹ Dairy Australia. Situation & Outlook, May 2025 (milk production estimate 2024/25; market trends).

² ANZSCO 121313, Jobs and Skills Australia

29. Farmers unable to find staff are often forced to cap herd sizes or delay expansion plans, meaning potential production is lost. Some farmers are even exiting industry early, partly due to the strain of being unable to recruit help. In short, the *growth and sustainability of the dairy sector are being stifled by workforce shortages*.

Occupations Requested and Rationale

30. The dairy industry by its nature requires a highly skilled workforce. Dairy farm roles extend far beyond manual labor – they involve managing herd genetics and health, operating heavy machinery and hi-tech milking equipment, pasture management, milk harvesting and quality control, and business decision-making under stringent food safety standards.
31. In fact, it is often noted that a dairy farm manager must command over “170 separate skills” across at least 11 specialist domains to run a successful farm business. There are very few truly “unskilled” jobs on a dairy farm. Even entry-level farmhands require extensive on-the-job training to handle livestock safely and implement standard operating procedures (e.g. identifying and isolating antibiotic-treated cows during milking to protect milk quality).
32. 363213 Senior Dairy Cattle Farm Worker (Skill Level 3): herd managers and senior hands responsible for skilled daily operations, training/supervision, and implementing SOPs. Introduced in the ANZSCO 2022 update, this occupation (also known as *Dairy Herd Manager* or *Senior Farmhand*) denotes an experienced farm worker who can independently oversee and coordinate daily milking operations, herd care, and other farm functions in a supervisory capacity abs.gov.au.
33. It is pegged at Skill Level 3, akin to a trade or technician level. In practice, these are the team leaders or 2ICs on farms: staff who often have several years’ experience and possibly formal agriculture/dairy certificates. They perform skilled tasks such as monitoring animal health and nutrition, administering treatments, implementing breeding programs (e.g. artificial insemination and calf rearing protocols), operating milking systems and farm machinery, and training/supervising junior farmhands.
34. Before ANZSCO recognised this role, the dairy industry had already identified its importance – securing a dedicated Dairy Industry Labour Agreement (DILA) in 2014 to allow sponsorship of “Senior Dairy Cattle Farm Worker” at skill level 3. The Great South Coast DAMA in Victoria and the South Australian Regional Workforce Agreement further include this occupation (and its related lower level “Dairy Cattle Farm Worker”) as eligible for sponsorship. This reflects a consensus that the role is both essential and in shortage domestically.
35. We stress that a “Senior Farm Worker” is not an entry-level laborer – they are closer to a para-professional on the farm, expected to run the farm in the owner/manager’s absence with minimal supervision abs.gov.au. In fact, a specialization of this ANZSCO is Production Manager (Dairy) at skill level 2, indicating that with further experience some senior farm workers progress to higher management roles abs.gov.au
36. This role meet skill and remuneration thresholds, align with ANZSCO 2023 updates, and are pivotal to safe and productive operations. Together, they represent the management and high-skilled workforce tier on dairy farms. A 2021 analysis by the National Agriculture Workforce Strategy noted that dairy farming (like other intensive livestock industries) has distinct labour requirements and challenges, often needing advanced skills in remote areas where local supply is thin australiandairyfarmers.com.au

Evidence of Skill Shortages and Recruitment Difficulties

37. Multiple sources confirm a **significant, ongoing shortfall** of skilled workers in dairy. The National Farmers' Federation's **Farmer Priorities Survey 2023** found that for dairy farmers, workforce shortages are the **2nd highest priority issue**, with over 75% of dairy producers concerned about their ability to secure workers.
38. Similarly, the Regional Australia Institute in *"The Missing Workers"* (2018) highlighted that in Australia's eight major dairying regions, local labour pools are so small that *"unemployment approaches zero"* – meaning almost every able worker is already employed, leaving farms struggling to find staff australiandairyfarmers.com.au.
39. This situation has not improved; if anything, it has become more acute post-COVID due to reduced backpacker numbers and competition from other sectors.
40. Dairy Australia's **Power of People** surveys provide direct insight from farmers. In 2020, **70%** of dairy farmers reported that recruiting new staff was "somewhat" or "very" difficult. By 2024, the updated survey shows about **48%** still find it difficult thepeopleindairy.org.au.
41. While there is a slight improvement (possibly due to short-term factors like lower cow numbers in drought), it remains true that **almost half of dairy farms cannot easily fill vacancies** – a major red flag for a sector reliant on continuous operations 365 days a year. Only 26% found recruitment "easy" in 2024, and looking forward, **more farmers (23% of respondents) feel recruiting is harder now than 3 years ago** than those who feel it's easier thepeopleindairy.org.au.
42. Behind these difficulties are several factors frequently cited by farmers: the jobs are in rural areas with limited population; the work involves early hours and requires skills that urban jobseekers often don't have; and importantly, other industries are competing for the same workers.
43. As one analysis noted, *"despite competitive salaries, agriculture has had little impact on the annual supply of qualified personnel... the 2022 employment market is highly challenging due to **low unemployment** and strong demand in other industries (tourism, hospitality, health, etc.)"*. In fact, the demand for on-farm employees **intensified by 53% in 2021** compared to 2020 (job advertisement data), and postings for farm management roles jumped 160% over 2015–2021. This indicates that even as wages and conditions improve, the sector simply cannot find enough people.
44. As JSA would appreciate, these are precisely the conditions under which skilled migration is warranted – when an industry has *tried everything* domestically (higher wages, training, job ads) and still can't get enough workers.

Figure A. Recruitment Difficulty (Power of People 2024)

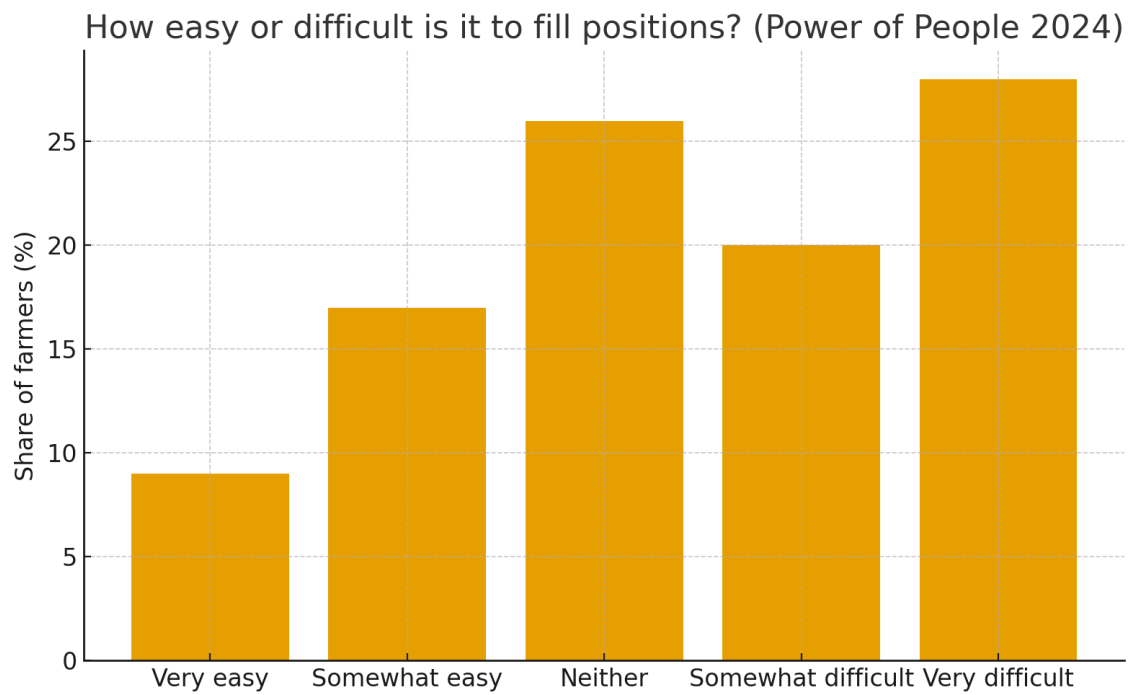
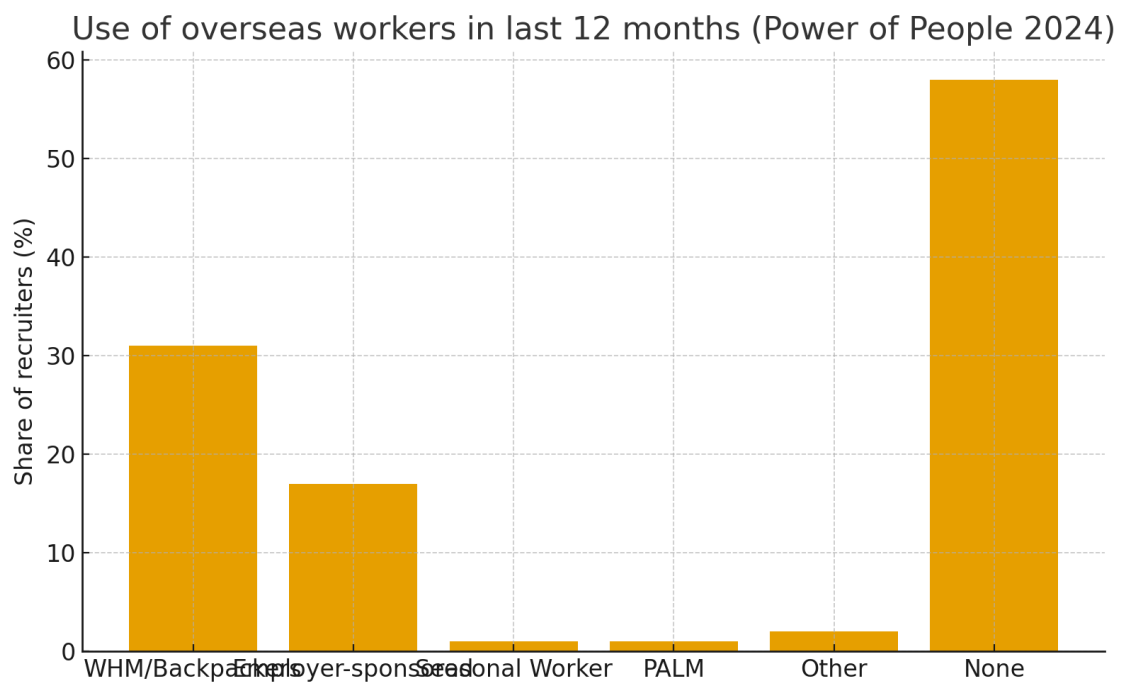


Figure B. Use of Overseas Workers by Pathway (Power of People 2024)



Regional Labour Market Constraints and Unemployment Data

45. A critical piece of evidence underscoring the need for migrant workers in dairy is the **extremely low unemployment in major dairy regions**. It is often suggested that farmers should simply hire from the local unemployed population; in reality, in many dairy heartlands *there is effectively no unemployment to draw from*.
46. These figures (sourced from JSA's own Jobs and Skills Atlas and ABS Labour Force data) are striking for example, **Shepparton/Northern Victoria** – which alone produces nearly 20% of national milk – has just **1.1%** unemployment. **Warrnambool & South-West Victoria** (the single largest dairy region, 22.7% of national production) is at **1.8%**.
47. By any economic definition this is **full employment** – essentially anyone who wants a job has one, and likely there are more open jobs than jobseekers. **Gippsland** in eastern Victoria has a somewhat higher rate (~4.6%), but that is still below the national average and reflects frictional unemployment across a larger population; notably Gippsland dairy employers also report chronic difficulty finding skilled staff due to competition from industries like forestry, mining and even tourism in that region.
48. Meanwhile, **Tasmania (ex-Hobart)**, which has 11% of national milk production, sits at **4.0%** unemployment, and much of that state's dairy is concentrated in remote areas of the north-west where the available local labor pool is very small.
49. The **takeaway is clear** expecting dairy farms to recruit unemployed locals is not realistic in these regions – there simply aren't unemployed locals in significant numbers, and those who are unemployed may not have the requisite skills or willingness to take on farm work. Dairy roles also tend to have early morning start times and require living in rural locales; even if an unemployed person from a city were interested, the **housing shortages** in many regional towns present another barrier (it is well documented that a lack of rural housing has impeded attracting workers across agriculture).
50. Thus, **migration is not displacing Australians – it's filling a gap where Australians are not available**. Our farms have jobs waiting; what they lack are candidates. Bringing in a skilled migrant farm manager or senior farm worker often means a farm can keep operating at full capacity – which in turn supports downstream processing jobs (at dairy factories, transport companies, etc., many of which *do* employ local Australian workers). In that sense, enabling these key on-farm roles to be filled benefits the broader regional economy and job market.
51. This dynamic was acknowledged by the prior Australian Agricultural Workforce Strategy and is a rationale behind existing programs like the Seasonal Worker (PALM) scheme and ag-specific DAMAs.
52. We urge JSA to consider that *dairy's situation exemplifies the intended purpose of the Core Skills List*: an occupation critical to the economy, for which domestic supply is insufficient even in the medium-long term.

Attracting and Retaining Domestic Workforce

53. The Australian dairy industry is **fully committed to training and recruiting local workers wherever possible**. We wish to highlight the extensive efforts and investments being made on this front – demonstrating that skilled migration is a complement, not a substitute, to domestic workforce development. Dairy Australia and ADF have, for over a decade, run programs to make dairy farming an attractive and viable career for Australians:

- (a) **National Recruitment Campaigns:** Through initiatives like the “Dairy Jobs Matter” platform and associated marketing, we actively promote dairy farm job opportunities to jobseekers in regional areas and other industries. The **Dairy Farm Jobs Board** lists vacancies and connects farmers with local candidates and has been widely advertised. Recent campaigns have targeted school leavers, ex-defense force personnel, and workers displaced from other sectors during COVID, highlighting the competitive pay and lifestyle benefits of dairy farm jobs.
 - (b) **Education and Training Pathways:** Dairy Australia works with secondary schools, vocational training providers, and universities to encourage more Australians to enter dairy careers. This includes **curriculum materials and career talks** for schools, promotion of agricultural courses, and support for traineeships/apprenticeships on farms. The industry sponsors initiatives like Cows Create Careers (school engagement with hands-on dairy projects) and offers dozens of training courses through the **Dairy Australia “Enlight” online training platform** (covering everything from milking skills to farm safety). These courses are free and open to anyone interested in upskilling for dairy roles.
 - (c) **Capability and Career Progression:** To improve retention, we focus on creating clear career paths in dairy farming. The **Dairy Capability Guide** provides a framework for skill development and progression from entry-level farm hand to herd manager to farm manager. Many farms implement this to give employees a vision of advancement (indeed, some senior farm workers eventually become sharefarmers or farm owners in their own right). The industry also runs leadership programs and Young Dairy Network groups to foster professional growth.
 - (d) **Workplace Improvements:** Dairy employers increasingly offer incentives to retain staff. According to the 2024 survey, **32% of farmers offer flexible work hours/rosters, 25% provide accommodation** on-farm or assistance with housing, and **24% pay above the Pastoral Award** rates as a retention strategy thepeopleindairy.org.au. Additional benefits like vehicles, bonuses, and training opportunities are also offered by many thepeopleindairy.org.au. These efforts show that farmers are using all available levers – competitive remuneration, better work-life balance, and upskilling – to hold on to their workforce.
54. Despite these considerable efforts, structural challenges persist. **Enrollments in agriculture training and graduates entering farm production roles remain too low** to meet demand. A study by Pratley & Crawley (2020) found that for every ag graduate, there are about **6 job openings**, and only roughly 10% of ag university graduates end up working in farm production. The rest tend to go into agribusiness, research, government, or other sectors, leaving a shortage on the farms.
55. Some institutions like Marcus Oldham College feed more graduates into hands-on farming (about 28%), but others like the major universities send <5–15% of grads to farms. This underscores a key point: **the domestic pipeline of skilled farm personnel has not kept pace with industry needs for decades**.
56. We are redoubling efforts to market farm careers and improve workplace conditions, yet it will take many years to substantially grow the local talent pool. In the interim (and likely the long-term as well), strategic migration is required to bridge the gap.
57. It should also be noted that dairy farming jobs are predominantly located in regional and rural communities. Encouraging Australians to relocate to these areas for farm work is challenging. The industry has partnered with government in exploring relocation incentives and regional resettlement initiatives, but uptake is modest in comparison to the need.

58. Paradoxically, many migrants sponsored for dairy jobs are quite keen to live in regional Australia and often put down roots there – an outcome highly valued by rural towns that seek population retention and growth. Many dairy migrant workers bring families, join local schools and clubs, and become part of the social fabric. In this way, skilled migration also supports regional development, which is a broader policy objective of the government.
59. ADF wants to assure JSA that the dairy industry is **not taking the easy route of importing labor without trying domestically** – on the contrary, we have been investing in domestic workforce solutions for years (with some success stories, but not enough volume). However, realistic policy must acknowledge the limits of domestic supply in the near term.

Increasing Reliance on Migrant Workers: Trends and Outcomes

60. The role of migrant workers in dairy farm staffing has grown significantly in recent years, demonstrating both the necessity and effectiveness of this workforce source. According to Dairy Australia’s 2024 farmer survey, 42% of farms who hired staff in the past year had employed an overseas worker during that period. This is up from just 18% of hiring farms in 2020 – more than doubling the reliance on overseas labour in a short time.
61. The most common sources were working holiday makers (backpackers) – 31% of farmers had employed one – and Temporary Skill sponsored visa holders – 17% had employed a worker on a 457/482-type visa. A smaller share had engaged Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) seasonal workers (around 1%).
62. This mix shows that dairy farmers have been utilising all available migration pathways: from short-term backpackers for interim relief, to longer-term skilled visas for core positions.
63. From a policy perspective, this reliance is significant. It indicates that without access to migrant workers, many dairy farms would simply not have filled essential jobs, potentially leading to lost production or overwork of existing staff/owners.
64. It also underscores why ADF is requesting Senior Dairy Farm Worker be recognised on the Core Skills List: roles that migrants are already filling via existing schemes (often through labour agreements or DAMA sponsorship). Formalising them on the CSOL will ensure the new skilled visa settings do not inadvertently cut off the dairy sector’s lifeline to needed skills.
65. We acknowledge JSA’s question regarding “critical mass” of employment for these occupations. Nationally, there are approximately 8,800 Dairy Cattle Farmers (including owner-operators) according to ABS census data. In addition, we estimate there are on the order of 5,000–6,000 full-time equivalent dairy farm workers employed, of which a significant subset (likely a few thousand) would meet the criteria of “Senior Dairy Cattle Farm Worker” – though official stats historically grouped them with general farm hands.
66. These are not tiny niche occupations; they are quite large when considering the relatively small number of industries (dairy, beef, etc.) that employ them. For comparison, 8,800 dairy farmers are larger than many other occupations already on skilled lists. Each dairy farm manager on average directly oversees operations that employ 2–3 other workers and produces millions of litres of milk per year.
67. We believe this constitutes a critical mass of employment and economic importance. It is also worth noting that ABARES in a 2015–16 survey found that dairy farms have distinct labour needs and higher labour-use intensity than broadacre farms – meaning the sector inherently needs more workers per enterprise, and thus faces greater pressure when labour is scarce.

Retention and Outcomes of Migrant Dairy Workers:

68. One concern raised in the 2024 consultation was the uncertainty of outcomes for migrant workers (e.g. do they stay in the industry, do they integrate, etc.). While comprehensive longitudinal data is limited (a gap we are actively working to fill with upcoming surveys and studies), **available evidence and anecdotal reports are encouraging:**
- (a) **Pathway to Permanency:** The Dairy Industry Labour Agreement provides a pathway to permanent residency (via the ENS 186 visa) after **3 years** of employment on a dairy farm thepeopleindairy.org.au. This condition itself encourages retention – workers have an incentive to remain with their employer and in the industry to achieve PR.
 - (i) Many dairy visa sponsors report that their overseas workers have successfully transitioned to PR and continue to work on dairy farms beyond the required period. We note that the new federal migration reforms likewise envision longer-term visas and permanency for core skill roles – which we strongly support as it will improve stability and outcomes for both workers and employers.
 - (b) **Length of Stay:** Prior to the CSOL process, as of 2024, there were about **140 Dairy Industry Labour Agreements (DILA) in place** with individual farm businesses. While the total number of visa holders under these agreements was not fully tracked, we know each agreement can sponsor multiple workers. Critically, **most overseas dairy workers progress through multiple visa stages and stay for extended durations.**
 - (i) A typical scenario (documented by ADF in 2020) is a person who starts as a backpacker on a Working Holiday visa, gets a taste for dairy work, and is then sponsored on a 482 or 494 visa, ultimately staying **5–6 years or more** (often across multiple farms as they advance their career). During this time, they gain experience and often fill increasingly skilled positions – for example, a junior farmhand from overseas may, after a few years, step up into a Senior Farm Worker role as local workers move on or farm expansions create new roles.
 - (c) **Geographic Retention:** Unlike some industries where skilled migrants might use a regional visa as a stepping stone to city jobs, dairy workers overwhelmingly remain in the regions (because that's where the jobs are). We are not aware of significant numbers of sponsored dairy workers leaving for non-dairy jobs; if anything, the bigger risk is losing them to other dairy employers offering higher pay (a sign of ongoing competition for skills).
 - (i) This inter-farm movement is healthy and usually results in the worker settling in another dairy region rather than leaving the sector. Ultimately, many dairy migrant workers put down roots. Some have even gone on to share-farming arrangements or farm ownership, becoming permanent members of the Australian farming community – the ultimate positive outcome from a workforce development standpoint.
69. In summary, migrant dairy workers have **good retention and settlement outcomes**, particularly when provided a pathway to stay. They are filling roles that would otherwise likely remain vacant.
70. By including this occupation on the CSOL, JSA would facilitate a more efficient, standard pathway for these much-needed workers to enter and remain in the industry under appropriate visa settings (with proper skill and wage requirements in place). This, combined with the industry's continued domestic training efforts, is the formula to ensure our dairy farms have the people they need for the future.

Wages and Skill Levels Relative to CSOL Criteria

71. JSA has indicated that one consideration for CSOL inclusion is whether roles have skill and income levels commensurate with the envisioned “core skills” visa stream (to ensure they are not entry-level or underpaid positions). We can confidently state that Dairy Cattle Farmers and Senior Dairy Farm Workers meet and exceed these criteria.
72. As detailed earlier, Dairy Cattle Farmer is a Skill Level 1 occupation (bachelor’s degree or 5+ years experience standard) and Senior Dairy Farm Worker is Skill Level 3 (certificate and experience). These classifications have been validated in the latest ANZSCO review.
 - (a) The roles involve significant responsibility and expertise – for instance, a farm manager must manage biosecurity plans, regulatory compliance (all dairy farms must be licensed and audited for food safety), and often multi-million dollar farm businesses. Senior farm workers handle complex tasks like artificial insemination, pasture budgeting, and staff supervision that require both formal training and practical know-how. In short, these are skilled trades/professions in every sense – not casual labour.
73. Dairy farm roles are comparatively well paid, reflecting the difficulty and skill involved. It is important to dispel any notion that these jobs are “low-wage”. According to the Fair Work Ombudsman’s pay scale, a full-time Farm and Livestock Hand Level 8 (FLH8) – which corresponds to a senior farm worker or leading hand – earns a base weekly wage of \$1,148 (as of July 2025). This equates to about \$59,700 for a standard 38-hour week. However, dairy farm employees often work substantial overtime (with proper overtime pay or via annualised salary arrangements). It is common for an experienced full-time dairy employee to gross \$75k–\$90k per year including overtime, penalties, and benefits like housing. Many farms prefer to pay an annual salary well above award to secure good staff.
 - (a) For example, we have members paying in the order of \$80,000 plus housing for 2IC herd manager positions, and more than \$100,000 for farm managers. For context, the average taxable income for a (male) dairy farm manager was reported around \$149k in recent data from the Department of Immigration. It signals that these roles are not low-income.
 - (b) Crucially, under migration programs: all employer-sponsored dairy roles must meet minimum salary requirements (TSMIT) which is now \$70,000. The DILA explicitly requires market-rate pay – there are no wage concessions apart from allowing non-monetary benefits like housing to count. In practice, this means any migrant senior farm worker or farm manager is being paid at or above the national median income, often significantly above. Indeed, our survey data shows 24% of dairy farmers are already paying above award (market rate) to attract staff, and 35% offer additional benefits (free housing, utilities, etc.) to sweeten the employment package.
74. Thus, including these occupations on the CSOL aligns with the goal of focusing on higher-wage, higher-skill jobs. ADF would not support bringing in overseas workers to fill low-paid positions – but that is not the case here. We seek skilled workers who will earn decent salaries and contribute value on par with skilled roles in other sectors.
 - (a) For comparison, the dairy roles we are discussing pay competitively with, say, skilled trades in construction or technicians in mining – fields that have traditionally been on skilled occupation lists.
75. It’s also noteworthy that by helping farms operate at full capacity, these workers indirectly support additional employment (e.g., a farm that can milk more cows because it has a herd manager will send more milk to factories, creating more shifts for processing workers – typically jobs filled by Australians and often entry-level).

Conclusion and Recommendations

76. The Australian dairy industry is at a crossroads: poised for continued success and contribution to national food supply and exports, but constrained by a workforce shortage
77. Inclusion of ANZSCO 363213 (Senior Dairy Cattle Farm Worker) on the Core Skills Occupations List for 2025 is a critical step to ensure dairy farmers have reliable access to skilled workers in the years ahead. This submission has provided up-to-date data (2022–2025) and analysis demonstrating:
 - (a) A demonstrable, persistent shortage of skilled dairy farm personnel, despite exhaustive domestic recruitment and training efforts. This shortage is documented through farmer surveys, economic reports, and employment statistics, and is worsening due to demographic trends and competition for labour.
 - (b) Quantifiable evidence of tight labour markets in dairy regions (unemployment ~1–4%) and the increasing reliance on migrant workers as a supplement to domestic labour (42% of hiring farms using overseas labour in 2024, up from 18%). These indicators show that without migrants, many dairy positions go unfilled, to the detriment of industry output.
 - (c) Strong outcomes and integrity associated with these roles in a migration context: they attract genuine skilled migrants who are paid respectable salaries (>\$70k), often stay long-term, and do not pose significant risk of exploitation or displacement of locals. On the contrary, they help sustain and even create local jobs by enabling dairy businesses to thrive.
78. ADF and Dairy Australia firmly believe that adding this occupation to the CSOL will address “gaps” noted by JSA in the last round. We have demonstrated a critical mass of employment (thousands of workers, billions in output) tied to these roles, provided data-driven evidence of the need, and outlined the worker outcomes showing that migrants in these roles become an integral part of the agricultural workforce with long-term contributions.
79. We have also underscored that this ask is part of a holistic approach – alongside continuous investment in domestic workforce development – meaning it is not a stop-gap but a strategic augmentation of Australia’s skills base. Importantly, these roles align squarely with the Government’s objectives for regional migration and supporting key industries.
80. ADF and Dairy Australia appreciate JSA’s consideration of this submission. We are available to provide any further information or clarification as needed. The data and case we have presented make it clear that Dairy Cattle Farmers and Senior Dairy Farm Workers are core skilled occupations vital to our nation’s agricultural future. Recognising them on the CSOL is a logical, evidence-based decision that we hope to see reflected in the final determination.

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