

Immigration relieves agricultural skills shortages

A major challenge in the cotton industry, and agriculture generally, is variability in production which can make it hard to guarantee long term employment.

After a drought such as we have had for the past couple of years, the cotton industry always faces a challenge to replace the people lost to 'greener pastures'.

Part of the answer may be to expand our horizons in the search for good staff. Skilled migrants can help fill critical skill shortages and contribute both economically and socially to regional communities.

The Australian Government has a number of initiatives to attract more skilled migrants to regions in Australia where they are needed the most, and has a range of regional migration programs.

In partnership with State, Territory and local governments and regional authorities, the Australian Government continues to implement new regional migration initiatives to encourage skilled migration.



Linda Bailey (right) inspects a Deltapine trial.

These programs allow skilled migrants to experience the opportunities and lifestyles of Australia's regions while making significant contributions to the areas in which they settle.

Linda Bailey from Zimbabwe says being

sponsored by an employer in regional NSW was the best thing that ever happened to her and her family. In fact, she is one of the most enthusiastic Australians you could ever find, having become an Australian citizen in September 2004,

along with husband Grant and son Ryan.

"Being in a regional area in Australia is better than anything. We don't ever want to leave Australia — we'll even have all our holidays here," she says.

Her enthusiasm for her new country is perhaps understandable given her experiences in Zimbabwe. Linda worked as a plant breeder with the Tobacco Research Board in that country, but life became very difficult as law and order broke down in Zimbabwe.

"There was not much future to look forward to, especially for our son," she says.

Linda was sponsored to come to Australia by Deltapine Australia in November 2001.

Sponsoring Linda gave Deltapine some skills in their plant breeding program they weren't able to find in the local marketplace. She worked with Deltapine at Narrabri as an assistant plant breeder until February, 2004.

"We then bought a property over at Grafton, but I had trouble getting a job locally," Linda said.

"Then another job came up in cotton, with Serv-Ag Research at Goondiwindi. I've been more than happy about the move — Goondiwindi is a thriving town and there are a lot of very progressive people."

Linda Bailey says life in Australia is wonderful.

"To pay for private schools in Zimbabwe was beyond our means, but here the public education system is great.

"In Zimbabwe we were always security



Deltapine plant breeder Richard Leske and ex-GM John Molony with Linda Bailey.

conscious about locking our doors and our personal security. It has taken a year to get used to not having to be as cautious. Soon my son will be able to ride his bike down the street.

"It is so amazing to have this freedom," she says. "And apart from anything else, we now have a great cricket team to cheer for."

According to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Senator Amanda Vanstone, more skilled migrants than ever are choosing to call Australia's regional areas home.

In 2003–04, 12,725 visas were granted under State-specific and regional migration initiatives. This is an increase of 60 per cent over the previous year.

The Skill Matching Scheme, a useful

resource for employers, was introduced by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs in 1996 to match skilled migrants with skill shortages.

The newly enhanced internet version of the Skill Matching Database, includes details of around 6800 potential migrants, and is updated daily. Regional employers can use the database to view their qualifications and employment history.

"I would recommend the database to people overseas looking to come to Australia as a permanent resident," Linda said.

For more information on the Skill Matching Database, visit www.immi.gov.au/skills or talk to the Department of Immigration about skilled migration programs at the National Australian Cotton Trade Show at Moree on May 25–26. 🌱

HOW REGIONAL MIGRATION WORKS

Launched on July 1, 2004, the Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) visa is the newest initiative for regional migration. The SIR visa will help regional and low population growth areas attract, and retain, skilled migrants.

It provides for prospective skilled migrants with an interest in living and working in regional Australia. The visa also gives overseas students who have studied in Australia a chance to stay and contribute to regional growth.

SIR visa holders may apply for permanent residency via schemes such as the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) once they have been living in regional Australia for two years and employed for one year.

Employers can also sponsor employees directly using the RSMS. This scheme supports regional employers by allowing them to seek full-time skilled employees when the positions cannot be filled locally.

If employees need help finding suitable skilled workers, the web-based Skill Matching Database may be of assistance. This database includes the occupational and educational details of potential migrants.

Migrants registered on the database want to be matched either to specific jobs in regional Australia (through the RSMS) or to areas with employment opportunities appropriate to their skills. They have already satisfied the criteria for entrance to Australia in the areas of qualification, work experience, age and English language proficiency.

There are also temporary business entry arrangements which provide a fast, flexible way to recruit skilled workers for up to four years. Many employers go on to sponsor their employee permanently under the RSMS.

Areas covered by regional initiatives

Regional migration initiatives generally cover most areas of Australia except the major metropolitan areas.

More information about these initiatives is available on the DIMIA website at www.immi.gov.au/migration/regional.

Regional Outreach Officers (ROOs)

In order to promote regional migration options around Australia, a network of Regional Outreach Officers (ROOs) has been established. The officers are based in the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs' (DIMIA) business centres in each state and territory.

ROOs work closely with State, Territory and local governments, regional authorities, business and employer networks to assist regional Australia respond to its skilled employment needs. ROOs have a pivotal role in raising awareness and supporting state-specific and regional migration initiatives.

Contact details for ROOs: NSW 02 9893 4023 or Queensland 07 3360 5862.