

Working for Victoria

Agriculture Resilience and Recovery Program

Program Guidelines

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The Victorian Government acknowledges the ongoing strain of the COVID-19 pandemic on the food supply chain and agricultural workforce. The new \$ 5.2 million program provides broad support to deliver regional, or business-based solutions for business recovery, the provision of COVID safe operational environments, worker housing solutions and training support for employees.

1 Program Overview

The \$5.2 million Agriculture Resilience and Recovery Program (the Program) aims to support enduring solutions that address the needs of farm businesses and food processing businesses to prepare for and adapt to future threats to workforce stability and recover from the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on its workforce.

The Program provides funding to farm businesses, food processing businesses, local governments, not for profit community organisations, and accommodation providers to provide on-farm infrastructure, accommodation, business upgrades or new facilities, and support services for the agricultural workforce consistent with COVIDSafe standards.

The Program builds on the Agriculture Workforce Plan (AWP) which provided grants to agriculture and food supply chain businesses to respond to the COVID-19 situation through 2020-21. In recognition that the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact are ongoing, the Program focuses on supporting longer term solutions that build resilience and fast tracks recovery for Victorian farm and food processing businesses and their workforces.

Grants of \$10,000 - \$300,000 (GST exc) will be available under three streams:

1. The **Business Resilience and Recovery** stream will support eligible farm and food processing businesses to adapt business operations to manage the risk of, or to maintain production through, the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The **Place-based Worker Support** stream will support farm and food processing businesses to attract and retain a sustainable workforce, through increased supply and access to COVIDSafe worker accommodation in areas where accommodation shortages are a barrier for jobseekers.
3. The **Training and Education** stream will provide enduring, providing benefits to workers over several seasons' support for farm and food processing workers to access information and services and ensure businesses are providing COVIDSafe work practices for workers.

Grants above \$300,000 will be considered on a case by case basis in consultation between Rural Finance and Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (the Department) and relevant Local Government Authority.

The Program aims to:

- support agricultural farm and food processing businesses in regional Victoria to build resilience to and recover from the impacts of COVID-19
- increase the stability and safety of the workforce of these businesses
- deliver solutions that have enduring benefits to build the long-term resilience of businesses to manage through ongoing COVID-19 pandemic impacts
- deliver solutions that enable businesses to adapt and fast track their recovery from COVID-19 impact
- address ongoing accommodation supply issues in regional areas where accommodation shortages are barriers to the attraction and retention of a sustainable workforce.

2 Program eligibility

2.1 Applicant eligibility criteria

- 2.1.1 All applications must satisfy both the program parameters and eligibility criteria set out below.
- 2.1.2 Applications are open to primary producer businesses, food processing businesses, local governments, not for profit community organisations, or accommodation providers.
- 2.1.3 Applications will not be accepted for funding for retrospective works or activities that have been undertaken prior to receiving any in principle offer.
- 2.1.4 Applications will not be accepted for funding for works that have been supported through other grant programs such as (but not limited to) Agriculture Workforce Plan – business adaptation grants or the Seasonal Worker Accommodation Program.
- 2.1.5 Projects must be compliant with COVIDSafe best practices (such as spreading out workers, enabling worker bubbles and separated work areas, and improved hygiene).
- 2.1.6 Applicants must provide evidence to demonstrate the feasibility of delivering the project. For example, indicative support from the relevant local government, project costings and timelines reflecting current availability of supplies etc.
- 2.1.7 To be eligible to apply, applicants must meet the following criteria:
- be one of the following:
 - a) They employ staff and have a primary producer or food processing operation located in rural or regional Victoria (i.e., located in one of the local government areas outlined in Appendix 1) (Eligible Industry Business) (Category One Applicants); or
 - b) They are a:
 - (i) Local Government Authority;
 - (ii) a not for profit organisation (including religious organisations and/or community groups); or
 - (iii) an accommodation provider,seeking funding to be used solely to support an Eligible Industry Business (Category Two Applicants).
 - Applicants must be an eligible legal entity which includes:
 - companies incorporated pursuant to the *Corporations Act 2001* and registered with the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (and including where the company is acting in its capacity as a trustee); and
 - individuals, including if they are acting as part of a partnership but only if all individuals in the partnership will be legally liable for any agreement entered into; and
 - an incorporated association incorporated pursuant to the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012*; and
 - a Local Government Authority; and
 - other incorporated entities approved by the Department.
 - Applicants cannot be in voluntary administration or receivership.
 - Applicants must be registered with Worksafe to demonstrate a commitment to providing a safe and healthy workplace.
 - For Category One Applicants, the following additional criteria applies:
 - They hold an Australian Business Number (ABN) and held that ABN at 16 March 2020 (date that the COVID-19 State of Emergency was declared).

- They have, or are expected to have, a turnover of more than \$75,000 in the 2020- 21 financial year; and/or had a turnover of more than \$75,000 in 2019-20; or can show that under normal conditions¹ would generate a turnover of more than \$75,000
- They must contribute at least 50% of the total project costs.
- At least 50% of the annual turnover of the business relates to one or more of the following industry sectors²:
 - Primary producers, including:
 - Horticulture (including nurseries, flower farms and growers of inedible plants)
 - Viticulture and wine
 - Cropping (Grains and hay)
 - Livestock (including meat, wool, eggs and other animal products)
 - Dairy
 - Aquaculture Production
 - Seafood
 - Food processors, including:
 - Dairy
 - Meat, poultry, fish and seafood
 - Eggs
 - Grain
 - Fruit & vegetable
 - Small goods (e.g. cured meats)
- For Category Two Applicants, the following additional criteria applies:
 - The proposed project is undertaken in partnership with or supporting Eligible Industry Business, and the proposal is designed for the benefit of the primary producer or food processing workforce.
 - Where the applicant is a Local Government Authority it must be in one of the areas listed in Appendix 1.
 - Where the applicant is an accommodation provider, it must contribute at least 50% of the total project costs.

2.2 General Project Eligibility

- 2.2.1 The proposed project will support jobs in primary producer or food processing businesses that are based in rural and regional Victoria (i.e., one of the areas listed in Appendix 1).
- 2.2.2 Projects must meet the relevant Stream project eligibility criteria and program parameters outlined in sections 3, 4, 5 and 6.

2.3 Evidence of eligibility and compliance

- 2.3.1 Applicants will be required to attest to their eligibility and may be required to provide supporting documentation through the application process.
- 2.3.2 Applicants will be required to comply with any legal requirements of Rural Finance and provide evidence and supporting information at the request of Rural Finance³.

¹ Normal meaning not impacted by drought, COVID-19 or other economic stress events.

² Business operations relating to transport, distribution, hospitality, retail and wholesaling (including farmers markets) are not eligible for support under the Program.

2.4 Application, assessment and contracting process

- 2.4.1 Prior to submitting a formal application, applicants must read these Program Guidelines to establish eligibility.
- 2.4.2 Rural Finance will provide the applicant with an application form for financial assistance through this Program.
- 2.4.3 All applications will undergo an assessment process as follows:
- The eligibility of the applicant and the project will be assessed against the eligibility criteria in section 2, the relevant Stream project eligibility criteria and program parameters outlined in sections 3, 4,5 and 6 and the Assessment Criteria below.
 - All applicants will be required to declare whether the requested funding support would be used to employ or support the employment of persons under 18 years of age. If so, they will be required to produce evidence of being incorporated as a separate legal entity and being appropriately insured against child abuse (which will be pre-requisites for funding approval).
- 2.4.4 Assessment Criteria
- The application will be assessed for a standard quality against the following criteria (Assessment Criteria):
 - Benefit of the project – e.g demonstrated importance to the region, demonstrated likely improved resilience for the business against potential COVID-19 impacts, such as permanent availability of workforce accommodation that meets COVIDSafe best practice.
 - Value for money – e.g. financial assistance requested, relevant co-contribution committed, and reasonableness of proposed expenses.
 - Long term benefits – e.g. how the project will deliver benefits over multiple seasons.
 - Need – e.g demonstrated need for assistance to manage the risk of, maintain production through, or adapt in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, risk of failure/job losses etc.
 - Criticality of the businesses that will benefit from the project to the supply chain.
 - Decisions on all matters relating to the awarding of grant funding under this Program are at the absolute discretion of Rural Finance. This includes approving a lesser amount than applied for.
 - Applicants may be subject to a Probity Check.
 - Applicants seeking funding above \$50,000 will be subject to a Financial Risk Assessment as part of the application process. Applicants may be requested to provide audited financial statements or other supporting documentation for this purpose.
 - Rural Finance reserves the right to request the applicant provide further information should it be deemed necessary.
 - Successful applicants will receive an offer in principle and will be reimbursed for expenses agreed in-principle on completion of the agreed milestones for the project (See section 3.3) (noting that applicants will be required to contribute 50% of the project costs (with the exception of applications from Local Government Authorities and not for profit organisations)).
- 2.4.5 If an applicant receives an offer in principle, recipients will be required to comply with any requirements set by Rural Finance.

2.5 Other conditions of this program

³ Rural Finance is a trading name of Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Limited, the administrator of this Program on behalf of the Department.

- 2.5.1 These Guidelines and any discussions you may have with Rural Finance or any Department representative are for information only, and do not constitute advice. Applicants should seek independent advice before making an application or accepting an offer in principle.
- 2.5.2 Applications are at the cost of the applicant.
- 2.5.3 All funding recipients must agree to comply with the reporting and evaluation requirements of any in-principle offer.
- 2.5.4 Any tax implications resulting from any funding provided through this program are solely the responsibility of any employer or employee who benefits from the support.
- 2.5.5 Any funding recipients will be required to cooperate with Rural Finance and the Department in any promotional or marketing activities relating to the Program and any support provided.
- 2.5.6 Rural Finance reserves the right to amend these Guidelines at any time as it deems appropriate, in consultation with the Department.

2.6 Confidentiality/Privacy Statement

- 2.6.1 Any personal information provided by the Applicant or a third party in an application will be collected by Rural Finance for the purpose of program administration. This information may be provided to the Department, and other Victorian Government bodies for the purposes of assessing applications. If there is an intention to include personal information about third parties in the application, please ensure they are aware of and consent to the contents of this privacy statement.
- 2.6.2 Rural Finance may provide information to the Department, and other Victorian Government bodies for the purposes of reporting, providing visibility to government on the benefits of the grants Program and evaluating the Program's effectiveness.
- 2.6.3 Any personal information collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred will be held in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)* and other applicable laws.
- 2.6.4 The Department is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information. Enquiries about access to personal information, or for other concerns regarding the privacy of personal information, can be emailed to the Department's Privacy Unit at privacy@ecodev.vic.gov.au. The Department's privacy policy is also available by emailing the Department's Privacy Unit.

3 Program parameters

3.1 Program Dates

- 3.1.1 Applications can be made until 29 October 2021.

3.2 Available funding – overall

- 3.2.1 Grants of between \$10,000 and \$300,000 (GST excl) may be available per application.
- 3.2.2 Grants will only be offered for up to 50% of the total project costs (except for applications made by Local Government Authorities and not for profit organisations which may apply for grants to cover the total project costs).
- 3.2.3 Grants above \$300,000 will be considered on a case-by-case basis in consultation between Rural Finance, the Department and relevant Local Government Authority.
- 3.2.4 The applicant will be required to commit to providing the funding for the remaining 50 % of the total project costs and any cost overruns (unless it is exempt from requiring a contribution as the applicant is a Local Government Authority or a not-for-profit organisation).

- 3.2.5 Applicants can submit a maximum of three separate applications but can only be awarded a maximum of up to \$300,000 (GST exc) in grant funding in total across all successful applications under the Program for the life of the Program (unless an application for a higher grant funding amount is approved in consultation with the Department and the relevant Local Government Authority).
- 3.2.6 The provision of any grant funding to applicants, and the amount of funding, will be at the discretion of Rural Finance and its assessment of whether the application aligns with the intent of the Program and guidance.

3.3 Evidence for Payment

- 3.3.1 Applicants will only be paid for eligible expenditure incurred and substantiated with evidence up to the maximum amount stated in the letter of offer received from Bendigo and Adelaide Bank.

4 Business Resilience and Recovery

- 4.1.1 The Business Resilience Stream will support Category One Applicants to adapt its business operations to manage the risk of and maintain production through, the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2 Eligible projects

- 4.2.1 The Business Resilience Stream may provide funding to support the following business activities where the applicant can demonstrate that the activity will ensure compliance with COVID-19 health and safety social distancing requirements or adapt to required business changes imposed from, or to maintain production through the COVID-19 pandemic:
- upgrade of workplace facilities to ensure compliance with COVID-19 health and safety social distancing requirements
 - upgrade or installation of workplace facilities to enable the business to adapt or deliver new production systems that support economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic
 - logistics and coordination services to develop, oversee and implement works that support and changes production systems.

4.3 Non-eligible projects

- 4.3.1 The Business Resilience Stream will not fund:
- Temporary costs incurred by employers to adapt workplaces to ensure compliance with COVID-19, including but not limited to:
 - consumables such as disposable Personal Protective Equipment, hand sanitizer and worker clothing
 - cleaning costs or equipment
 - costs associated with transitioning and supporting staff to work from home, including but not limited to the purchase of IT equipment and network upgrades
 - hire of temporary facilities
 - activities that do not support either the retention of existing jobs or employment of new workers;
 - business as usual expenses that have not changed since the implementation of the COVID-19 social distancing requirements;
 - purchase of recreational equipment for employees not directly related to the provision of accommodation or the work activities (e.g. gaming consoles, sporting equipment);

- activities primarily undertaken to meet standard (non-COVID-19) regulatory requirements (except for obtaining planning or building permits directly related to the project being undertaken);
- purchase of property (land);
- ongoing operating costs or salary subsidies; or
- activities that have already received or will receive funding through commonwealth, state or local government sources.

5 Place-based Worker Support

5.1.1 The Place-based Worker Support Stream will support eligible applicants to attract and retain a sustainable workforce, through increased supply and access to COVIDSafe worker accommodation in areas where accommodation shortages are a barrier for jobseekers.

5.2 Eligible projects

5.2.1 This Place-based Worker Support Stream may provide funding towards:

- the establishment of new COVIDSafe accommodation for workers.
- modifications to existing accommodation or facilities, (including kitchen, laundry, toilets, bathroom facilities) that encourage COVIDSafe practices, including separation and hygiene, and upgrades to this infrastructure that consider cultural needs that may be a barrier to COVIDSafe accommodation supply for seasonal workers.
- development of proposals and business cases that encourage private sector investment in accommodation for agricultural workers.

5.2.2 An applicant is eligible for funding under the Place-based Worker Support Stream if the applicant meets the general program eligibility criteria and can demonstrate accommodation supply is provided for the housing of workers of Eligible Industry Businesses.

5.3 Non-eligible projects

5.3.1 This Place-based Worker Support Stream will not fund:

- rental payments, hire or mortgage payments
- salary subsidies, including for workers sourcing their own accommodation
- rental of temporary accommodation facilities (eg hire of temporary cabins, toilet facilities)
- any ongoing costs of accommodation or upgrades to accommodation previously funded under this program or other commonwealth, state or local government sources, such as activities previously funded under *Seasonal Worker Accommodation Program*
- purchase of property (land); and
- worker accommodation or projects that have already received or will receive funding through other commonwealth, state or local government sources.

6 Training and Education

6.1.1 The Training and Education Stream will support eligible applicants to deliver training to primary producer and food processing workers, now and into the future, that has been necessitated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.2 Eligible projects

6.2.1 Grants will be available in the Training and Education Stream to support:

- training and education programs that will enable an organisation or business to provide enduring⁴ support to primary producer and food processing workers, such as development of a suite of training packages that has been necessitated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.3 Non-eligible projects

6.3.1 The Training and Education Stream will not fund:

- temporary training and education required as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including but not limited to:
 - hire of training providers or facilitators to deliver training sessions; or
 - hire or provision of venues, transport or catering.
- where the required training is already available free of charge through other providers, such as the Department of Education and Training or industry bodies;
- ongoing operating costs, including any IT costs or salary subsidies for staff to deliver or participate in training; or
- activities that have already received or will receive funding through commonwealth, state or local government sources.

Authorised by the Hon Mary-Anne Thomas,

Minister for Regional Development
Minister for Agriculture

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⁴ Enduring means the project/activity will provide benefits to workers over several seasons. An example is training materials that can be used for the coming season and beyond.

Appendix 1 – Eligible rural and regional Victorian Local Government Areas (as listed in the *Regional Development Victoria Act 2002*)

Hume Region

- Alpine Shire Council
- Benalla Rural City Council
- Falls Creek Alpine Resort
- Greater Shepparton City Council
- Indigo Shire Council
- Lake Mountain Alpine Resort
- Mansfield Shire Council
- Mitchell Shire Council
- Moira Shire Council
- Mount Buller Alpine Resort
- Mount Hotham Alpine Resort
- Mount Stirling Alpine Resort
- Murrindindi Shire Council
- Strathbogie Shire Council
- Towong Shire Council
- Wangaratta Rural City Council
- Wodonga City Council

Gippsland Region

- Bass Coast Shire Council
- Baw Baw Shire Council
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Latrobe City Council
- Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort
- South Gippsland Shire Council
- Wellington Shire Council

Loddon Mallee Region

- Buloke Shire Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Greater Bendigo City Council
- Loddon Shire Council
- Macedon Ranges Shire Council
- Mildura Rural City Council
- Mount Alexander Shire Council
- Swan Hill Rural City Council

Grampians Region

- Ararat Rural City Council
- Ballarat City Council
- Golden Plains Shire Council
- Hepburn Shire Council
- Hindmarsh Shire Council
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Moorabool Shire Council
- Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Pyrenees Shire Council
- West Wimmera Shire Council
- Yarriambiack Shire Council

Barwon South West Region

- Borough of Queenscliff
- Colac-Otway Shire Council
- Corangamite Shire Council
- Glenelg Shire Council
- Greater Geelong City Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- Surf Coast Shire Council
- Warrnambool City Council

