

Working holiday makers in Australia: abused, exploited . . . and essential to Australia's food security.

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Abstract

Tourism and work were once considered to be separate spheres of activity, but now scholars are well aware of their various entanglements. Working holiday makers are one of the more conspicuous examples of people who blur distinctions between work and tourism, labour and leisure. Australia's working holiday visa program began in 1975 as a vehicle for cultural exchange but has now become essential for supplying Australia's agricultural sector with flexible, temporary workers. As working holiday makers comprise one quarter of Australia's agricultural workforce, they make important contributions to maintaining Australia's food security and economy. But the long-term productivity of Australian agriculture is threatened both by the effects of climate change – which will make outdoor work more difficult, and the cases of sexual harassment, exploitation and withholding of wages increasingly reported by working holiday makers. This presentation explores these issues and provides a speculative account of what Australia's agricultural workforce might be like in 2050.