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**Skilled migrant labour vital for dairy, says peak body**

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**For Immediate Release**

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DAIRY businesses are losing up to \$364 million each year in employee turnover, with Australia's peak dairy farmer group warning the problem will only get worse unless the federal Government acts immediately to solve the industry's labour crisis.

Australian Dairy Farmers, in a submission to the Department of Jobs and Small Business review of the Skilled Migration Occupation Lists, called on the federal Government to overhaul its skilled migration program to reflect workforce needs.

"Agriculture is a growth industry in Australia with a target to increase our gross value of production from \$60 billion currently to more than \$100 billion in 2030," ADF President Terry Richardson said.

"There are many drivers required to achieve this target. A permanent skilled workforce is one of the highest priorities."

Farmers were set back when the Government abolished the 457 visa system which had been used to recruit skilled overseas labour, a decision made on the back of Fair Work Commission findings that 40 per cent of visa holders were no longer employed by a sponsor or being underpaid.

Mr Richardson said the dairy industry's 25,000-strong workforce would suffer if other sectors continued to abuse Australia's record high annual immigration intake of 190,000, most of whom come under the skilled migration program.

"Australian dairy farmers have a reputation for running professional operations and paying above the award rate, but our industry will suffer if we can't recruit foreigners with either experience on dairy farms or tertiary qualifications in agriculture science from their home country," Mr Richardson said.

"Unfortunately, many of the locals who are being pushed into these jobs don't have the necessary skills to handle the roles.

"They find it difficult to satisfy food safety standards, administer veterinary and other animal husbandry requirements, operate technology or are generally unable to fulfil the obligations of a skilled dairy farm manager or leading hand."

The 457 visa stream was replaced in March by a Temporary Skills Shortage (TSS) visa for short and medium-term employment, but farmers hoping the new visa will solve their labour woes will be disappointed.

The Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), which determines the roles eligible for TSS visas, lists *dairy cattle farming* as the dairy industry's only job, overlooking skilled positions including business manager, production manager and senior farm hand.

Mr Richardson said the Government needed to overhaul its occupation classification and visa systems to reflect the modern reality of the dairy industry, including providing skilled overseas workers access to longer visas and a pathway to permanent residency.

"Dairy farming is currently listed as a short-term skill, meaning anyone who comes out on a TSS visa can only stay for up to two years, with the option of a two-year renewal," he said.

"Skilled migrants will only apply for these roles when they are guaranteed four, not two, years of employment and have a pathway to permanent residence."

“Dairy farmers need reliable access to skilled overseas workers and will continue to struggle to staff their businesses unless the Government makes drastic changes to the visa classifications.”

The ADF submission to the Department of Jobs and Small Business is available [here](#).

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