

# Labour FAQs

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Geoff Lewis of Lewis Farms, one of the founders of the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, is well-placed to provide a perspective on the scheme as well as to explain it. What follows is Geoff's response to some FAQs (frequency asked questions).

**1. History can tell us a lot about “how and why” things have evolved the way they have. What are three things from the past that have informed the current state and why are they important?**

- In the early 2000s, there was an industry desire and a political push to diversify the ag sector with the big constraint for the horticulture sector being labour. So the horticulture sector lobbied the Helen Clark-led Labour Government to look to the Pacific to provide seasonal labour as a scheme to allow the sector to grow.
- Initially the focus was to grow the export sector and that was the political motivation.
- As the years progressed, the domestic production sector has rationalised from smaller family businesses to larger family corporates and companies. This has meant there is a need to add RSE to this workforce to supplement the domestic labour supply, especially if there is a seasonal peak to production.

**2. Given the current settings, what are the areas vegetable growers should be focused on (thinking new entrants opposed to seasoned campaigners like Lewis Farms)?**

- New Zealanders first policy, supply full time labour resources for domestic production.

**RSE can fill three roles:**

- For a business, an RSE team can come to fill a seasonal peak
- A mix of small teams can come through the year and increase the business's total workforce, including during seasonal peaks
- An RSE team can be shared between employers as a joint ATR (agreement to recruit) to manage seasonal peaks.

**3. Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated Chief Executive, Colin Bond talked about “mutually beneficial” at the RSE Conference. What do you think this means for an employer?**

- RSE is a programme that requires a commitment to have a relationship with a Pacific country, and its communities and families. If an employer is prepared to engage at this level, then the employer's life will be hugely enriched. If this engagement is not for employer, then this scheme is not for that employer.

**4. We have heard new entrants to RSE have a number of pain points. What is your message regarding these pain points?**

***Compliance cycles – working with Immigration New Zealand (INZ), working with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD)?***

- There are many masters and requirements as part of the scheme.
- MSD. An employer must demonstrate the commitment to the local workforce before being allowed to bring in offshore workers.
- Getting your first RSE status can be quite challenging. The status lasts three years.
- For each RSE group to be brought in, you will need to apply to the RSE Unit for an ATR (INZ1141). This must be done five months before arrival of the team. This ATR has many requirements and needs to be well planned.

***The new rules for multi entry visa, movement, wages, accommodation. Has this gone far enough and what needs to be considered to get the most out of the system?***

- This is a great step forward and is as good as we will get for a while. The only change will be (I hope) clarification of the rules around accommodation and its deductions.
- I have not described other details as they are well publicised.

***Skills recognition and returning labour are key pillars of RSE. How should this be optimised for both staff and employer?***

- Productivity for the first couple of RSE years can be quite average. For many, Year 2 is a big leap but for others, it is Year 3.
- Having your harvest teams correctly balanced with the correct leadership is important.

**5. Information to understand compliance. Where should vegetable employers go to get the right information, at the right time, to find the right solution? Who is our representative or facilitator for RSE?**

- There is no mother ship in terms of RSE learning, help and entrance. This could be perceived as a problem, but that's what it is.

**There are three main ports for new entrants:**

- The Regional Labour Governance Group (RLGG) is a grouping of growers, regionally based, that will most probably have a grower whom a new entrant may know.
- Find a grower in your sector who could guide you through the opportunity and how it may work. A new entrant needs to discuss the scheme and how to ensure it creates value for a new grower.
- If the initial exploration gives a new entrant confidence that the scheme is for them, then the mechanisms need to be discussed and learnt. The INZ Relationship Managers (Tony Jensen, North Island; and Michael Jones, South Island) are excellent resources.

**6. In your opinion, what does Vegetables NZ / HortNZ need to do for its employers to get the most out of the RSE scheme?**

- HortNZ is funding four regional roles across the country that will bring RSE skills and knowledge to the sector. It is intended that these regional people will support employment initiatives, and bring employers together to discuss collaboration.

**7. For you, what does RSE success look like?**

- RSE success is having a skilled motivated RSE team to be part of our wider harvest team.