

+ Support for Queensland agricultural jobs during COVID-19

Vital regional Queensland agriculture jobs and the state's contribution to the export avocado market will be supported through COVID-19 as farming business access COVID-19 Jobs Support Loans.

Touchwood Farming's Andy and Judy Veal are yet to see the full impact of export restrictions on their South Burnett avocado production but have already been able to prepare for future uncertainty by securing regional jobs and maintaining production capacity throughout the season.

The loan scheme administered by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA), provides finance of up to \$250,000 for businesses and non-profit organisations impacted by COVID-19 to assist with carry-on expenses such as employee wages, rent and rates and other expenditure.

Judy said while she expected the full impact of COVID-19 was still to come, already access to supplies from overseas were limited and avocado exports to Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong were restricted.

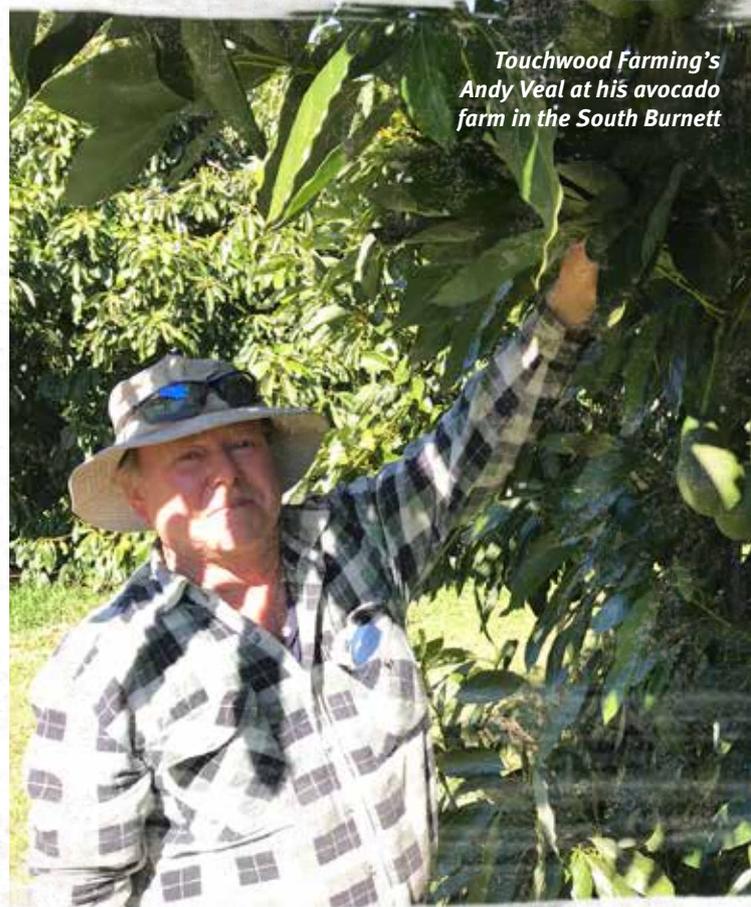
Potential for reduced demand in the domestic food service industry could also have an impact on harvesting capacity, creating reduced and uncertain income.

The enterprise produces on average 35,000 to 45,000 5.5kg trays of avocados a year but recent drought conditions and hot summers prior to COVID-19 had severely impacted capacity across the two farms, with more than 2,400 trees.

"There is a little bit of export and some air space here and there, but that has been the biggest challenge. Those countries still want the fruit but getting the air space to get it to them is challenging at the moment," Judy said.

"Our premium fruit goes straight to Woolworths but other classes are directed to the food service industry which includes cruise ships and airlines which has seen a big impact.

"How we will be impacted from here, we're not entirely sure. Going forward, we're not sure what's going to happen."



Touchwood Farming's Andy Veal at his avocado farm in the South Burnett

"We have been able to support existing staff but also put on the workers where they are needed"

Judy said the funding allowed the business to continue supporting five jobs plus additional workers during harvest in May.

"We have been able to support existing staff but also put on the workers where they are needed. The work is there but we need the ability to pay those people to do the work," she said.

"We're very mindful about supporting and buying local. It's important because if the farmer can bring workers in, they can spend money in local towns."

Judy said she contacted QRIDA to apply for the COVID-19 Jobs Support Loan.

"When I got the call to say the application was approved, it was a massive weight off my shoulders," she said.

"To say it's a safety net is the truest thing we can at the moment, we've got the operating money to keep us going."

For more information see www.qrida.qld.gov.au/covid19jobssupportloans or **Freecall 1800 623 946**.

QRIDA is delivering the \$1 billion COVID-19 Jobs Support Loan Scheme on behalf of the Queensland Government.