



NEW ZEALAND  
*Kiwifruit*  
SEASONAL LABOUR  
REPORT 2023



Presented by

**NZKGI**

NEW ZEALAND KIWIFRUIT GROWERS



# INTRODUCTION

Kiwifruit is New Zealand’s largest horticultural export, with 135 million trays of kiwifruit being picked for overseas markets in 2023, the equivalent of over \$2 billion in revenue. This is predicted to increase by over 50 percent by 2028 with 218 million trays of kiwifruit set to be exported that season. As the industry continues to grow at this rate, the number of workers required to work on the orchards and in the packhouses also increases. The industry is working hard to ensure a stable and efficient workforce, alongside innovating in the automation space, to support the continued growth for years to come so that the supply chain is future-fit to meet demand.



## New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated (NZKGI)

NZKGI is the representative body which advocates for New Zealand’s 2,800 kiwifruit Growers. There are over 3,000 registered orchards in New Zealand and more than 14,000 hectares of kiwifruit in production. 80 percent of New Zealand-grown kiwifruit comes from the Bay of Plenty.

# 2023 SEASON CHALLENGES



The 2023 season presented unique challenges to the kiwifruit industry compared to recent years.

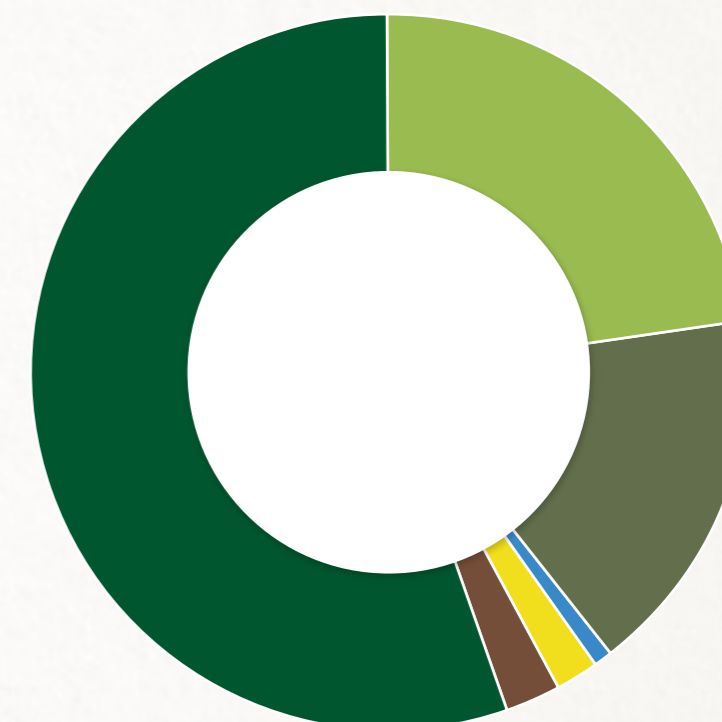
This season was the first full year to have the New Zealand borders open and saw the return of working holiday visa (WHV) holders to the industry with a reported 80 percent of pre-COVID levels in New Zealand by the start of the harvest season. This is reflected in the seasonal worker breakdown, with employers reporting that 16 percent of their workforce comprises of WHV holders, which is nearing the 25 percent seen pre-2020.

As well as the industry having a good supply of labour, major weather events in the North Island caused a large drop in crop which meant labour demands decreased also.

Due to this, employers reported low vacancy compared to previous years. Though this lessened concerns around labour demand, the industry still needs to be consistent with labour attraction as crop volumes increase in future years.

The decrease in crop volumes also meant that the 2023 season was the first to see a shift in the seasonal labour demand peak, with more workers needed for summer work than harvest. This trend is set to continue even as the crop volumes increase as efficiency in work has disproportionately increased in the post-harvest sector compared to other parts of the industry, largely because of the introduction of automation.

Seasonal worker percentage during harvest



NZ seasonal 55.3% | RSE 22.8% | Working holiday 16.7% | Other work visa 2.4% | SSE 2% | Student 0.8%

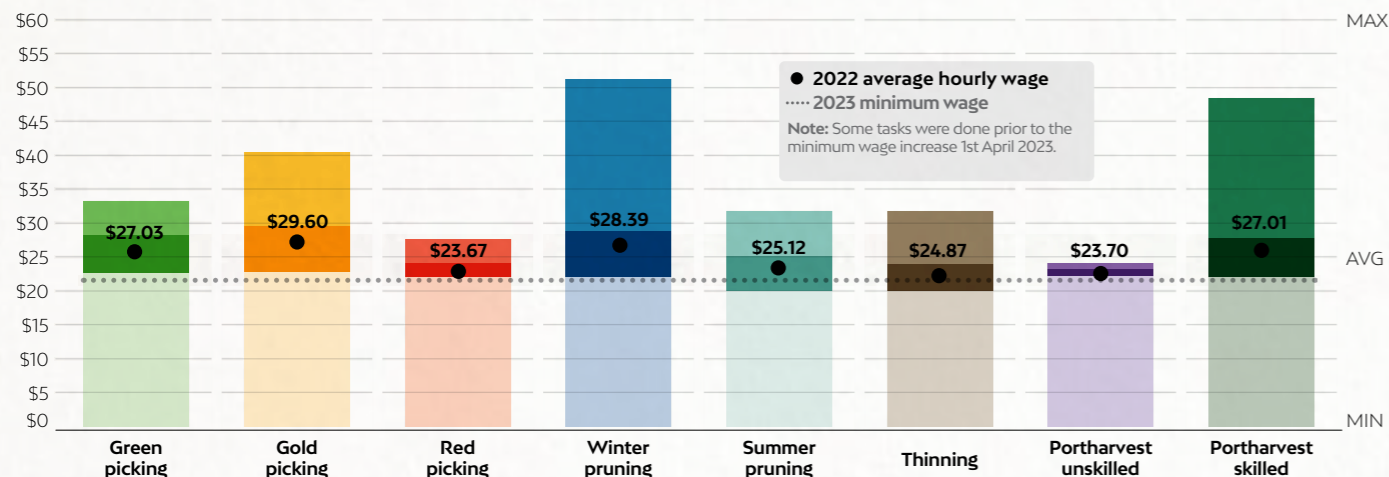
# THE 2023 SEASON

## 2023 season payrates

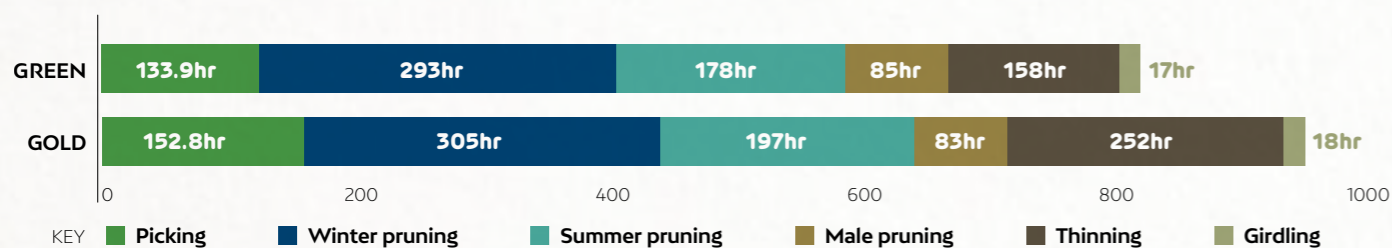
Payrates in the 2023 season have remained consistent with previous years' trends and continue to be well above the minimum wage in New Zealand. The average payrate for picking kiwifruit, both gold and green, was around \$29.



### Hourly payrates



### Orchard operations / per hectare



### Average length of employment

	NZ seasonal	RSE	Working holiday	Student Visa	SSE	Other Work Visa
1-3 weeks	8%	5%	0%	50%	14%	33%
3-12 weeks	48%	0%	85%	50%	29%	50%
3-6 months	32%	27%	15%	0%	57%	17%
6 months +	12%	73%	0%	0%	0%	0%

### Trays per person / per hour



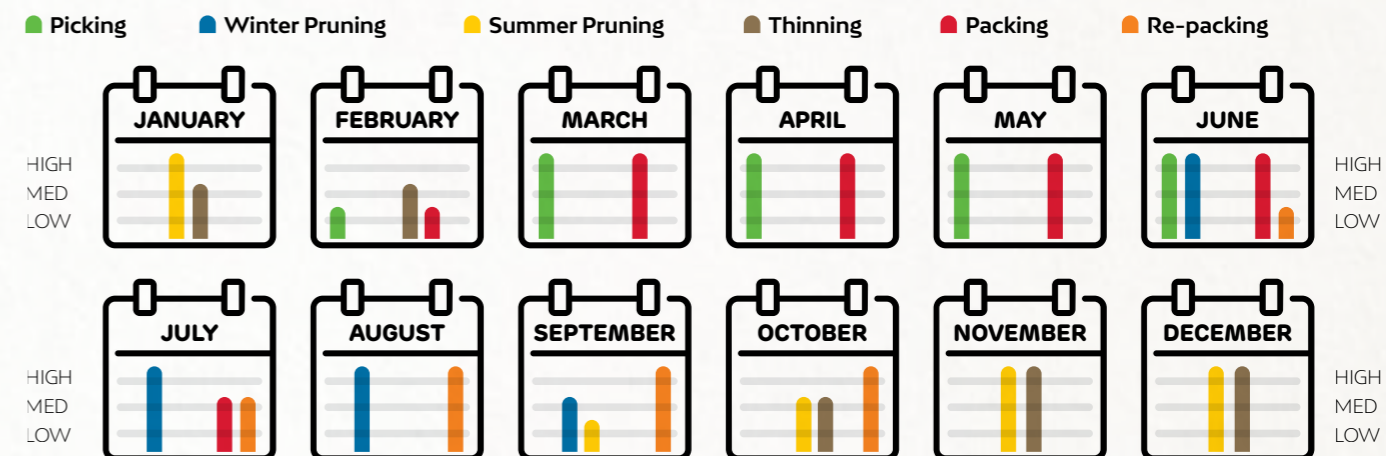
# THE KIWIFRUIT INDUSTRY'S SEASONALITY

The kiwifruit industry operates on a schedule that requires specific tasks to be completed during certain periods of time. This results in fluctuations in labour demands throughout the season, leading to seasonal employment opportunities within the industry.

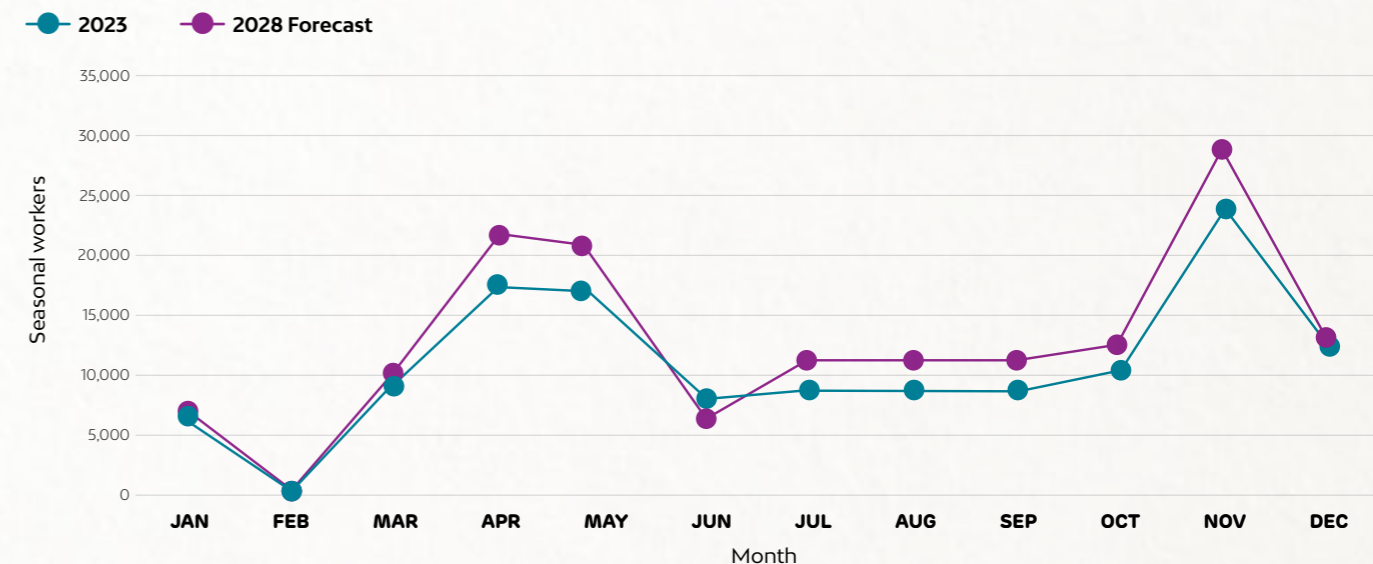


Looking ahead, the industry will start to see the peak of seasonal labour demands during the summer work period (November - January) as more hectares are planted and start producing.

### Industry pressures by month



### Monthly demand for seasonal workers



# THE SEASONAL WORKFORCE

## Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE)

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme is critical to the kiwifruit industry. While providing only 23 percent of the seasonal workforce in 2023, these workers provide stability and reliability to the industry, especially when there are other gaps in the workforce. The RSE scheme has been in place for 15 years and has grown from 5,000 workers in 2007 to 19,000 in 2023. The workers bring much-needed labour and efficiency to the horticulture and viticulture sectors and the scheme has very positive impacts on the Pacific Island countries.



## Accommodation

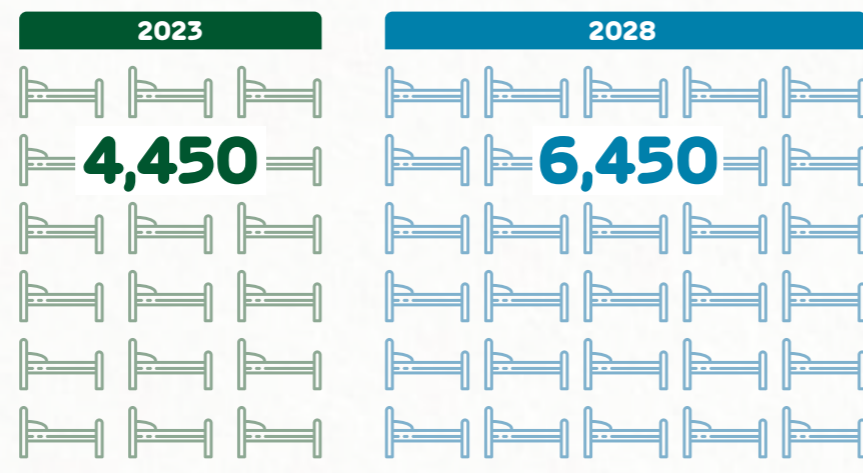
In the Bay of Plenty region, there has been a shortage of accommodation for seasonal workers which causes challenges when trying to grow the workforce. In particular, the smaller Western Bay of Plenty towns where most orchards and some packhouses are located. This means that some employers have resorted to building or converting existing accommodation to facilitate employees near the workplace. In 2023 surveyed employers indicated that they had 4,450 beds available for seasonal workers, with plans for 6,450 additional beds by 2028.

## Worker welfare

Worker welfare is always a focus for the kiwifruit industry and becomes more apparent when there are worker shortages within the industry. NZKGI continues to assist in this space by providing resources to support the welfare of staff. Since 2018, all employers must be registered and audited through the internationally recognised GLOBALG.A.P (Good Agricultural Practice) and GRASP (GLOBALG.A.P Risk Assessment on Social Practice) programmes. This gives a high bar for new employers to meet before they can become part

## WORKER WELFARE IS ALWAYS A FOCUS FOR THE KIWIFRUIT INDUSTRY AND BECOMES MORE APPARENT WHEN THERE ARE WORKER SHORTAGES WITHIN THE INDUSTRY.

### Five year planned accommodation



of the industry. Additionally, there are several methods where employees' concerns and complaints can be voiced and addressed. This focus on worker welfare goes a long way towards dismissing the lingering misconceptions that deter potential employees from the industry.

## Transport

An incentive some employers also use is subsidised transport to and from the workplace. In 2023, the average subsidised travel cost for employees for this was \$5.35 per day and 65 percent of surveyed employers indicated they have provided some form of transport.

# FUTURE OF THE KIWIFRUIT INDUSTRY

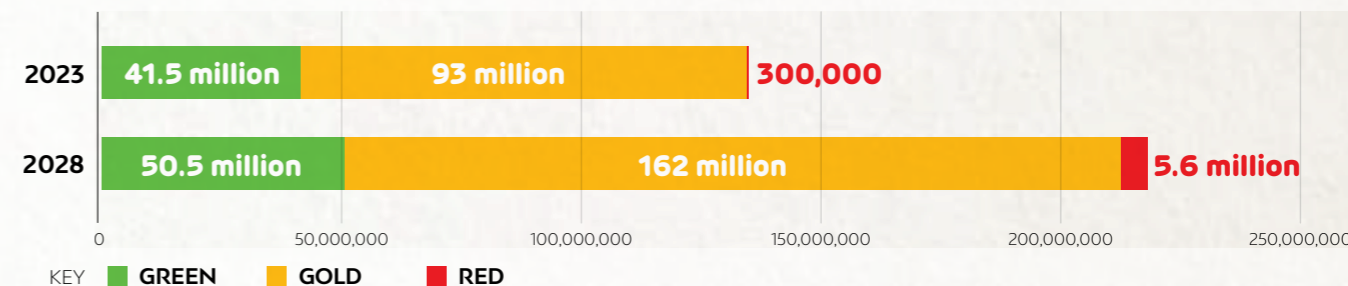
## Possible future challenges

As the industry continues to grow, there will be additional challenges the industry must face in addition to the current ones. These include:

- Increase in Gold kiwifruit production and the introduction of Red.**  
 Both varieties are more labour-intensive and therefore could offer limited opportunities for automation in the orchard space.
- New Zealand is facing a national labour shortage as the NZ workforce leaves the country for options overseas.**  
 This means the kiwifruit industry will be competing with other industries for labour, where the chance for full-time work exists.
- Accommodation constraints for RSE's**  
 To be part of the RSE scheme, employers need to provide accommodation to their RSE employees. Due to the limited sources of accommodation available, many employees have to turn to purpose-built facilities which can be very costly and make the scheme unavailable to many employers.
- Motivation and quality of the workforce attracted to the industry varies considerably.**  
 This can be damaging to the reputation of the industry and lead to a possible loss of the workforce in the future.



### Total trays — 2023 vs 2028



## Current strategies to aid in seasonal labour attraction

With the ever-changing landscape in the labour space, NZKGI is strongly supporting the industry to succeed. The industry has several work streams as well as the ongoing NZKGI Labour Attraction Strategy campaign to entice interest in working within the industry. These efforts include:

- Improving payrates and working conditions**  
 Most employers offer at least the living wage, with some jobs paying significantly more
- NZKGI-led training programmes and career development**  
 Working with training providers to ensure training is fit for purpose  
 Giving a wider understanding of the career pathways available
- Investment in technology/automation**  
 Looking for ways to promote efficiencies and reduce reliance on low-skilled and hard to fill positions.
- Collaboration with schools**  
 Heightened awareness of careers and pathways within the kiwifruit industry via school job fairs and presentations  
 Advertisements for school holidays and weekend jobs
- Collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD)**  
 Support for New Zealand seasonal workers and employers.  
 Training programmes

# 5-YEAR ORCHARD OUTLOOK

**2023 season  
versus 2028 season**

