

## 16 June 2020 – SBS Dateline: Apples & Oranges

Dateline investigates how COVID-19 is disrupting food production in Australia, the UK, and Germany. Are there enough workers to ensure crops are harvested and food makes it the table?

<https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/1745497667922/dateline-pandemic-farming-apples-and-oranges>

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Presenter:

*Back in the apple orchard, I meet the boss. So how many acres do you have here?*

Fiona Hall (**Fiona**), Director, Caernarvon Cherry Company (she is wearing a Caernarvon Cherry uniform).  
*Ahh, 250 acres of Apples and Cherries.*

Presenter:

*Fiona Hall has worked this property in NSW for 20 years.  
And how would you describe the season this far?*

Fiona

*Well its been tough. We've had big water issues, water storage issues, our bores went dry. And the beginning of this year, we ran out of water on this far (Caernarvon). And then you throw Covid on top of that, its been pretty tough. (Giggles). Yeah - It hasn't been easy. (13.35)*

13.40s

Presenter:

*In the packing sheds, social distancing is another headache to contend with.  
So what have we got in here?*

Fiona:

*Packing pink ladies today.*

Presenter:

*And how many people do you have working in this space right now?*

Fiona

*Ah around 20 is here today, that's usual for our apples.  
(13.55)*

*Come cherry time in our cherry shed we probably put in there between about 70 and 90?*

14.01

Presenter:

*70 and 90?*

Fiona:

*Yeah.*

Presenter:

*Wow.*

Fiona:

*MMMMM*

Presenter:

*Is it possible to enforce social distancing?*

Fiona:

*Impossible. Impossible. It's a very tight shed.*

14.10. *People have to work close together.*

Presenter:

14.13. *Do you think we've truly felt the effects of covid in operations like this?*

Fiona:

14.19. *I think the effects of covid are still to come for us, in terms of labour that we'll require in a few months time.*

Presenter:

*Fiona needs upto 90 workers come summer harvest. But she's concerned that backpackers will have left by then. With no new arrivals to fill their places.*

14.37.

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14.50

Presenter:

*These guys are only making around \$70 per day (fruit pickers). And with no jobs in the cities and limited farm work available, they're facing some tough decisions.*

15.00

Worker:

*I've had thoughts about going back home. We haven't been able to save up money at all really. Right now things are looking pretty grim.*

15.32

Presenter:

*All most 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all backpackers have left Australia since the Covid virus crisis outbreak, a concerning statistic for Fiona.*

15.40

Presenter:

*The season is almost over, are you worried that you won't get these workers back in the year?*

Fiona (nodding).

15.47. *Yes. I'm worried about this guys, they'll go and also the ones that were due to come in will not be available (grimface).*

15.52. *So our BIGGEST worry will be going into the next crop. It could be really scary. There would be nothing more devastating than having a beautiful crop and you can't get them harvested. (sad worried look, grim music).*

16.08

Presenter:

*Getting fruit off the tree is only half the problem. Once picked it needs to be sold. But the pandemic has disrupted global fruit and supply lines. And that's a big concern for producers like Fiona.*

16.21

Fiona:

*If we don't have an export market for our cherries, and come cherry season, if the um, if we don't export into china um, if we don't export into south east asia ... our normal markets, then we are going to have a very flooded domestic market, um, and it will be a disaster.*

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