

<b>Agricultural Technical Officer</b>	<b>Queensland</b>
<b>ASCO Code: 3112-11</b>	April 2008
<b>Labour market rating</b>	Shortage
<b>Comment:</b>	

### **Occupational demand**

Agricultural technical officers provide support and advice on aspects of agricultural research, production, servicing and marketing. Employment can be found with the government, pastoral firms, agricultural chemical manufacturers, farm consultancies and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). Demand for this occupation increases in line with the importance and need to improve the quality of agricultural products, funding increases in research and development, and growth in the volume of imported and exported products that require testing. The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries indicates continued growth in demand for agricultural workers with the total value of Queensland's primary industry commodities for 2007-08 forecast to be approximately \$12.5 billion, which is three per cent higher than the final estimate for 2006-07.

### **Occupational supply**

Formal entry to this occupation is via the completion of a certificate IV in agriculture-related studies, although employment prospects may be greatly improved with a higher qualification in an agricultural discipline. Data from the Department of Education and the Arts indicate that supply from training at the certificate level is low with an average number of four students commencing courses each year since 2002. Diploma level data from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations does not provide a breakdown of specific majors but overall numbers in the Diploma of Applied Science have been declining for several years with commencements in 2006 (54) representing 37 per cent of commencements recorded in 2002 (146). At the same time, the total agricultural technical officer workforce has been on a downward trend as made evident by Census data for Queensland which show employment fell by 26 per cent between 2001 and 2006.

### **Employer and industry comments/current labour market**

There were very few vacancies for agricultural technical officers notified in Queensland in the target range of dates for this year's survey. In view of this, potential public and private sector employers, industry contacts and professional bodies were contacted to obtain their perspective on the labour market for this occupation. Those who did advertise had several vacancies and the overall filled rate was 92 per cent. However, these employers were willing to accept workers without qualifications. Census data for Queensland suggest a decline in the number of persons holding a higher qualification in this occupation. For example, 86 per cent of the workforce held a certificate III or better in 2001, but by 2006, this number had fallen to 69 per cent. Cold canvassed contacts reported difficulties attracting and retaining qualified workers, attributing the current shortage of suitable applicants to high levels of wastage from the occupation and a general lack of interest in the agricultural sector from potential students. Wastage from the occupation is reportedly due to workers leaving for alternative occupations (in some cases unskilled) in other industries, particularly the mineral resources sector, where wages are often higher than those offered to agricultural technical officers. Some respondents believe that the shortages will not improve until the salary and lifestyle opportunities in the agricultural sector are similar to those offered in other industries.

### **Labour market outlook**

The recruitment of qualified agricultural technical officers in Queensland is becoming more difficult, hampered by a lack of potential student interest and high wastage from the occupation. Industry and employer contacts concur that the labour market for this occupation will remain in shortage at least for the medium term, particularly in regional and rural areas. Without greatly improved remuneration lifestyle and increased numbers in training, the current shortages are expected to continue to characterise this occupation for the foreseeable future.