

# Detailed Research Methodology and Key Data

Ag Trade Apprenticeship  
Supplementary Report 1

April 2024

## Contents

Detailed Research Methodology and Key Data .....	3
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Literature Review .....	3
Stakeholder Input.....	3
In-depth Interviews .....	3
Stakeholder Survey .....	4
Provision of Guidance .....	5
<b>Sector Benefits .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Industry Development .....	7
Workforce Development.....	8
Labour Supply.....	9
<b>Sector Challenges .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Qualification Design .....	11
Marketing .....	12
<b>Employer Benefits .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Skilled Workforce .....	14
Quality Employees .....	15
Cost Effectiveness .....	16
Farm Viability .....	17
<b>Employer Challenges .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Resource Investment .....	19
Programme Relevance .....	20
Logistical Hurdles .....	22
Business Considerations.....	24
<b>Training Provider Benefits .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Business Development.....	26
Workforce Development.....	27
<b>Training Provider Challenges .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Business Resources .....	29
Marketing.....	30
<b>References .....</b>	<b>31</b>

# Detailed Research Methodology and Key Data

## Methodology

### Literature Review

A review of published literature including academic journal articles, reports issued by various bodies and organisations, and news articles and similar.

The relevance and veracity of each item was carefully evaluated by the Skills Insight project team in the context of existing industry knowledge and insights and published data. Priority was given to materials published from 2019 onwards.

### Stakeholder Input

Comments and statements directly or indirectly related to the Ag Trade Apprenticeship made to Skills Insights personnel by stakeholders including industry bodies and leaders, representatives of organisations including commercial and not-for-profits organisations, individuals connected with agribusiness including but not limited to producers, training provider employees, suppliers, academics, and potential apprentices and their advisors. Many of these inputs were gathered during the workshops conducted as part of this project. Where appropriate, deidentified quotes from stakeholders have been included in this report.

### In-depth Interviews

Comments provided by producers during a series of one-on-one video qualitative in-depth video interviews conducted with 9 producers involved in dairy, broadacre, and or livestock farming. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 60 minutes and focussed on the potential relevance of an Ag Trade Apprentice to the industry and their own organisation, any and potential benefits and challenges in employing an apprentice, and their potential interest in employing a qualified Ag Trade Apprentice.

The interviews were conducted by a senior Skills Insight researcher between December and February 2023. Participants were recruited via industry contacts and were all senior managers or owners or employers of potential apprentices. All interviewees were provided with assurances of anonymity in relation to their responses.

All participants were selected on the basis that they had previously or currently employed young people who fit the general criteria of a potential Ag Trade Apprentice. The interviews were recorded and transcripts produced which were then subjected to thematic analysis resulting in the identification and description of potential benefits and challenges associated with an Ag Trade Apprenticeship. Where appropriate, deidentified quotes from interview participants have been included in this report.

## Stakeholder Survey

An online stakeholder survey was designed based on input from the above sources which typically took between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. The survey was posted on the Skills Insight website with a general appeal for input by all interested parties. An invitation to participate and a link to the questionnaire was widely promoted by Skills Insight and other interested parties via social media and other channels including industry body newsletters. In addition, Skills Insight directly emailed individuals and organisational representatives listed on the Skills Insight email list.

The core elements of the questionnaire comprised:

- Appreciation for their participation
- A brief description of the origins of the Ag Trade Apprenticeship and why the input was being sought
- A brief description of the nature of a potential Ag Trade Apprenticeship program
- A set of questions answered by all respondents that addressed
  - Familiarity with discussions around a potential Ag Trade Apprenticeship (rated on a 5-point Likert Familiar/unfamiliar scale)
  - Potential benefits of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship (rated on a 5-point Likert importance scale)
  - Potential challenges of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship (rated on a 5-point Likert Agree/disagree scale)
- Stakeholder-specific questions that addressed
  - Potential benefits of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship (rated on a 5-point Likert importance scale)
  - Potential challenges of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship (rated on a 5-point Likert Agree/disagree scale)
  - Their personal or organisation's potential interest in an Ag Trade Apprenticeship
  - Descriptive attributes of themselves or their organisation

The wide distribution of the survey invitation facilitated responses from 81 potential apprentice employers and 49 potential training providers of the Ag Trade Apprenticeship. The following tables profile these respondents across multiple dimensions.

ORGANISATION TYPE	Number of interviews
Employer who may want to recruit an apprenticeship graduate	22
Employer who may want to take on an apprentice to learn in the workplace	59
<b>Total - Potential Employers</b>	<b>81</b>
RTO - Agricultural College	4
RTO - Enterprise	2
RTO - Industry Association	10
RTO - Private	16
RTO - TAFE	17
<b>Total - Potential Training Providers</b>	<b>49</b>

LOCATION	Potential Employers	Potential Training Providers
QLD	19	17
VIC	17	20
NSW	17	14
WA	22	6
SA	15	8
NT	4	5
TAS	5	3
ACT	0	2
National	4	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>49</b>
SECTOR COVERAGE (Individual Organisations may cover multiple sectors)	Potential Employer	Potential Training Providers
Broadacre	49	20
Livestock Production	47	28
Dairy Production	10	16
Horticulture	14	4
No particular type of agriculture	12	11
Other	1	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>49</b>

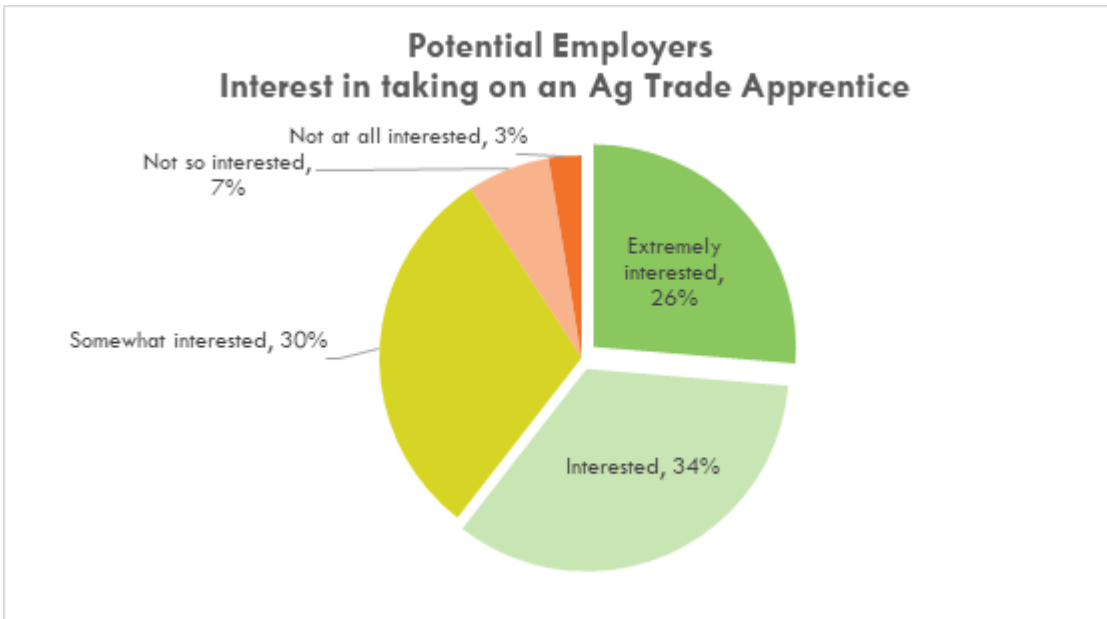
## Provision of Guidance

Gaining an indication of potential commitment by employers and by RTOs to an Ag Trade Apprenticeship is necessary to understanding its feasibility.

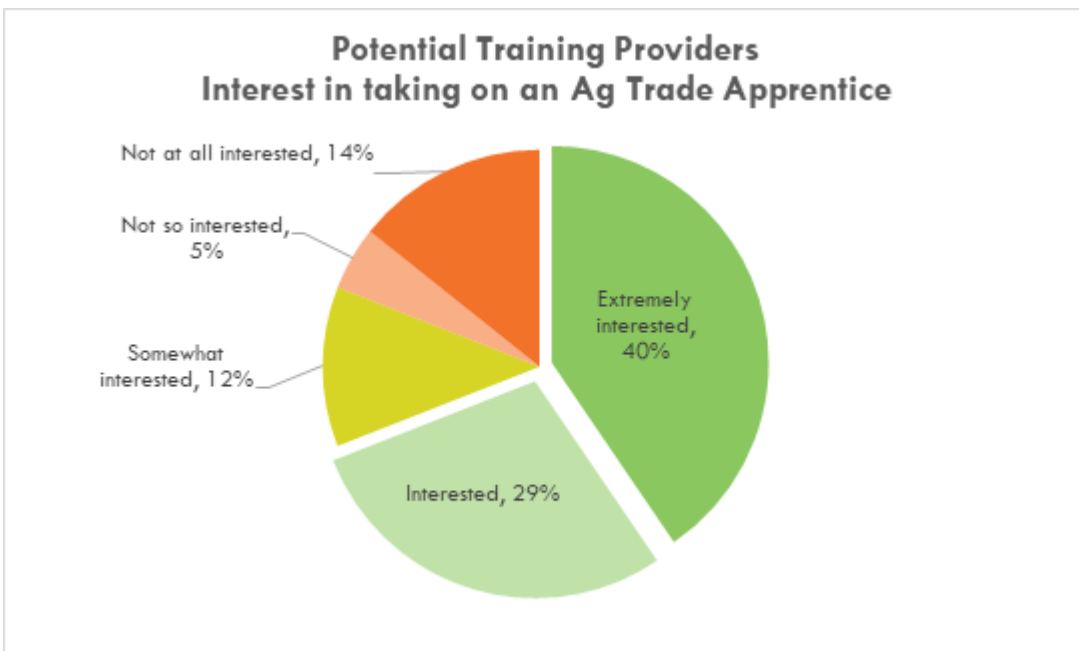
In the stakeholder survey, potential commitment was addressed via a standardised format designed to provide the respondent with both contextual information and a framework of potential benefits and challenges on which to base their response. The commitment question was posed after the respondent had been exposed to an example qualification and answered multiple questions asking for their opinion on the potential benefits and challenges of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship.

Potential employers were asked 'Based on what you currently know, how interested might your organisation be in taking on an Ag Trade Apprentice?'. For potential training providers, the question was worded as 'Based on what you currently know, how interested might your organisation be in offering on an Ag Trade Apprentice?'

Responses to these questions were collected using a 5-point Likert scale from 'Extremely interested' through to 'Not at all interested'. Respondents were also provided a 'Not applicable' option. The results for the two stakeholder groups are illustrated in the following graphs.



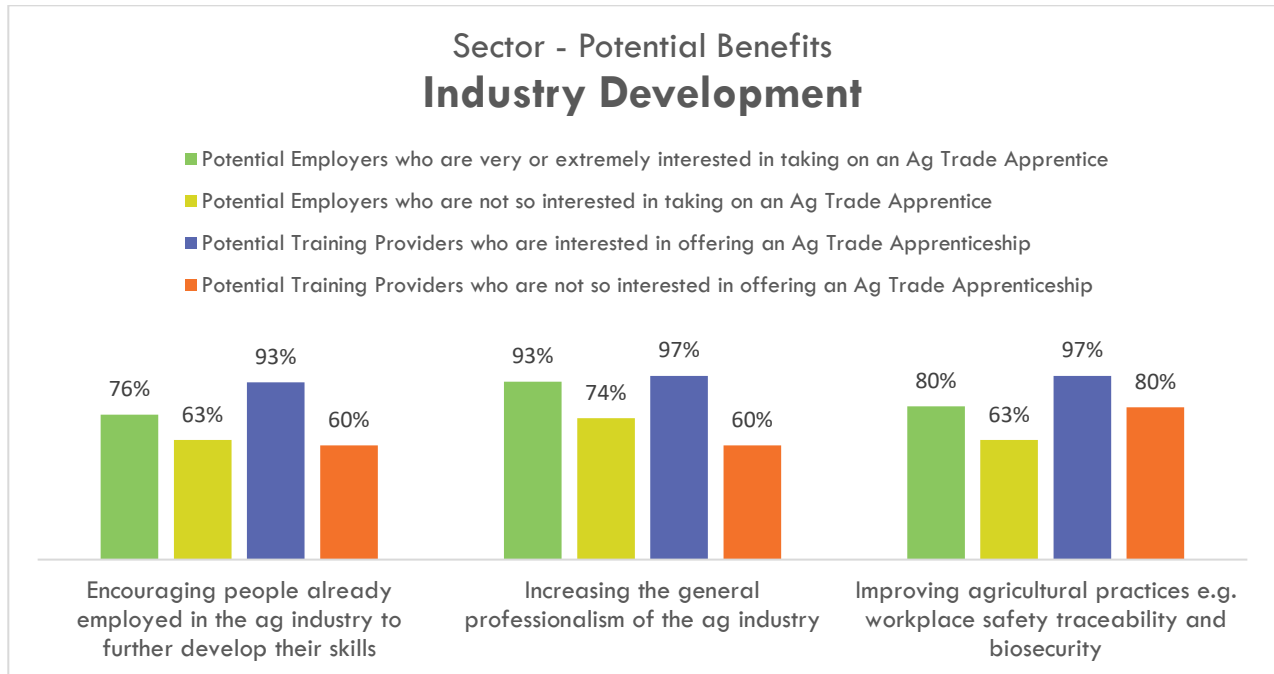
In the industry survey, 60% indicated that they were interested in potentially taking on an Ag Trade Apprentice. Significantly, only 3% were not at all interested in potentially taking on an apprentice. This level suggests a broad base of potential employers for Ag Trade Apprentices.



A total of 69% of training providers were interested in offering an Ag Trade Apprenticeship, with only 14% not at all interested. This reasonably high level of interest is an important factor in assessing the feasibility of an apprenticeship.

# Sector Benefits

## Industry Development



The survey investigated the importance of industry development for stakeholders, and whether this would lead to support for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship.

‘Encouraging people already employed in the agricultural industry to further develop their skills,’ with 76% of employers who are interested in taking on an apprentice and 93% of training organisations who are interested in offering the apprenticeship considering this as important.

‘Increasing the general professionalism of the ag industry,’ with 93% of interested employers and 97% of interested training organisations considering this as important. There is clear correlation between this survey response and other views later in this report that highlight the potential for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship to enhance the professionalism and reputation of the agricultural industry, as well as to attract and retain a skilled workforce.

The survey also shows that ‘Improving agricultural practices, e.g., workplace safety, traceability, and biosecurity’ is considered an important potential benefit by 80% of interested employers and 97% of interested training organisations.

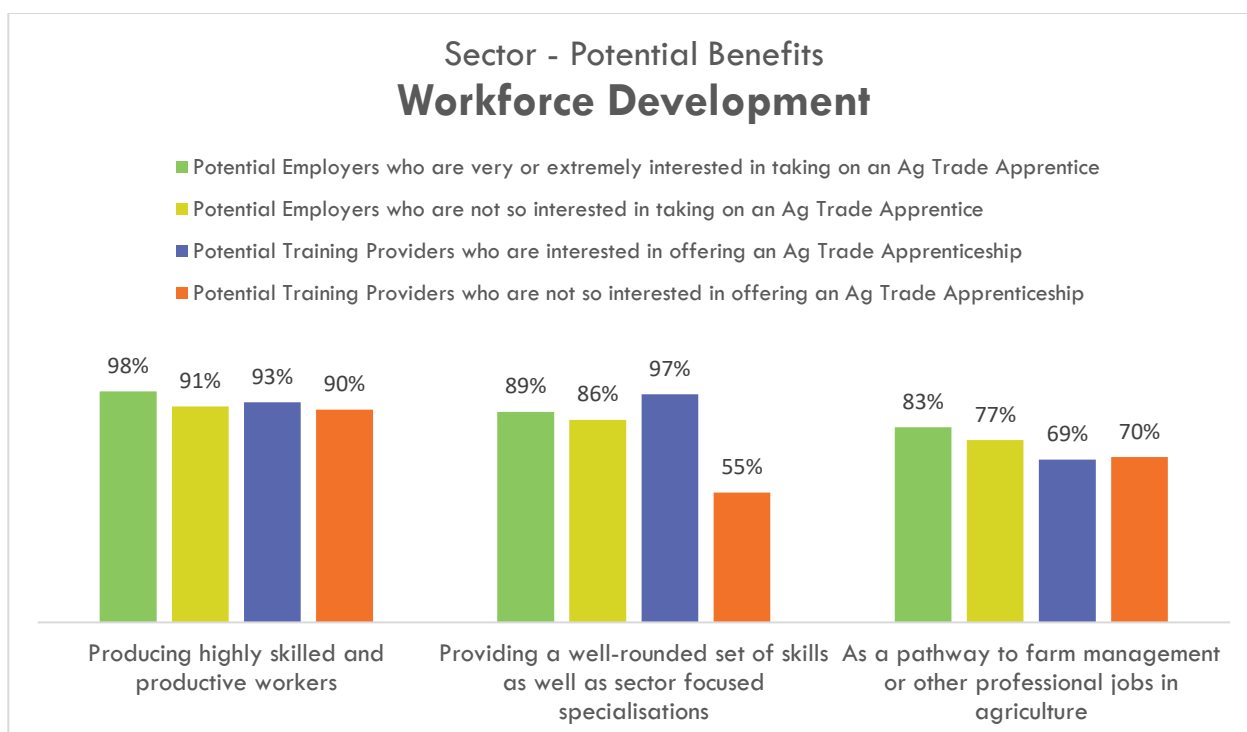
Producers in the in-depth interviews consistently highlighted their desire for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship to provide high-quality training on these and similar core elements of farm operation.

The data also highlights some differences between employers and training organisations. For example, a higher percentage of training organisations (97%) consider ‘Improving agricultural practices’ as an important potential benefit compared to employers (80%). This difference may reflect the different priorities and perspectives of these two stakeholder groups, with training organisations potentially placing a greater emphasis on the broader industry-level benefits of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship.

The high ratings of attributes such as skill development, professionalism, and improved agricultural practices by employers and training organisations who are interested in an apprenticeship suggest that the program is seen as a valuable tool for enhancing the overall quality and sustainability of the agricultural industry. However, the lower ratings by those with limited or no interest highlight the need for targeted efforts to demonstrate the value and relevance of an apprenticeship to these stakeholder groups.

**‘...having someone with those skills and learning you know when you go out and work on a farm, not every farm has got all those skills or the latest technology that's out there. And to be able to bring that back to the employer is great.’ – Tasmanian Producer**

## Workforce Development



The data reveals strong support among interested employers (98%) and training organisations (91%) for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship as a means of producing highly skilled and productive workers for the sector. However, there are divergent views on the ability of these programs to provide comprehensive, specialised skills, with interested employers (89%) and interested training organisations (86%) assigning high importance, but not-interested training organisations expressing concerns, demonstrated by a lower rating (55%).

On whether Ag Trade Apprenticeships would serve as direct pathways to professional roles, interested employers (83%) view Ag Trade Apprenticeships as viable routes, but training organisations assign relatively lower significance to such a pathway (69% for interested, 70% for less interested).

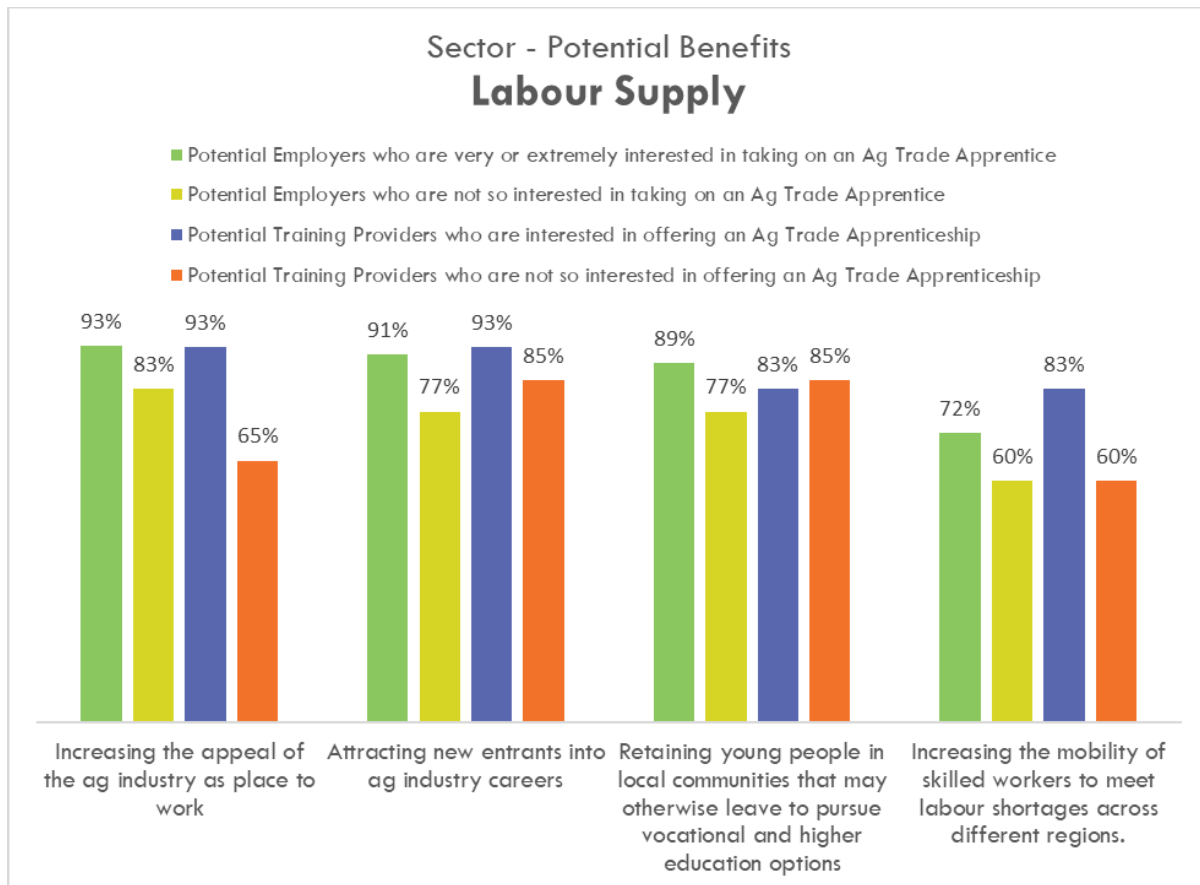
These differing perspectives, highlight the need for careful program design and stakeholder alignment to optimise workforce development outcomes through Ag Trade Apprenticeship initiatives.



**‘It might not take long for the word to get around. Good news travels fast. Yeah, that these guys that have gone through this apprenticeship have actually got the skills that we want, right? And they're appropriately trained.’ Queensland Producer**

**‘When you're a farmer, what does the word farmer mean? You're doing plumbing, you're dealing with electricians, you're dealing with building, you're dealing with machinery, you're dealing with animals. You're an animal doctor. You're a plumber. You're an electrician. You're everything on every single day. The number of skills is really complex.’ – New South Wales Producer**

## Labour Supply



A notable finding is the high importance ratings assigned by interested employers (93%) and training organisations (93%) to the attribute of ‘increasing the appeal of the ag industry as a place to work.’ Similarly, these groups also highly rate the ability of apprenticeships to ‘attract new entrants into ag industry careers’.

The attribute of ‘increasing the mobility of skilled workers to meet labour shortages across different regions’ receives relatively lower importance ratings across all groups compared to other attributes (72% among interested employers and 60% among interested training providers). This could indicate some scepticism about the effectiveness of apprenticeships in facilitating worker mobility

and addressing regional labour shortages within the agriculture sector. It is important however, that in all instances at least half of each segment viewed mobility as very or extremely important.

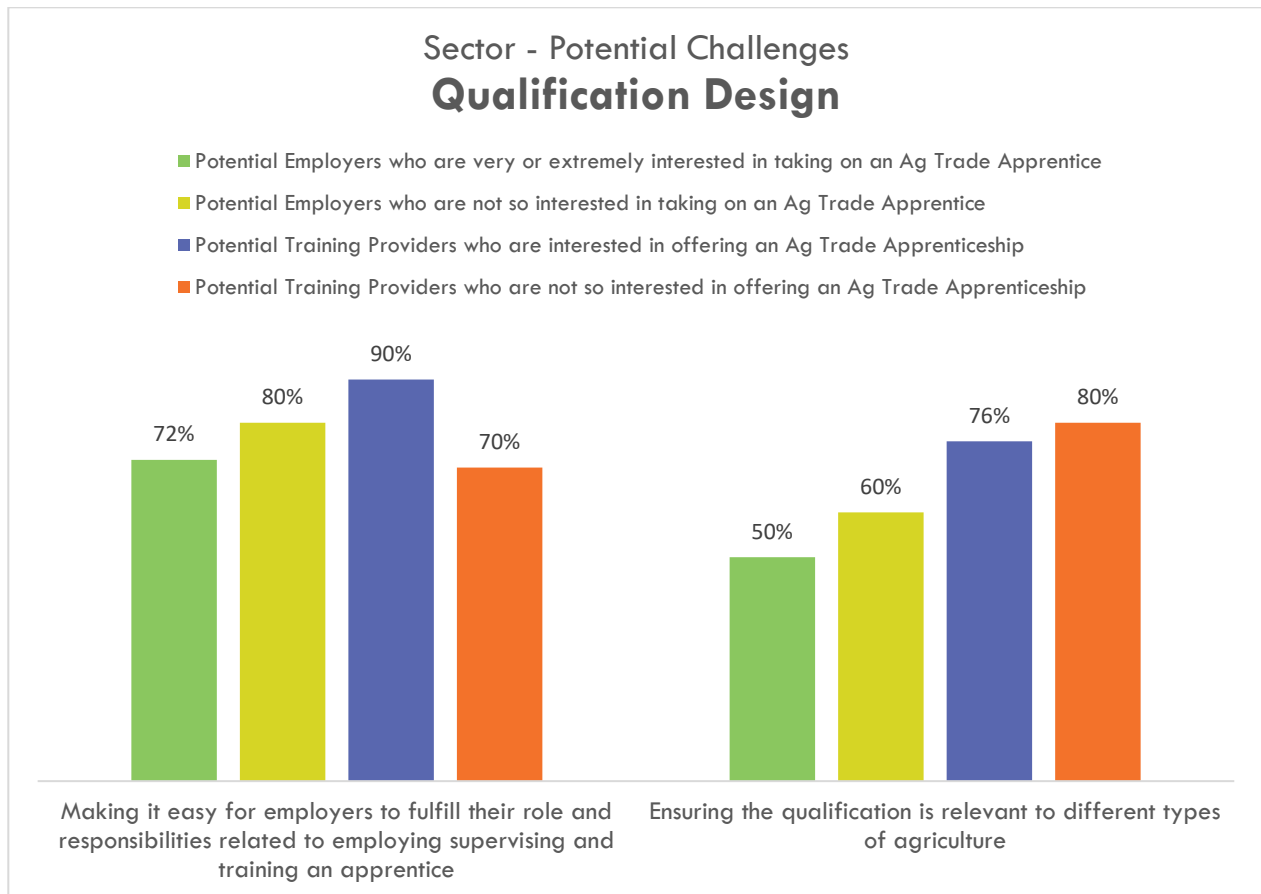
These findings are consistent with those obtained by Cosby et al (2024) in which growers expressed strong support for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship for similar reasons.

**‘The outcome that I'd like is that we are training new entrants into the into the ag industry, particularly as the world's changed.’ – Western Australian Producer**

**‘I definitely I think whether you're on a farm in Victoria, NSW, Tassie, or SA we are all running, a lot of the same types of production systems. And definitely, if the course starts up, it should be relevant across a lot of the States. And we're going to have a workforce that travels around Australia as well.’ – Tasmanian Producer**

# Sector Challenges

## Qualification Design



The data reveals concerns across groups on potential qualification design challenges for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship.

On the challenge of ensuring the qualification is relevant to different types of agriculture, higher levels of agreement are observed among training organisations to employers. This likely reflects the broader industry perspective held by training organisations, which may lead to greater concerns about the ability of a single qualification to adequately address the diverse needs and specialisations within the agriculture sector.

Addressing these concerns through stakeholder engagement, effective communication, and demonstration of well-designed solutions could be necessary to increase buy-in from these groups.

The in-depth interviews also highlighted some additional elements. There was broad agreement on the importance of these elements and a desire to see them addressed within the program. These included:

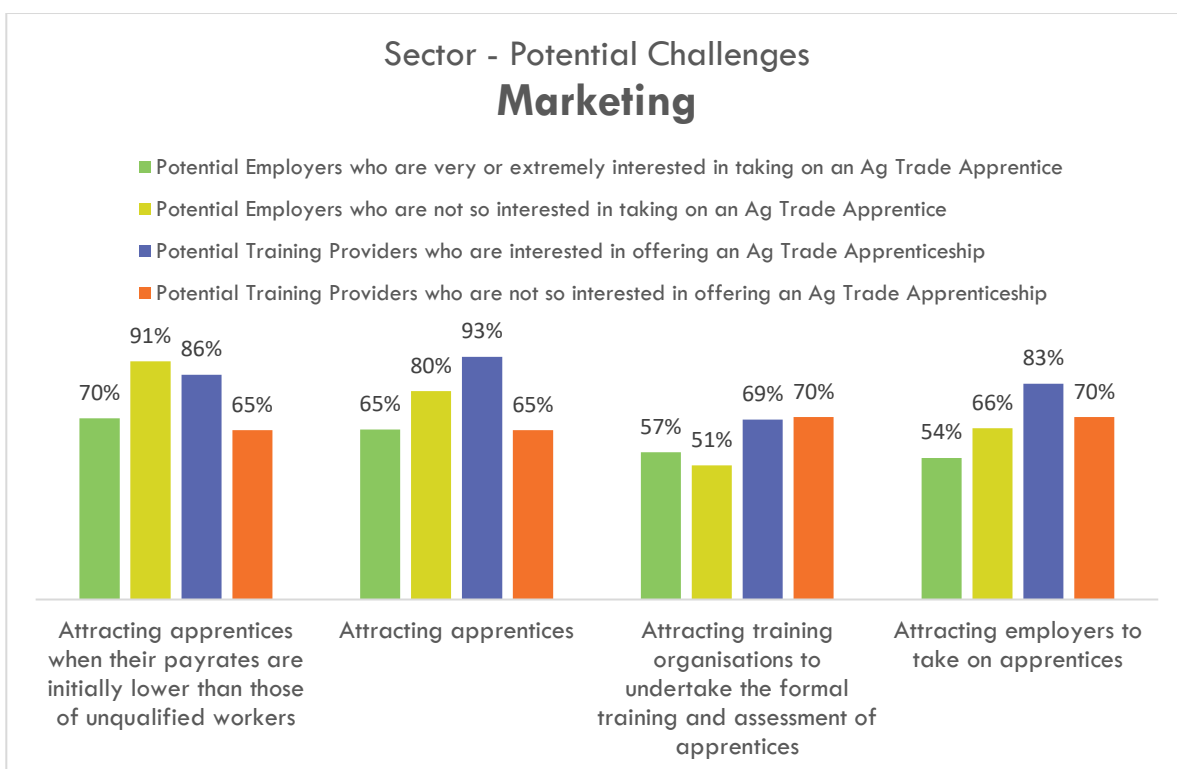
- The duration of the Ag Trade Apprenticeship is tailored to the evolving needs of the industry, balancing skill development with adapting to technological advancements.
- The apprentice is competent in the main forms of technology used in agriculture and can quickly master new technologies.

- The apprentice has strong communication skills development including email etiquette and workplace communication.
- The apprentice has mental resilience training to prepare them for challenging situations.

**‘So, I'd like to see a greater connection with what's done on farm and the learning applying more to the farm.’ – New South Wales Producer**

**‘We would most likely always preference practical work-based experience. If there was an apprenticeship, then we would be assured that they have practical experience.’ – Victorian Producer**

## Marketing



The prevalence of negative perceptions of careers in agriculture among the broader population and the difficulties that these present in attracting apprentices has been extensively researched and is an accepted industry issue.

A survey of 3000 Australians aged 18-25 found that 12% described themselves as very likely or extremely likely to consider a career in agriculture, yet the percentage population actually working in agriculture are far lower. This proportion is only marginally higher at 15% (Voconiq (Firm) and AgriFutures Australia, 2022) among those living in rural areas, which suggests that exposure to rural environments has limited impact on a desire for a career in agriculture. This suggests an inability to translate agricultural interest into agricultural careers. There may be numerous explanations for this, such as competition for labour from other industries, negative perceptions of working conditions, the need to move away from family and lack of suitable housing, among others. Whatever the causes, agriculture industry stakeholders are united in believing that solutions must be tried, and one suggestion to assist is the creation of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship, supported by other solutions.

The analysis of potential marketing obstacles for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship reveals varying levels of concern among stakeholders. One of the key issues is attracting apprentices despite lower initial pay rates. Another challenge is attracting apprentices in general, with training organisations expressing the highest level of concern.

There was widespread agreement amongst the employers who participated in the in-depth interviews and in the workshops that they do not expect to pay apprentices a lower wage than others who are undertaking similar work.

Engaging employers to take on apprentices is also seen as a potential challenge, with 79% of interested training organisations responding that this could be a stumbling block. Interestingly, employers exhibit relatively lower levels of concern which may suggest that training organisations may be more focused on and concerned about ensuring sufficient employer participation to provide on-the-job training opportunities at a critical mass to support training delivery. For example, employers may not be concerned about their challenges in employing one apprentice, but a training provider may need to have 20 or 30 apprentices enrol in their training to make training viable.

Attracting training organisations to undertake formal training and assessment is perceived as less of a concern by employers however, training organisations themselves express higher levels of apprehension for the reason described above and perhaps also their past experience in investing in training delivery that the enrolment numbers did not support.

To address these issues, tailored marketing strategies could be developed to target these concerns. Emphasising the long-term benefits of Ag Trade Apprenticeships and exploring incentive structures could help mitigate worries about lower initial pay rates for apprentices. For example, highlighting the potential for career growth, skill development, and increased earning potential over time could make an Ag Trade Apprenticeship more attractive to potential candidates. However, this logic only applies if the work that Ag Tradies perform is restricted to the Ag Trades. If the work is available for people to perform without an apprenticeship pathway, why would a worker invest in a 4-year learning program with lower wages over that time?

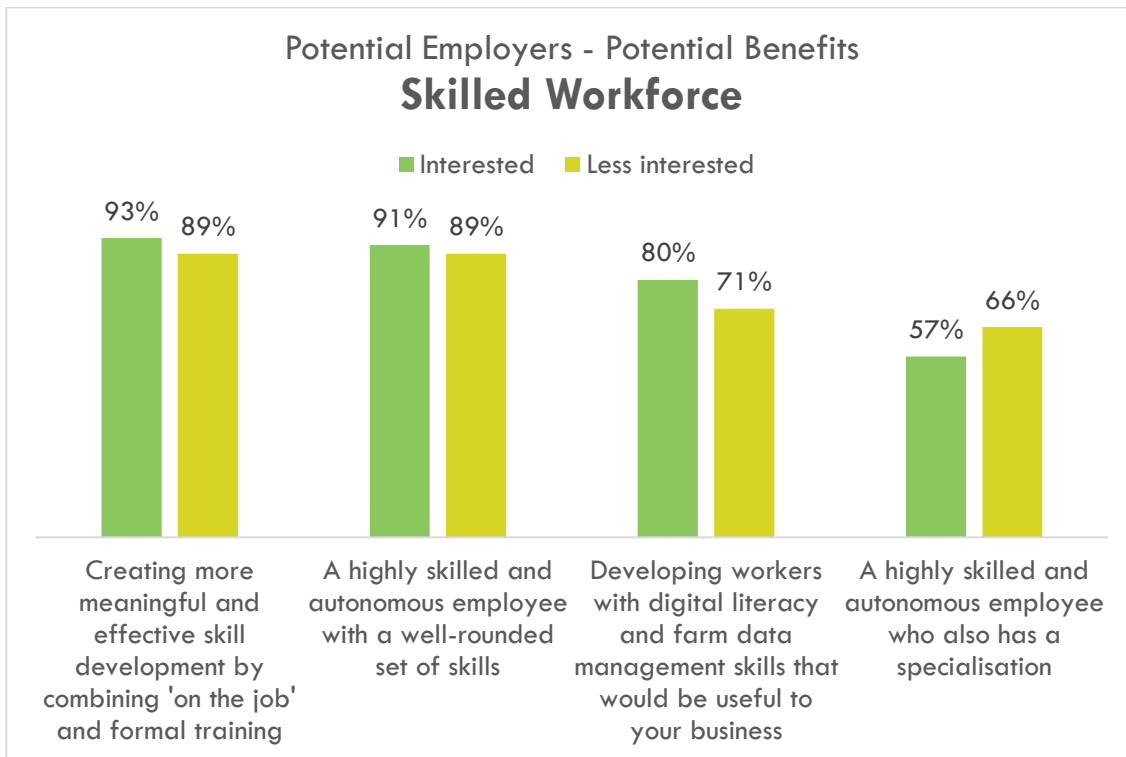
Further, targeted campaigns highlighting the advantages of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship for employers, such as improved productivity, reduced turnover, and the development of a highly skilled workforce, could be effective in encouraging employers to take on an apprentice.

**‘Some of them (potential apprentices) are quite connected with farming, but they still really didn’t have any vision of how they might enter that industry or why they might want to.’ – Western Australian Producer**

**‘In agriculture, we’ve never been great at telling our story to an audience beyond our own. So, if we’re looking to attract them from the outside into an apprenticeship and then into a career, we need to start telling our story a lot better.’ – New South Wales Producer**

# Employer Benefits

## Skilled Workforce



The survey data provides insights into employers' perspectives on the potential benefits of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship for developing a skilled workforce revealing high levels of agreement across attributes regardless of the interest to take on an apprentice.

Both groups strongly agree that combining on-the-job and formal training creates meaningful and effective skill development and that apprenticeships can produce highly skilled, autonomous employees with well-rounded skills. There is, however, a notable gap in the perceived value of developing workers with digital literacy and farm data management skills (80% of highly interested, 71% of less interested). Interestingly, both groups show relatively lower agreement on the importance of specialisation suggesting a preference for adaptability and broad-based competence.

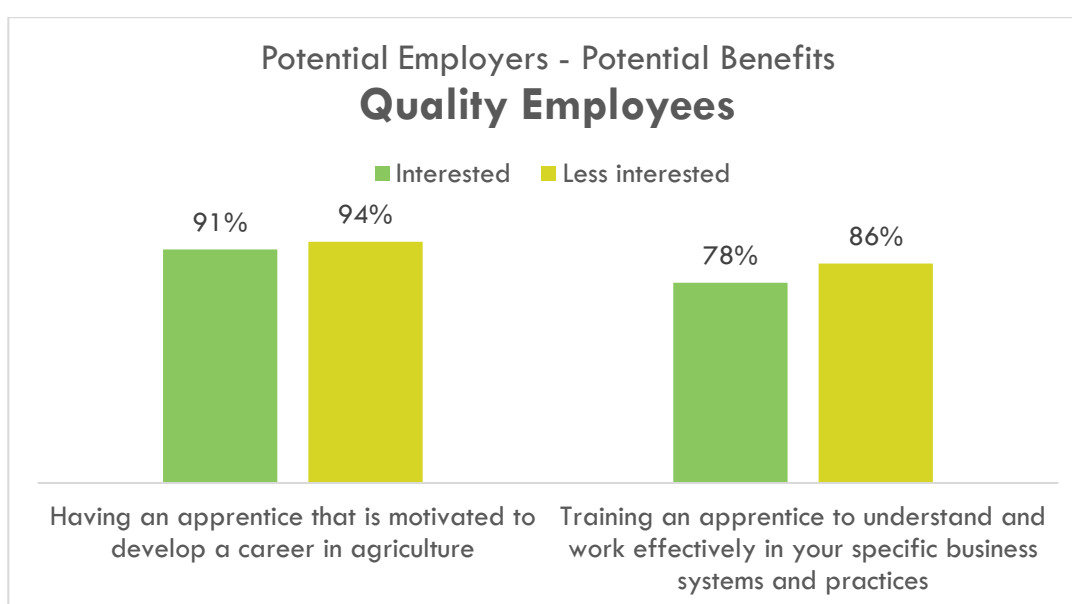
In the context of developing a skilled agricultural workforce, the data indicates that the apprenticeship model is widely seen as valuable, particularly for its comprehensive approach to skill development and emphasis on producing well-rounded, autonomous employees. The data also highlights the need to address the lower interest in digital literacy and data management skills among employers not currently interested in apprenticeships, as these skills become increasingly crucial in the evolving agriculture industry.

**'Technology is a big one that would need to be incorporated into the program. Whether it's the use of farm management software or GPS tracking and those sorts of things. Technology would definitely have to be part of that course.'** – Tasmanian Producer

**‘That’s why we need a formal education component, which is, you know, apprenticeship is the perfect model. They’re getting experience, but they’re also doing modules where they’re actually in the classroom learning.’ – Western Australian Producer**

**‘So literally about not to be an agronomist, but to understand the whole cycle of seed germination and the role of fertilisers. So that if they then had to go out and apply fertiliser, they’ve got a context for what they’re doing and hopefully could do it a little more intelligently than just following the directions on the can.’ – Victorian Producer**

## Quality Employees



The data reveals valuable insights into the potential benefits of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship in the context of developing quality employees.

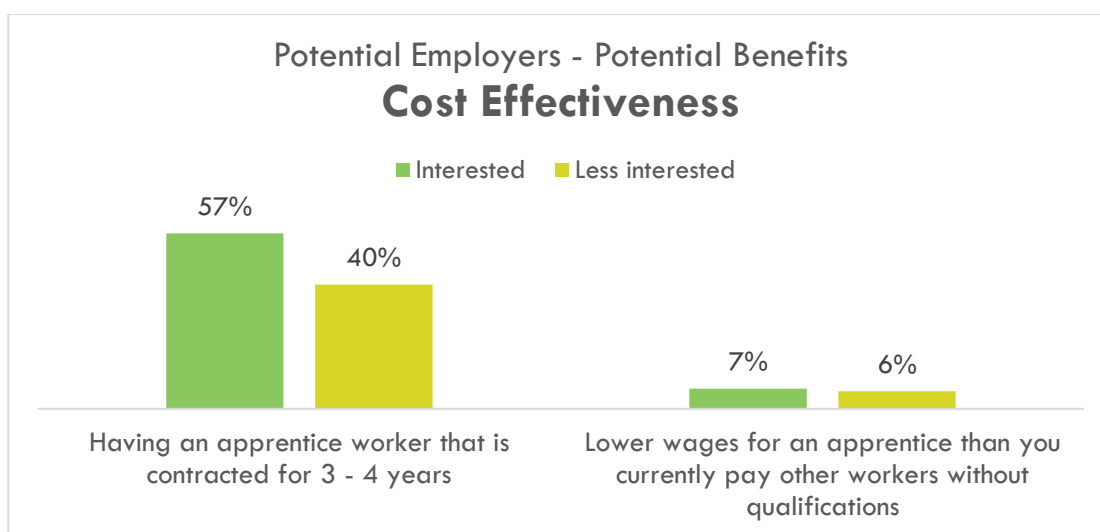
One key attribute that stands out is ‘Having an apprentice that is motivated to develop a career in agriculture,’ which garnered a high level of agreement among both interested and less interested employers. This suggests that employers across the board recognise the value of having motivated, career-oriented apprentices who are committed to the agriculture industry. This was also a key desire of the employers who participated in the in-depth interviews. While this is a great attribute desired by employers, what mainly motivates apprentices is the access to work that others cannot do and are not allowed to do.

Another important aspect highlighted in the data is ‘Training an apprentice to understand and work effectively in your specific business systems and practices.’ While still a majority, there is a somewhat lower level of agreement among employers that this is a key benefit. It appears that employers are more interested in having motivated staff than that they can train in their own business specifics and apprenticeship training would support that process and outcome.

This difference suggests that employers who are actively considering apprenticeships may place a higher value on the opportunity to train apprentices specifically in their business's unique systems and practices, ensuring a better fit and alignment with their operations.

**‘We know that if we have someone who takes pride in their work and is intrinsically motivated, they are the types we want to keep.’ - South Australian producer and workplace consultant, Danielle Lannin England. (England, 2022)**

## Cost Effectiveness



The data provides insights into employers' perspectives on the cost-effectiveness of Ag Trade Apprenticeships. Interestingly, the attribute 'Lower wages for an apprentice than you currently pay other workers without qualifications' received very low levels of agreement from both interested and less interested employers. This suggests that employers are not primarily motivated by the potential cost savings associated with lower apprenticeship wages.

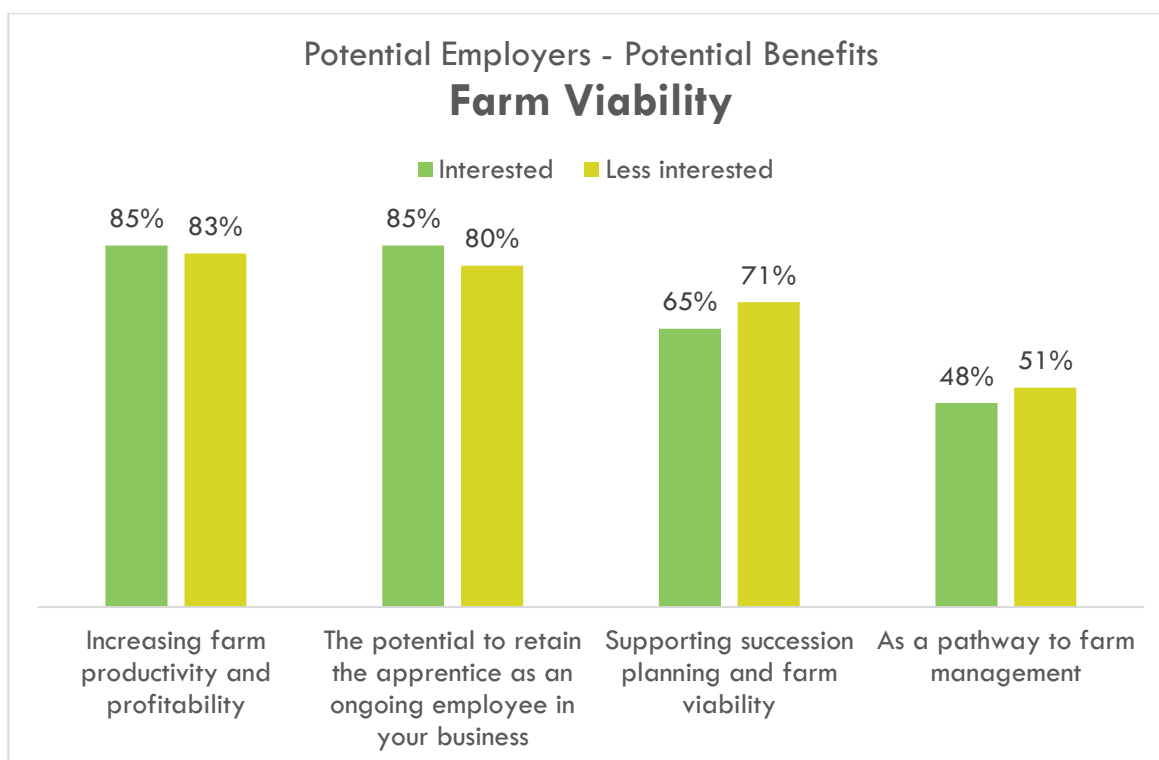
Instead, the data indicates that employers are more concerned about the long-term value an apprentice can bring to their organisation. The attribute 'Having an apprentice worker that is contracted for 3 - 4 years' received a higher level of agreement among employers who are very or extremely interested in taking on an apprentice (57%), compared to those with very little or no interest (40%).

This difference suggests that employers who are actively considering apprenticeships may place a higher value on the stability and commitment that comes with having an apprentice contracted for an extended period, allowing them to invest in the apprentice's development and benefit from their growing skills and contributions over time.

The lower rating of the wage-related attribute, coupled with the higher rating of the contract duration attribute, implies that employers are not primarily driven by short-term cost savings but rather by the potential long-term value an apprentice can bring to their organisation. They appear to be more focused on the opportunity to develop a skilled, committed workforce that can contribute to their business's success over an extended period, rather than simply benefiting from lower wage costs in the short term.



## Farm Viability



The data reveals intriguing patterns that suggest employers in the agricultural sector may be inclined to NOT consider qualified apprentices for career advancement particularly into farm management. A substantial proportion of employers, including those who are highly interested in apprenticeships (85%) and those with little to no interest (83%), concur that skilled workers have the potential to significantly contribute to increased farm productivity and profitability.

Furthermore, 85% of employers with a keen interest in apprenticeships and 80% of those with minimal interest recognise the value in retaining skilled apprentices as long-term employees, indicating a desire to capitalise on their expertise and contributions over an extended period.

Research undertaken by the Productivity Commission in 2020 (Productivity Commission 2020) notes that employers would like greater assurances that their investment in an apprenticeship will provide longer-term rewards (this includes staying with the employer over the apprenticeship and post-completion). (DWER 2022) While this finding was across all sectors, it is likely to also apply to the Agribusiness sector and reflects similar sentiments to those expressed in the survey.

Additionally, the survey data highlights that 65% of employers highly interested in apprenticeships and 71% of those with little interest acknowledge the crucial role that skilled workers can play in supporting succession planning and ensuring the long-term viability of their farming enterprises. This suggests that while a considerable portion of employers do understand the importance of cultivating a skilled workforce to safeguard the future of their operations, there is also a proportion who believe that farm ownership is not necessarily available to farm workers.

The employers interviewed in-depth confirmed that a person would typically have to have been employed in the industry for 10-15 years before being considered for farm management.

Despite the long potential gap and the potential for career changes, a substantial proportion of employers do perceive apprenticeships as a direct pathway to management positions, with 48% of

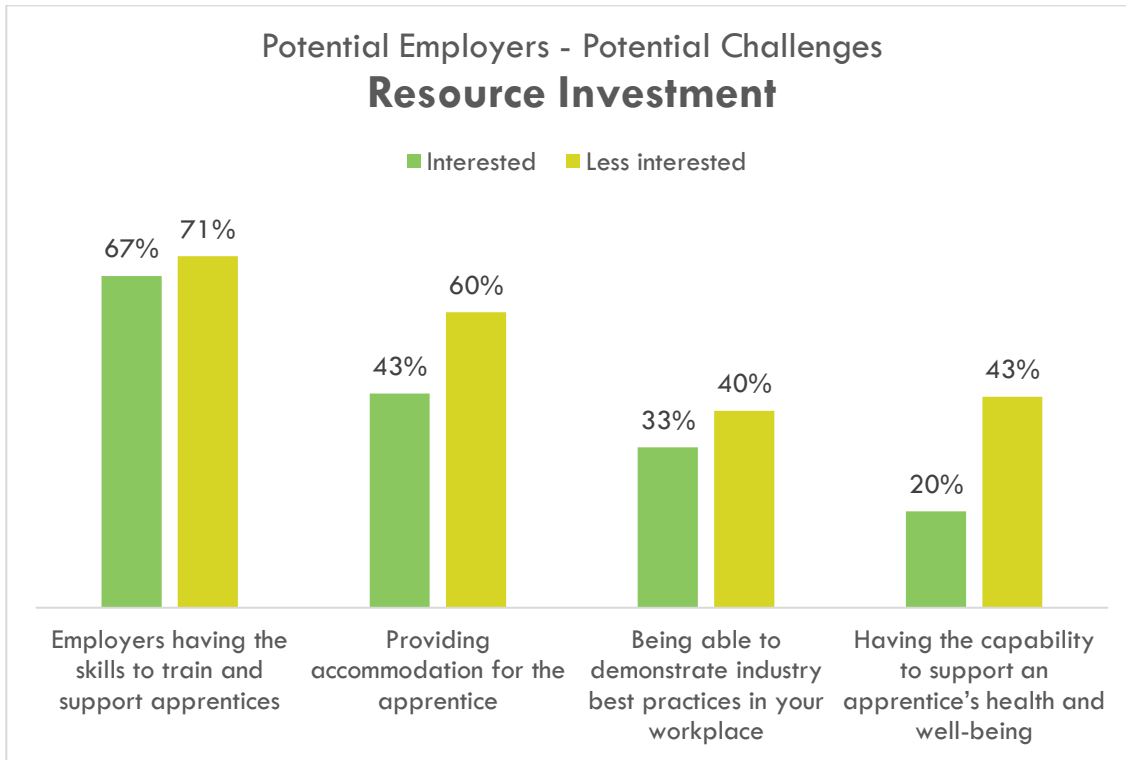
highly interested employers and 51% of less interested employers agreeing with this notion. This may be an issue of concern for potential apprentices who view an apprenticeship as a stepping stone to farm management.

**‘If there's a financial reward and there's also a job prospect for you and longer-term opportunities you're not just gonna be staying a tractor driver. You're gonna have a chance to step up and be part of some critical decisions.’ – South Australian Producer**

**‘You're not just training them to move them on, you're training them to be a part of the team.’ – Northern Territory Producer**

# Employer Challenges

## Resource Investment



The findings associated with the potential resource investment required of employers reveal some notable patterns regarding the challenges employers perceive in supporting apprentices in the agricultural sector. The generally lower percentages across all attributes, compared to other dimensions, suggest that the breadth of resource investment required may significantly influence employers' perceptions and willingness to engage in apprenticeship programs.

Among the attributes, 'Employers having the skills to train and support apprentices' receives the highest level of agreement, with 67% of highly interested employers and 71% of those with little interest acknowledging this as a potential challenge. This implies that a majority of employers recognise the importance of possessing the necessary skills to effectively train and support apprentices.

However, the other attributes related to resource investment exhibit lower levels of agreement. 'Providing accommodation for the apprentice' is seen as a challenge by 43% of highly interested employers and 60% of those with little interest. Similarly, 'Being able to demonstrate industry best practices in your workplace' is acknowledged as a challenge by only 33% of highly interested employers and 40% of those with minimal interest.

Notably, 'Having the capacity to support an apprentice's health and wellbeing' receives the lowest level of agreement, with just 20% of highly interested employers and 43% of those with little interest recognizing this as a potential challenge. This suggests that most employers believe they have the required capacity.

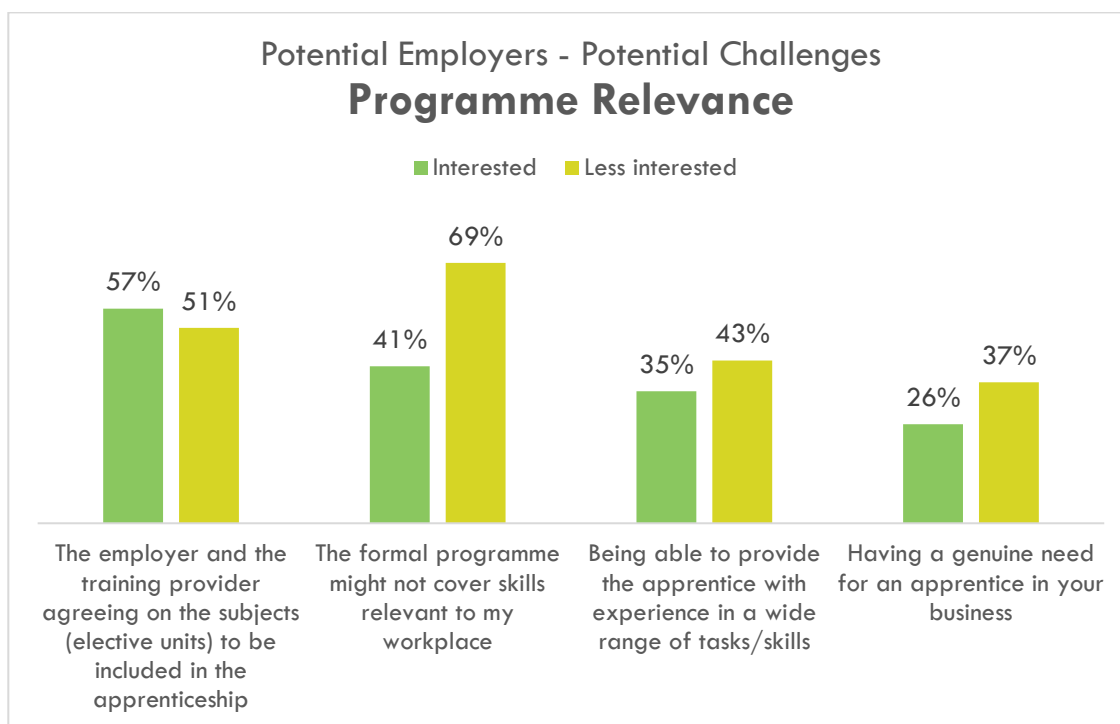
The understanding of the extensive nature of resource investment required, encompassing factors such as training skills, accommodation, demonstrating best practices, and supporting apprentices' well-being, may contribute to the lower percentages observed in this data set.

Employers may perceive these resource investments as challenging or burdensome or just not available to them, potentially affecting their willingness and ability if willing, to engage in an Ag Trade Apprenticeship program. Addressing these concerns and working out how to provide support to employers in managing the various aspects of resource investment could be crucial in encouraging greater participation in apprenticeship programs within the agricultural sector. Perhaps without this ability to support employers to support apprentices the program may have a significant barrier to its success.

**‘Some farmers might teach you the easiest and the quickest way but not necessarily the safest way.’ – Tasmanian Producer**

**‘Our staff are helping apprentices to be aware of their own mental health. It can be isolating when they’re doing tasks on their own and might be for days at a time. Mental health is a big issue.’ – Victorian Producer**

## Programme Relevance



The data set on program relevance highlights key factors employers consider when assessing the suitability of an apprenticeship program for their long-term needs. The combination of on-farm and school-based learning is crucial, and the data reveals varying levels of agreement among employers regarding potential challenges.

Notably, 60% of highly interested employers agree that ‘The employer and the training provider agreeing on the subjects (elective units) to be included in the apprentices’ is a potential challenge,

compared to 51% of those with little interest. This suggests that employers actively considering apprenticeships place greater importance on aligning the curriculum with their specific needs.

Further, 35% of highly interested employers and 43% of those with little interest agree that 'Employers being able to provide the apprentice with experience in a wide range of task/skills' is a potential challenge, recognising the importance of providing a comprehensive learning experience.

The data also reveals a difference in the perception of program relevance between the two groups. A higher percentage of employers with little interest (69%) agree that 'The formal programme might not cover skills relevant to my workplace' is a potential challenge, compared to only 41% of highly interested employers. This suggests concerns about the alignment between formal training and specific workplace requirements may be affecting the interest level of employers.

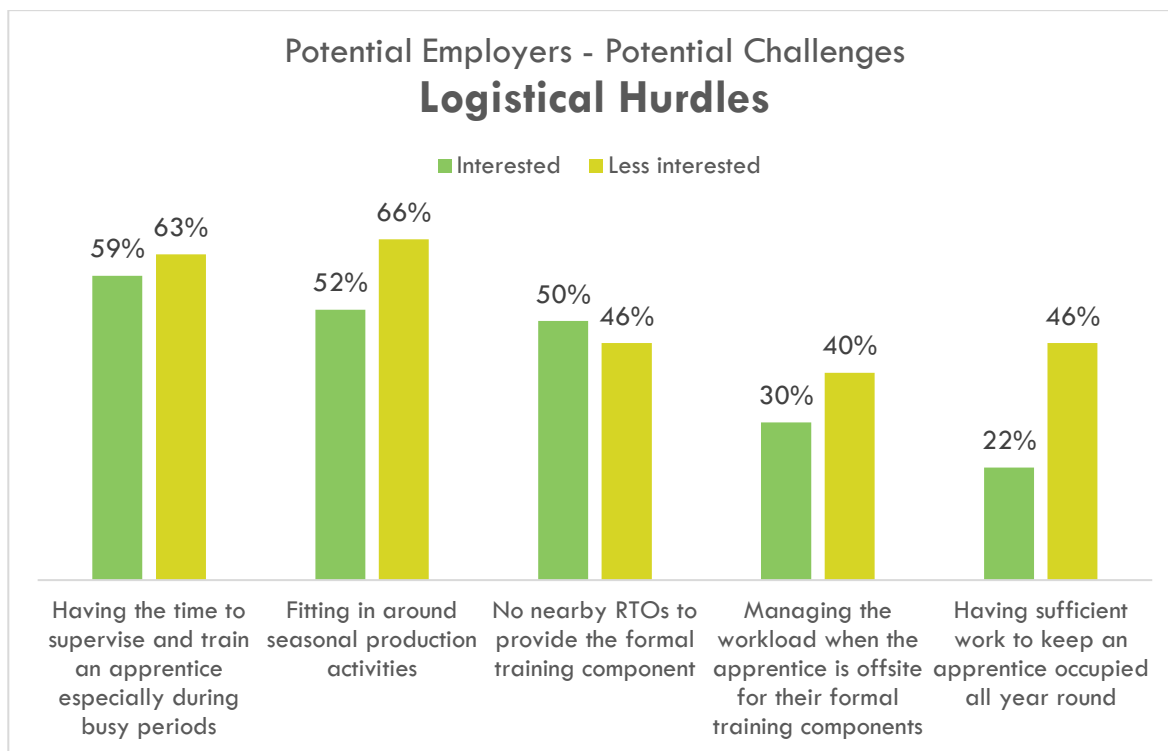
Program relevance was one of the most discussed aspects of a potential Ag Trade Apprenticeship among employers who participated in the in-depth interviews with a wide range of views expressed. Some felt strongly that sector knowledge was critical to the potential value of any employee (including apprentices). Others believed that such understanding could be developed over time and should not be a barrier to employment relative to other considerations like motivation and work ethic.

Interestingly, 'Having a genuine need for an apprentice in your business' receives the lowest level of agreement as a potential challenge, with only 26% of highly interested employers and 37% of those with little interest identifying this as a concern, implying that most employers believe they have a genuine need for apprentices.

Overall, the data highlights the importance of program relevance in influencing employers' perceptions and willingness to engage with an Ag Trade Apprenticeship model. Ensuring alignment between on-farm and school-based learning, providing input into subjects and skills covered, offering a wide range of skill experiences, and ensuring relevance to specific workplace requirements are crucial factors. Addressing these factors and promoting collaboration between employers and training providers could enhance the perceived relevance of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship and encourage greater employer participation in the agricultural sector.

**'With the colleges closing down, I think that's where a lot of kids got their foot in the door, where they got some experience. I think it's up to us — if we want the people in our industry, then we have to give back.'** Grazier Anne Webber (Simmons and Mccosker, 2023)

## Logistical Hurdles



The data set on logistical hurdles as barriers to the potential success of the apprenticeship program reveals several challenges that employers may face. These challenges can be linked to other themes described earlier, particularly those related to resource investment and program relevance.

One notable finding is that 59% of employers who are interested in taking on an apprentice and 63% of those with less interest agree that ‘Having the time to supervise and train an apprentice especially during busy periods’ is a potential challenge. This aligns with the resource investment theme, where a majority of employers acknowledged the importance of possessing the necessary skills to effectively train and support apprentices.

This is consistent with research undertaken by the Productivity Commission (Productivity Commission 2020) which concluded that outside of wages, employers cited supervision costs as the most expensive cost of having an apprentice working in their business. As with previous comments, this finding is highly likely to also apply in the agribusiness sector (DEWR 2022).

Similarly, 52% of interested employers and 66% of those with no interest agree that ‘Fitting in around seasonal production activities’ is a potential challenge. This relates to the program relevance theme, where employers expressed concerns about the alignment between the formal training program and the specific skill requirements of their workplace. Seasonal production activities may pose difficulties in providing a consistent learning experience for apprentices. In their research with growers, Cosby et al (2024) found that many had similar concerns.

The data also reveals that 50% of interested employers and 46% of those with little interest identify ‘No nearby RTOs to provide the formal training component’ as a potential challenge. This relates to the resource investment theme, as the lack of nearby training providers for many employers would mean that a program lacks viability as it will increase the costs and logistical challenges associated with apprenticeship programs.

Furthermore, 30% of interested employers and 40% of those with no interest agree that 'Managing the workload when the apprentice is offsite for their formal training components' is a potential challenge. This links back to the resource investment theme, as employers may need to allocate additional resources to manage workloads during apprentices' offsite training periods.

Respondents in the in-depth interviews echoed similar themes and some were disappointed in the past lack of flexibility shown by training providers in accommodating farm workloads.

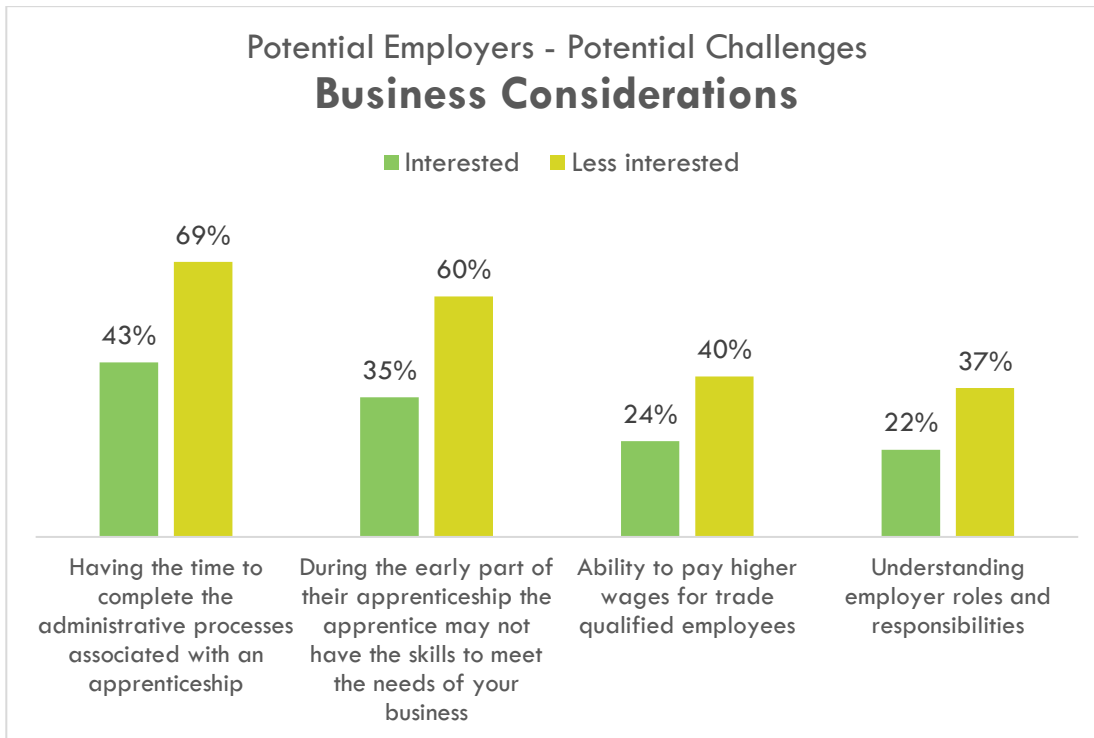
Lastly, 22% of interested employers and 46% of those with less interest identify 'Having sufficient work to keep an apprentice occupied all year round' as a potential challenge. This relates to the program relevance theme, as employers may struggle to provide a comprehensive learning experience if there is not enough work available throughout the year.

Overall, the logistical hurdles identified in this data set are closely linked to the challenges discussed in the resource investment and program relevance themes. Employers face challenges in allocating time and resources to supervise and train apprentices, particularly during busy periods and seasonal production activities.

**'Some of the other challenges and we will come across this is do we have enough work to keep this person engaged with that period?' – Victorian Producer**

**'Sometimes a student does miss a day or two here or there because its calving or whatever, and it's just all hands-on deck for that time.' – Tasmanian Producer**

## Business Considerations



The data set under the heading of business considerations highlights various factors that employers perceive as potential challenges to the success of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship model. While these considerations span different aspects, it is noteworthy that, in general, they were seen as lesser challenges compared to some of the other issues discussed earlier.

One pattern that emerges from the data is the higher percentage of employers with very little or no interest in taking on an apprentice who identify these business considerations as potential challenges. For instance, 69% of less interested employers agree that ‘Having the time to complete the administrative processes associated with an apprenticeship’ is a potential hurdle, compared to 43% of highly interested employers. This suggests that the administrative burden may be a more significant deterrent for employers who are already less inclined to participate in the apprenticeship program. Paperwork-related concerns have also been found among potential employers in sectors outside of agribusiness (DEWR 2022)

Similarly, 60% of less interested employers see ‘During the early part of their apprenticeship, the apprentice may not have the skills to meet the needs of your business’ as a potential challenge, compared to 35% of highly interested employers. This concern relates to the program relevance theme discussed earlier, where employers emphasised the importance of aligning the apprenticeship program with their specific skill requirements and ensuring that apprentices can contribute effectively to their workplace.

Other research has identified similar concerns by some potential employers of apprentices in other sectors (DEWR 2022).

The data also shows that 40% of less interested employers and 24% of highly interested employers identify ‘Ability to pay higher wages for trade qualified employees’ as a potential issue. This links to the resource investment theme, where employers recognised the costs associated with providing accommodation, training, and support for apprentices. The concern about paying higher wages for



qualified employees may reflect the long-term financial implications of investing in apprenticeship programs.

Lastly, 37% of less interested employers and 22% of highly interested employers agree that 'Understanding employer roles and responsibilities' is a potential challenge. This relates to the resource investment theme, where employers acknowledged the importance of having the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively train and support apprentices. The lower percentage among highly interested employers suggests that they may feel more confident in their understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the apprenticeship program.

Overall, while the business considerations identified in this data set were seen as lesser challenges compared to other issues, they still highlight important factors that employers take into account when assessing the feasibility and benefits of participating in the apprenticeship program. The patterns and linkages to earlier themes, such as program relevance and resource investment, underscore the interconnected nature of these challenges and the need for a holistic approach in addressing them to promote the success of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship in the agricultural sector.

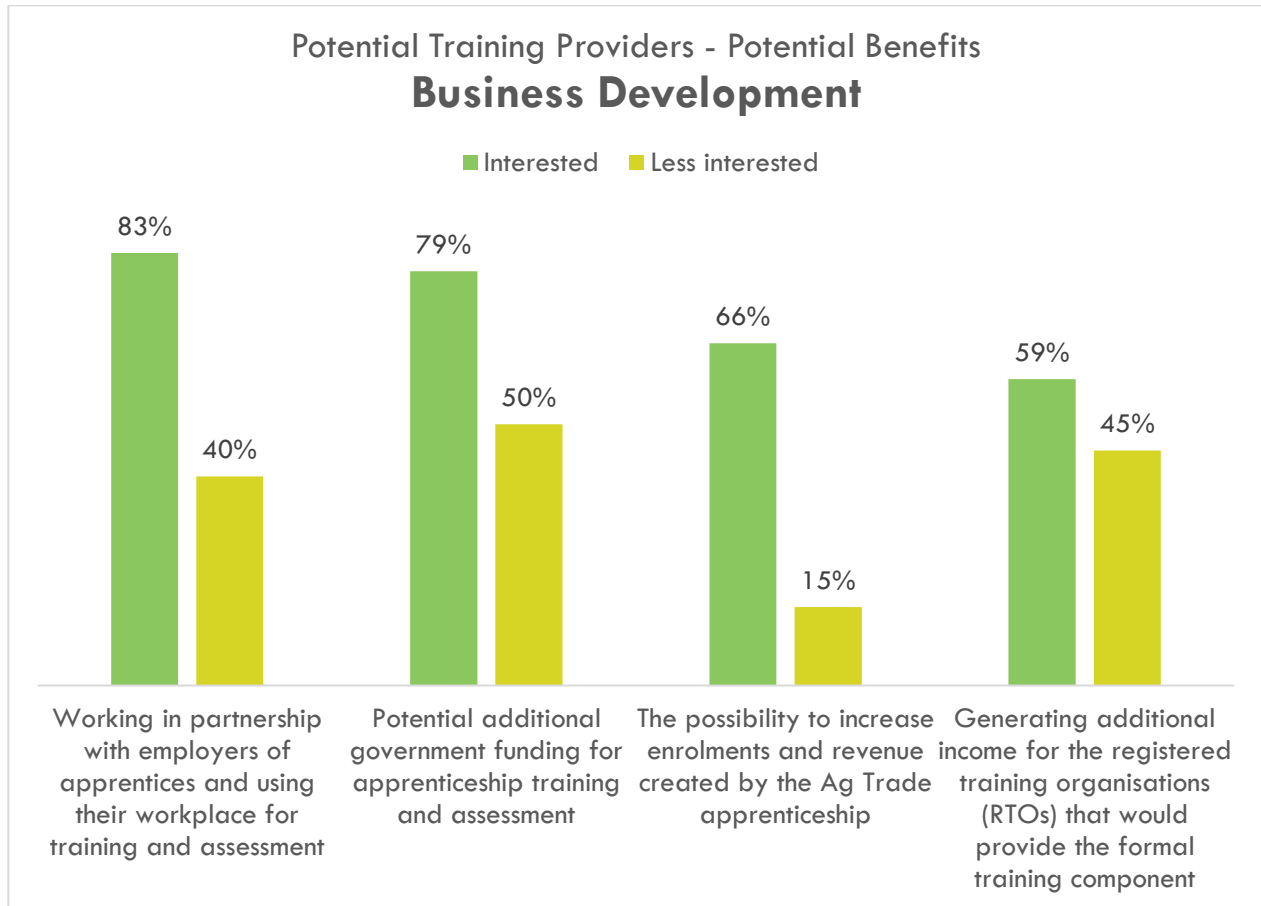
**Importantly the survey data highlights a number of important issues that are causing employers to be disinterested in such a program, and the success of the program would be enhanced by a capacity to address these issues.**

**'All the growers we spoke to were willing to pay more than the pastoral award, no one thought an apprentice should be getting paid less than the person next to them on a tractor not doing an apprenticeship.'** Dr Amy Cosby (Bailey, 2024)

**'There are far too many farmers that are generational farmers, and they actually don't know how to manage people.'** – Tasmanian Producer

# Training Provider Benefits

## Business Development



The data set on business development for training organisations offering agricultural trade apprenticeships highlights key attributes that providers consider important potential benefits. The most striking finding is the importance of ‘Working in partnership with employers of apprentices and using their workplace for training and assessment,’ with 83% of very or extremely interested training organisations identifying this as crucial, compared to only 40% of those with limited or no interest. This underscores the critical role of employer partnerships in the success of apprenticeship programs from the perspective of training providers.

It is important to recognise that training providers are either commercial or not-for-profit organisations that need to maintain financial viability in the short and long term. Government funding plays a significant role in the decision-making process of training providers, as it can help offset the costs associated with delivering the apprenticeship program.

This is reflected in the data, with 79% of very or extremely interested training organisations and 50% of those with limited or no interest considering ‘Potential additional government funding for apprenticeship training and assessment’ as very or extremely important.

Furthermore, 66% of very or extremely interested training organisations see ‘The possibility to increase enrolments and revenue created by the Ag Trade Apprenticeship’ as a very or extremely important benefit, compared to only 15% of those with limited or no interest. Similarly, 59% of

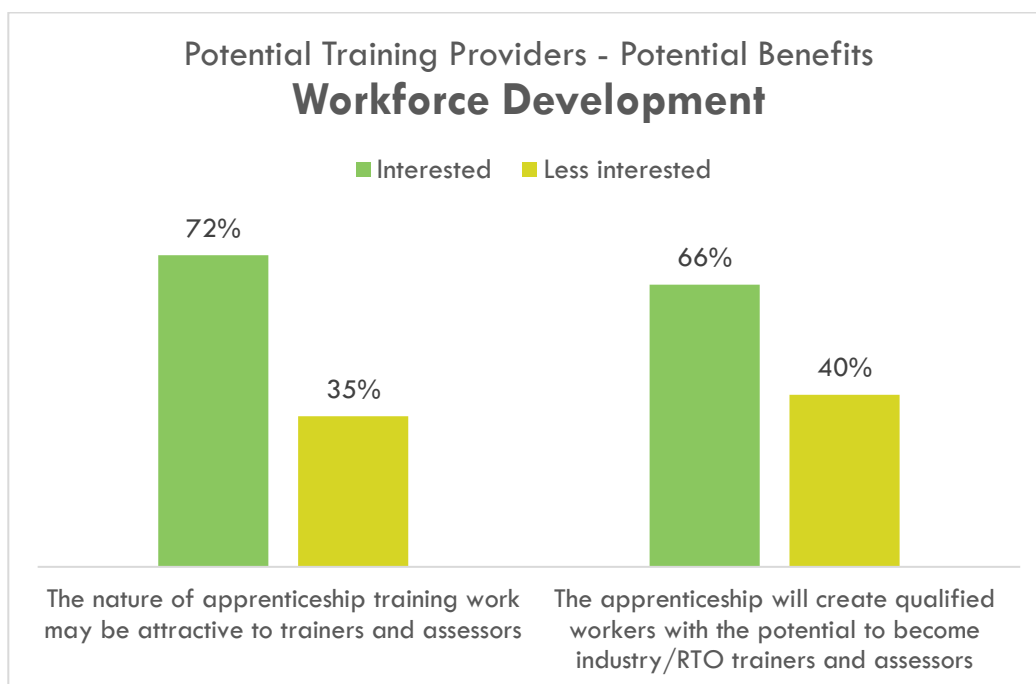
interested training organisations identify ‘Generating additional income for the registered training organisations (RTOs) that would provide the formal training’ as a very or extremely important benefit, compared to 45% of those with no interest. These findings emphasize the financial incentives that training providers consider when assessing the potential benefits of offering an apprenticeship program.

The data highlights the significance of working in partnership with employers and the importance of financial considerations, such as government funding and potential revenue generation, for training organisations in the context of agricultural trade apprenticeships. Addressing these factors and fostering strong collaborations between training organisations and employers will be crucial in promoting the successful implementation and delivery of apprenticeship programs while ensuring the financial sustainability of training providers.

**‘We literally we could not operate without the very, very strong relationships we’ve got with industry’ - New South Wales RTO**

**‘I’m more than happy to have a robust, gutsy program so long as I’ve got the ability to get funded along the way. I don’t care how that happens.’ - Queensland RTO**

## Workforce Development



The data set on workforce or staffing benefits for training providers offering agricultural trade apprenticeships reveals some interesting insights. It is important to acknowledge that finding and retaining quality staff is a persistent challenge faced by training organisations across various sectors, including agriculture.

The data shows that 72% of training organisations that are interested in offering an apprenticeship consider ‘The nature of apprenticeship training work may be attractive to trainers and assessors’ as a very or extremely important benefit, compared to only 35% of those with no interest. This suggests

that training providers who are keen on offering apprenticeships see the unique nature of apprenticeship training work as a potential draw for attracting and retaining skilled trainers and assessors.

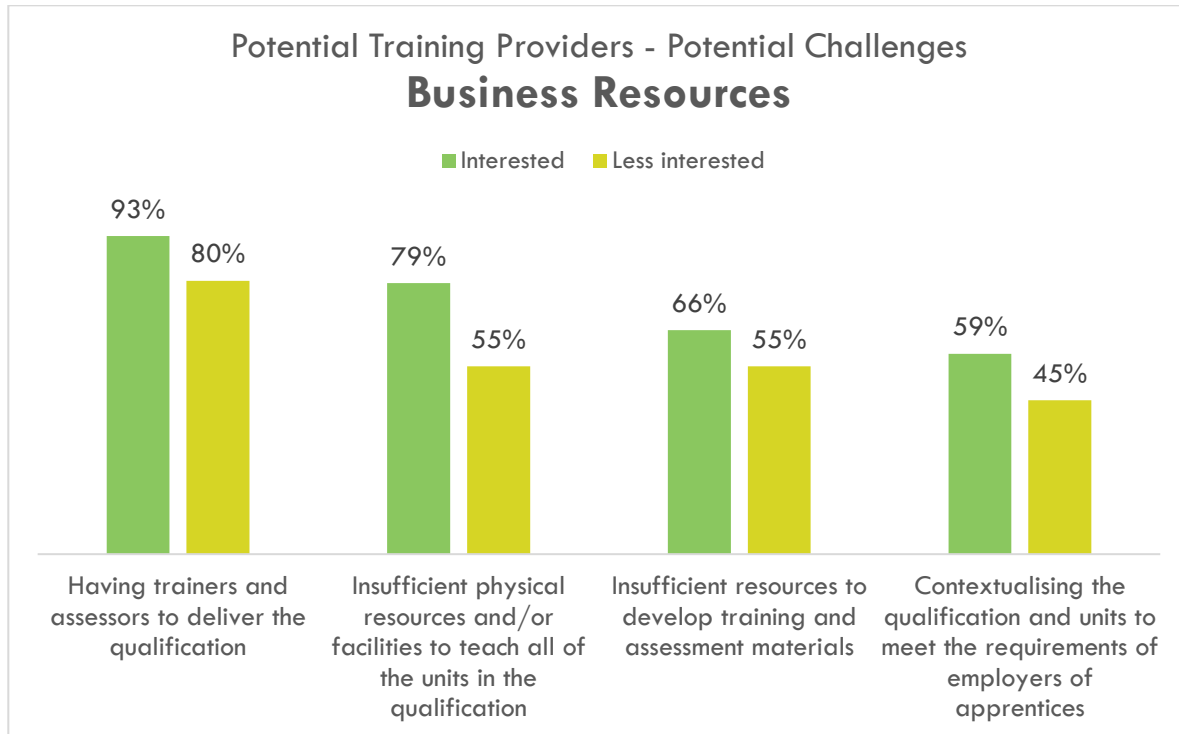
Furthermore, 66% of interested training organisations identify 'The apprenticeship will create qualified workers with the potential to become industry/RTO trainers and assessors' as an important benefit, compared to 40% of those with no interest. This indicates that training providers recognise the long-term potential of apprenticeship programs in developing a pipeline of qualified workers who could transition into training and assessment roles within the industry or training organisations themselves.

The challenge of finding and retaining quality staff is a persistent issue for training organisations in the sector, and the data suggests that agricultural trade apprenticeships may offer some potential benefits in this regard. The attractive nature of apprenticeship training work and the opportunity to develop a pool of qualified workers who could become future trainers and assessors are seen as important factors by training providers who are interested in offering apprenticeships. However, it is important to note that these potential benefits alone may not be sufficient to overcome the broader challenges of staff recruitment and retention faced by training organisations.

**'A lot of growers were concerned with the quality of the training that RTOs offered because of a lack of qualified and experienced staff.', Dr Amy Cosby commenting on research conducted for a cotton and grain industry apprenticeship. (Bailey, 2024)**

# Training Provider Challenges

## Business Resources



The data set on business resources challenges for training providers offering agricultural trade apprenticeships reveals some notable findings that relate to the previous data on potential benefits. One of the most significant challenges identified is ‘Having trainers and assessors to deliver the qualification,’ with 93% of interested training organisations and 80% of those with no interest agreeing that this is a potential challenge. This aligns with the persistent challenge of finding and retaining quality staff faced by training organisations.

Cosby et al (2024) also found that potential training organisations perceive the scarcity of suitability trained, knowledgeable, and experienced trainers as a key issue to providing an Ag Trade Apprenticeship qualification.

Another notable challenge is ‘Insufficient physical resources and/or facilities to teach all of the units in the qualification,’ with 79% of interested training organisations and 55% of those with no interest agreeing. This likely relates to the potential financial benefits of government funding and increased enrolments and revenue.

The data also shows that 66% of interested training organisations and 55% of those with no interest agree that ‘Insufficient resources to develop training and assessment materials’ is a potential challenge, underscoring the resource constraints faced by training providers.

Lastly, 59% of interested training organisations and 45% of those with no interest agree that ‘Contextualising the qualification and units to meet the requirements of employers of apprentices’ is a potential challenge, relating to the critical importance of working in partnership with employers.

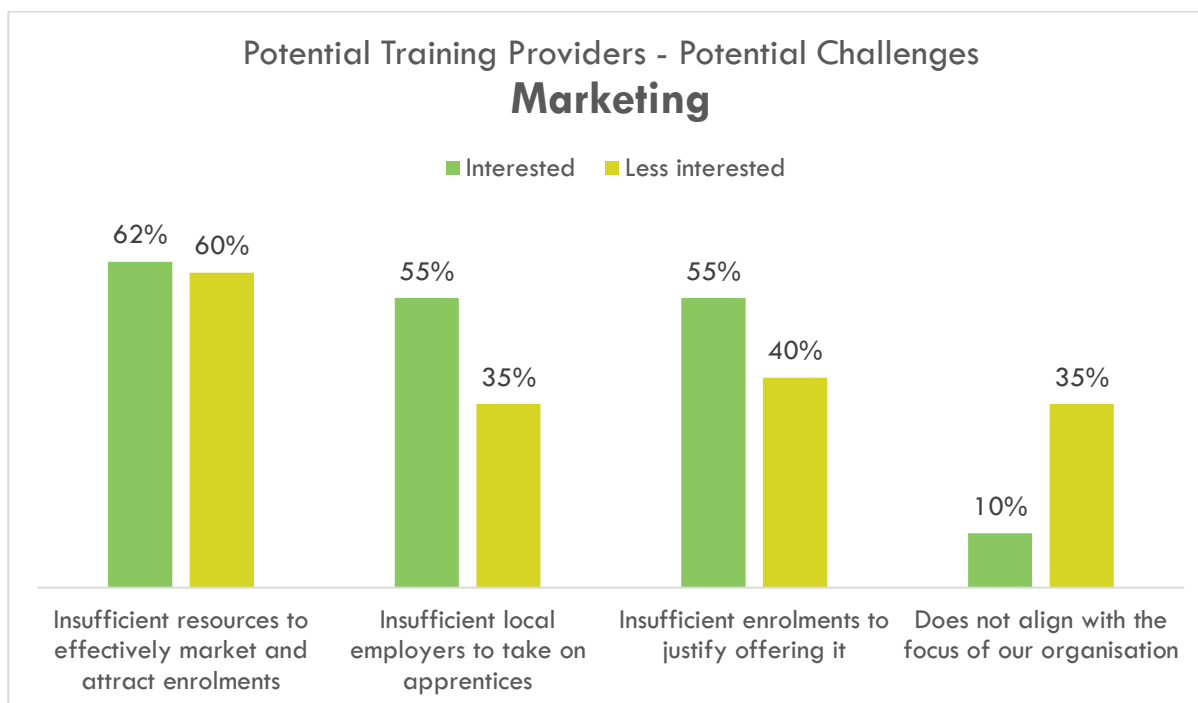
Overall, the data highlights the complex interplay between potential benefits and challenges for training providers offering agricultural trade apprenticeships. While training providers recognise

the potential benefits, they also face significant resource constraints that could impact their ability to fully realise these benefits. Addressing these challenges will be crucial in enabling training providers to successfully implement and deliver an Ag Trade Apprenticeship while capitalising on the potential benefits.

**‘You actually need the RTO's and GTO's conversing with industry. A lot closer and actually listening to each other. They need to work together.’ - Queensland RTO**

**‘The other thing that we're hearing quite a lot around the place is that the lack of available trainers is a real issue affecting the future of the industry and that's terrible.’ - Victorian RTO**

## Marketing



The data set on marketing challenges faced by training providers offering agricultural trade apprenticeships reveals some interesting findings that can be compared to the earlier response related to marketing. It is important to note the correlation between training providers who were less interested in offering the apprenticeship and the perceived lack of alignment with their organisation's focus.

One of the key challenges identified is 'Insufficient resources to effectively market and attract enrolments,' with 62% of interested training organisations and 60% of those with no interest agreeing that this is a potential challenge.

This finding parallels the earlier discussion on marketing, where the importance of tailored marketing strategies and addressing specific stakeholder concerns was highlighted. Training providers, regardless of their level of interest in offering the apprenticeship, recognise the need for adequate resources to effectively market the program and attract enrolments.

Another challenge identified is 'Insufficient local employers to take on apprentices,' with 55% of interested training organisations and 35% of those with no interest agreeing. This finding relates to the critical role of employer partnerships in the success of apprenticeship programs, as mentioned in responses to other survey questions.

Interestingly, there is a significant difference between the two groups of training providers when it comes to the challenge of 'Does not align with the focus of our organisation.' Only 10% of interested training organisations agree with this statement, compared to 35% of those with no interest. This lack of alignment could be a major barrier to their participation and may require targeted efforts to demonstrate the relevance and benefits of an Ag Trade Apprenticeship program to their specific organisational goals and priorities.

## References

Bailey, E., 2024. *Could a cotton and grains apprenticeship be successful?* Queensland Country Life.

Cosby, A., Kelly, N., Sullivan, M., & McDonald, N. (2024). *Exploring a cotton and grains agricultural apprenticeship/traineeships model* (Research project CQU 2303). Cotton Research and Development Corporation & Grains Research and Development Corporation.

DEWR, 2022. *Australian Apprenticeship Services and Supports Discussion Paper*, <https://www.dewr.gov.au/australian-apprenticeships/resources/australian-apprenticeship-services-and-supports-discussion-paper>, accessed 12-April 2024

England, D.L., 2022. *How to attract and retain quality staff*. Meat and Livestock Australia.

Productivity Commission, 2020, *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review*, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/skills-workforce-agreement/report>, accessed 12-4-2024

Simmons, C., Mccosker, M., 2023. *Longreach students given new pathway into agriculture industry amid worker shortages*. ABC News.

Voconiq (Firm), AgriFutures Australia, 2022. *Community Perceptions and Worker Experiences Program: quantitative research results*.