



World Council of Churches Ten Principles for Food

August 2026

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you. Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord comes. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

James 5:1-8

The Synods of Queensland and Victoria and Tasmania continue to invite you to join campaigns for social justice in our food systems to help address climate change, eliminate the exploitation of people working in food production, live sustainably, and promote human health.

As we noted in our February JustAct newsletter, the World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, has been running a Food for Life Campaign, which can be accessed here <https://www.oikoumene.org/programme-activity/food-for-life>. It released an advocacy resource for congregations outlining 10 principles for how we should relate to food. The resource can be downloaded from <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/TenCommandmentsFood.pdf> or by searching for the title "Ten Commandments of Food".

The ten principles are:

1. Give thanks for the food you eat.
2. Eat food grown as close as possible to where you live.
3. Strive for all people to have knowledge about and access to affordable, nutritious food.
4. Eat mindfully and in moderation.
5. Do not waste food.
6. Be grateful to those who grow and prepare food for your table.
7. Support fair wages for farmworkers, farmers and food workers.
8. Reduce the environmental damage of land, water and air from food production and the food system.
9. Protect the biodiversity of seeds, soils, ecosystems and the cultures of food producers.
10. Rejoice and share the sacred gift of food with all.

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7. Support fair wages for farmworkers, farmers and food workers.

Disturbingly, many people involved in the production of food globally, including the food we eat, are subjected to exploitation and abuse. At the most extreme end, the last measurement of the number of people in forced labour by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2022 estimated that 2.1 million people involved in agriculture were subjected to forced labour. The ILO also estimated that 128,000 crew on fishing boats are also subjected to forced labour.

Australia is not immune to the exploitation of people working on farms that produce the food we eat.

One of the ways Australian Governments have helped curb exploitation on farms has been the introduction of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme. Our Pacific neighbours have had unemployment problems due to limited economic development opportunities. Thus, enabling people to go overseas to work and send money back to their families in the Pacific is



vital to addressing financial poverty in the Pacific Islands. In the last year, Fijians on temporary labour programs overseas sent \$640 million to their families.

The Australian Government established the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) in 2012 to allow people from the Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste to work on Australian farms for six months. Since then, the Programme has been expanded and re-named to the PALM Scheme. It has two streams. One that allows people from the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste to come and work in placements for up to nine months, mainly on farms. The second stream enables people to come and work for three to four years in Australia. Workers on the second stream mostly go into meat processing and aged care facilities.

The Scheme has a high level of protection built into it to detect, prevent and address any issues of exploitation or abuse of workers, which are not available to other people working on temporary visas, such as working holiday makers (backpackers) or students. The safeguards in the PALM Scheme include screening of employers applying to join the Scheme. A significant number of employers are rejected as unsuitable. Without employer screening, workers would be more likely to be exploited, as is the case with working holiday makers.

One additional safeguard that should be trialled is allowing the workers on the PALM Scheme to move between employers on the Scheme. Such an arrangement is not as simple as it sounds. Given the other safeguards in the Scheme, it should be trialled to ensure it delivers a positive benefit to workers and to detect any negative unintended consequences. Currently, employers on the Scheme pay for airfare to bring the worker to Australia and set up accommodation and vehicle arrangements for the worker. They also organise the worker's visa. The worker has to repay most of the airfare and visa costs to the employer over several months. These arrangements make the PALM Scheme accessible to people in the Pacific who would otherwise lack the savings to pay for travel to Australia, benefiting those in financial poverty. If workers were free to leave the employer who made the travel arrangements as soon as they arrived in Australia, and did not have to repay the employer for the airfare and visa, employers are likely to leave the Scheme and engage people on other temporary visas instead, where they do not have to cover these costs. The overall outcome would then be a reduction in the number of people from the Pacific Islands able to benefit from the scheme and an increase in the exploitation of people on other types of temporary visas.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters or e-mails to:

The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP

Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations

PO Box 6022

House of Representatives

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

E-mail: Minister.Rishworth@dewr.gov.au

Salutation: Dear Minister



Points to make in your letter:

- Welcome the many measures the Government has put in place to detect, prevent and address cases of exploitation and mistreatment of people working on the PALM Scheme.
- As a further important safeguard, request that the Government pilot an arrangement to allow people working on the PALM Scheme to be able to move between employers on the Scheme after they have paid off the debt to the employer who arranged their travel to Australia.
- Employers on the Scheme should be able to advertise vacancies and workers on the Scheme should be able to apply for the positions advertised.