

# The Swedish berry picking

How to secure decent working conditions?

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## Basic facts:

- Every year it comes approx 6 000 pickers to Sweden to pick berries.
- The Swedish berry companies recruit pickers through Thai labour agencies.
- There are also so called "Tourist pickers" – this group is not employed, they sell to berry collectors.
- There are around ten companies (Swedish and Finnish) with employed pickers in Sweden.



## Rules:

- The companies applying for having Thai pickers need to follow the rules of the Migration agency, which is shortly:
- The working conditions must at least be in line with the rules in a Collective Bargaining Agreement, CBA.
- The CBA which all labour agencies have signed on to is Bemanningsavtalet with Kommunal.
- Follow the rules for lowest wage, now 80% of the median wage, 27 360 SEK/month for 2024.
- There must be a written labour contract.
- The labour agencies must show that they can pay the wages and together with the Swedish berry company show that they can organise the accommodation etc.



# Conditions for the berry pickers in Sweden

- Guaranteed basic wage.
- Transparent list with how much each picker have picked and visible price per kg.
- When the employee has picked for a value above the guaranteed wage, he/she will receive higher wage according to amount of picked berries.
- All employees pays for accommodation.
- Working hours should be 5 days a week, 8 h/day for regular work, but in reality many times 70 h/week with no days off.
- Working approx 2 – 2,5 months in Sweden



## Costs:

Travel (flight + other)

Visa, services & insurances etc

In total the costs are about 21 000 SEK

The employees take a loan and have interest as well

In short; the pickers are indebted when they arrive to Sweden

Cost for accomodation is also deducted later (often approx 200-300 SEK/day)

Depending on the accommodation cost the common netto-wage for pickers is from 8000 – 17 000 SEK for 2 months.

Given the often excessive working hours the hourly wage is very low.



## Latest scandals:

- Protests from berry pickers in the spring 2023.
- The news articles in Dagens Nyheter the summer of 2023 showed unacceptable conditions.
- Ongoing legal cases including charges of human trafficking.
- Now momentum for introducing Employer Pay Principle, EPP.



## What have been done?

- Kommunal set CBA with all Thai labour agencies.
- Berry network (Guidelines for free berry pickers and follow up each season before and after).
- Initiatives for Employer Pay Principle from sourcing companies like IKEA and Axfood since 2021.
- ETI (Ethical Trading Initiative)– Berry working group start april 2024.
- Independent investigation started autumn 2023.
- Increased surveillance from authorities.



## What have Axfood done?

- Pushed for EPP
- Visits and ongoing dialogue with our suppliers
- Have sustainability assessments in the tender process for all wild berries & mushrooms with origin from Sweden & Finland (5%-rule)
- Require transparency, systematic follow up of decent work & risk assessments
- Exclude berry producers that cannot show this
- 2023 we included 1st step to EPP and required the berry company to cover the loan (interest-free for the pickers).
- Push for the sector to take the next step this season with 1/3 of costs paid by the employer.





## What is needed?

- EPP
- Improved grievance channels
- Improved possibility for remediation
- To implement this it is needed with a sector wide collaboration
- This can be done through the ETI's berry working group
- Buyers need to do proper Due diligence in all supply chains with wild berries (not only frozen and fresh)
- Proper monitoring from governmental agencies
- KRAV and IP Arbetsvillkor should include EPP
- Common framework for Sweden and Finland



**Thanks!**