

Hamilton farmer health conference charts new waters

The inaugural National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) conference is taking an industry blueprint for better health and wellbeing in rural areas to the world stage.

NCFH Director Sue Brumby says the Hamilton Charter for Farmer Health is a major milestone, not just for the conference, but for the delivery of better rural healthcare.

The charter will also be submitted to the prestigious, US-based *Journal of Agromedicine*.

Ms Brumby says all conference presenters and chairs were asked to identify their key message, which was then woven into the charter.

She said under the guiding hand of Evelyne de Leeuw, Deakin University's Professor of Community Health Systems and Policy the charter was collated and finetuned.

"Which was no easy task as there are so many crucial messages to deliver in this traditionally under-serviced area," Ms Brumby says.

"As a result the charter was continually overhauled, the current version is number six, but when it was presented at the end of the conference it received overwhelming support" she says.

Professor de Leeuw says the aim of the charter is to formulate a statement on farmer health which anyone can take home and advocate for farmer health in their own constituencies.

"Whether they are NCFH industry partners, communities, politicians or bureaucrats, the charter has the breadth and the flexibility to cover them," Professor de Leeuw says.

"In five core action areas it sets out a number of things which need to be done and we hope we have been forward enough to have made a fairly proactive statement about farmer health, not just here but around the world," she says.

Ms Brumby says the key message that the importance of health and wellbeing and the safety of farm men, women and families around the world is crystal clear.

And that it is a barometer for the level of national and global health as a resource and a reserve.

“As the world population soars, and demand for food grows, it is essential farm families are healthy and happy so they are able to provide food and fibre, the building blocks for everyone’s health and wellbeing,” Ms Brumby says.

“If we have unhealthy, even worse, undiagnosed, farming conditions we are left with an industry where health is under pressure and its specialists are potentially unable to sustain themselves, their productivity and their markets,” she says.

“What we have achieved here in Hamilton is to once and for all open the gates on farmer health and made sure this pattern of normalising poor health outcomes for farming families is debunked.”

She says the Hamilton Charter for Farmer Health has five core principles to guide all participants as they return to their workplaces, communities and countries, and send a message to all people involved in the delivery of farmer health, wellbeing and safety.

That key message of the charter is to:

- *Empower ourselves and others to consider the health impacts of agricultural production and campaign to ensure negative impacts on farmer health are recognised and not normalised as a by-product of production.*
- *Understand the cycles of farmer health and the relationship of farmers to nature while delivering appropriate and quality farming health programs to all.*
- *Defend and celebrate profitable and sustainable rural industries in a global market recognising and valuing the key role of farmers in providing food and fibre for the world.*
- *Broaden the identity of farm men, women and communities, beyond the life is work ethos, and thus enable them to successfully meet their new challenges through opportunities, alliances and education.*
- *Recognise improving farmer health involves building new relationships and strengthening existing ones across and within sectors. Research, policy development and service delivery will need to be developed in place, recognising the valuable interaction in, and with, communities. The interdependency and synergistic drive of these relationships will move this Charter forward.*

Go forth and sow and water the seeds of the Hamilton Charter for Farmer Health into your work, workplace, community, governance or new policy.

Ms Brumby says international speakers at the NCFH conference have asked if the Charter can be submitted to the *Journal of Agromedicine*.

She said published in Philadelphia, *The Journal* is dedicated to the health and agricultural sciences.

“It focuses on the health effects of agricultural operations on workers, consumers, and the environment,” she says.

“In exactly the same way as the NCFH does, as our conference has done and as we will work to achieve in the future.”

For further information please contact the National Centre for Farmer Health on 03 55518533