



It's time to pull together

FARMERS typically look after their stock well, but in hard times such as those currently being experienced around the state, farming families can be placed under enormous stress and their own health should not be overlooked.

The extensive Bestwool/Bestlamb network helps people talk with others in the same situation and gives vital support to one another.

The Sustainable Farm Families project aims to improve farmer health, well-being and farm safety.

It has been successfully piloted with more than 600 Australian farmers, with 100 per cent of participants recommending it to other farmers.

It has also been successful in decreasing participants' risk factors for major diseases, improving the uptake of farm safety and influencing positive behavioral changes, such as farmers actually taking holidays.

The Sustainable Farm Families

(SFF) project was developed in 2003 by Western District Health Service (WDHS), Hamilton, to address the health, well-being and safety issues facing the farming industries through an evidence-based program combining research and collaboration between different industry sectors.

The developers say farmers have been integral to the success of SFF and have helped to shape the project so it remains highly relevant to the needs of farming families.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has announced \$2.9 million funding for SFF to be delivered to 1000 Victorian farming families in the next two years.

There now exists the opportunity for farmers' local health service and industry group to be part of this roll out.

Under the program, every participant attends a two-day workshop in year one which is then followed up by another two day workshop in year 2.

This will include physical

assessments and referrals, information workshops and action planning each year.

Topics covered in workshops are linked to relevant health issues predominant in farming and rural populations such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, stress management, nutrition and farm safety

Workshops also look at the impact of health on farming business decisions and impact of farming decisions on health, family and farm.

Benchmark indicators and drivers of farm family health are then developed that can be incorporated into farm business plans and farm benchmarking systems.

Participants also create their own action plans to address identified issues.

Each workshop will be delivered by two trained rural health professionals (registered nurses) and facilitated by a DPI facilitator.

■ Visit www.sustainablefarm-families.org.au



■ The Sustainable Farm Families project is helping address health and safety issues in rural communities