

Audit approves health push

By **ANDREW MOLE**

A FARMER health and safety education program, Sustainable Farming Families, has received a ringing endorsement from Victorian Auditor-General Des Pearson.

Its big tick comes as the latest figures show people in regional and rural Australia will not live anywhere near as long as their city cousins.

The Royal Australian College of Physicians has estimated a white man born in Central Darling Shire of western NSW could expect 11 years less life than if he had been born in the Sydney suburb of Mosman.

Australia's Health 2010 study also shows the incidence of reported injury is 33 per cent higher outside major cities.

The only drawback for the \$5 million Sustainable Farming Families program, run by Western District Health Service, in Mr Pearson's 30-page report was a need to increase numbers of farmers participating.

Western District Health Service chief executive Jim Fletcher welcomed the Auditor-General's report and recommendations.

"By having this independent assessment of SFF, and its progress to date, we will be able to use it as a benchmark to assist in fine-tuning the next phase of the strategy," he said.

The report found stakeholder management and communication was sound, with evidence of good collaboration between funders, WDHS, agricultural industry groups and rural health agencies.