

►► **RURAL HEALTH**

Your pulse is vital business



Wellbeing benefits: Prof Kelly Donham offered his advice in Hamilton last week.

By **ANDREW MOLE**

HEALTH and safety need to be seen as a crucial part of farming's bottom line if the industry is to progress, a world expert told last week's National Centre for Farmer Health conference in Hamilton.

Prof Kelley Donham said while producers knew all about raising crops and breeding livestock, they rarely grasp the "need to farm health and safety".

He said farmers were too prepared to assume health issues and physical risks as part of their business.

Prof Donham, who works with the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa, developed the first training program, to focus on agricultural medicine.

It provides specialty training for healthcare professionals, oc-

cupational health professionals and veterinarians in agricultural communities.

Prof Donham's AgriSafe Network, a group of specialty clinics which deal with health issues of farm families and workers in their communities, has spread from one centre to a network across 17 states in the US.

And Prof Donham speaks with hands-on experience as he still owns and operates a farm.

His research has focused on diseases of agricultural workers, particularly respiratory diseases, zoonotic infectious diseases and intervention methods of prevention.

"One of the inherent risks for people in regional and rural areas is delayed, or misdiagnosed, intervention in illness," Prof Donham said.

"The traditional healthcare system provides little to zero training in agriculture issues.

"A producer comes in and presents with symptoms which the health provider simply does not and cannot recognise.

"That is compounded by the farmer's inherent sense of self-reliance and reluctance to go into detail about their problems, particularly men."

Prof Donham said once producers took the step to recognise their health and wellbeing as a value-added product on the farm, many of the current problems would go away.

He said farmers could worry about a single harvest, or sheep sale, but if they lost their health the result could be the loss of the farm.

"When you look at it that way, people suddenly grasp their true worth," Prof Donham said.

"The culture of agriculture means change has to be built into the system, we have to farm and raise healthcare."