

Farmers and animals working together often get sick together

Q Fever, equine flu, leptospirosis, cross staph infections, needle jabs – it’s a litany of life-threatening danger for farmers working closely with animals.

Clearly there are more risks for farmers working with animals than simple impact injuries such as having a cow or horse step on their feet or a ram smack its horns into their knees.

And they are all on the agenda of the inaugural National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) conference in Hamilton, Victoria, from October 11-13.

NCFH Director Clinical Associate Professor Sue Brumby says presenters include internationally renowned Kelley J. Donham, Professor and Director, Iowa’s Centre for Agricultural Safety and Health, Department of Occupational and Environmental Health, College of Public Health, the University of Iowa.

“We are incredibly fortunate to have someone of Professor Donham’s stature at our conference, and he will be one of the conference’s keynote presenters,” Professor Brumby says. He, in collaboration with Hamilton livestock vet David Rendell, has written review papers on farmer needle stick injuries.

“Farmer injuries from needle stick incidents while vaccinating livestock have required extensive surgical repair or amputation and have caused miscarriage and even death,” she says.

“Giving injections is part of livestock farming but needle stick incidences from livestock injections are very common, with more than 80 per cent of farmers and vets reporting a needle stick incident in the previous year.

“Risk of serious operator injuries from being knocked by sudden movements of sheep or cattle when they are injected is further incentive to improve injection technique.”

David Champness, Principal Veterinary Officer of the Victorian Department of Primary Industries will address zoonotic diseases such as Q fever and leptospirosis

Professor Brumby says both are well documented direct causes of illness in farmers.

But she says sudden outbreaks of livestock disease incidents such as anthrax, equine influenza or more insidious endemic diseases such as ovine Johne's disease in sheep or bovine Johne's disease in dairy and beef cattle herds attack a farming business on a number of levels.

“They impact not only on the health and welfare of livestock, but the financial return for the farming business. Which in turn boosts anxiety and stress levels of farmers.” she says.

“The greatest asset to a farming enterprise is the farmers themselves and the human health profession is well aware of human health problems due to the effects of chronic stress.

“Where the farmer's health and wellbeing is compromised whether it be physical or psychological impairment, without external assistance this may have a detrimental impact on livestock health and welfare leading to further financial and emotional stress on the farmer.”

Conference delegates will also hear about methicillin-resistant *S. aureus*, (MRSA) Which is well recognised as an important hospital acquired infection.

However, it has recently been detected in a variety of livestock species including cattle and poultry in European and Asian countries.

Professor Kelley J. Donham, will also provide a focus on current MRSA risk assessment and suggest recommendations for control, management, and public policy based on currently available science,” she said

“The NCFH conference will deliver grass-roots health, wellbeing and safety education, areas which are going to become more, not less, important in the years ahead as the pressure on farmers to boost production increases.

“Knowing what to look for will be a valuable tool for all farmers, researchers, and service providers.”

The NCFH conference will be held in the Hamilton Performing Arts Centre on October 11, 12, 13. Further details are available from www.farmerhealth.org.au or by contacting Sally Stevenson on 0355518533.