

Program bows out

A VALUABLE program which has benefited the health and wellbeing of rural landholders has concluded, much to the disappointment of those who've accessed the program for the last three years.

Alpine residents attended the final Sustainable Farm Families workshop last week and took part in various sessions and undertook personal health assessments.

The practical program started in 2003 with funding through the Joint Research Venture for Farm Health and Safety, managed by the Rural Industries Development Research Corporation and gained immediate credibility with farmers and agricultural industry groups.

A testament to the program's success has been the high retention rates seen over the three-year period.

SFF began in the Alpine region in 2011 working with Alpine Valleys Vignerons and Mudgegonga Landcare members, and annual workshops focused on a wide range of topics encompassing physical activity, cancer and health, and farming business.

Participants in SFF workshop say health message needs to be spread



HEALTH IS ON THE WAY: Alpine Valleys Vignerons members Greg O'Keefe, Bruce Holm, Annette Holm, Richard Orton, Di Dalbosco, Tim Walpole, Michael Freudenstein, Michael Dalbosco, Alpine Health facilitator Alison Hescocock and Tony Ferraro at the third and final Sustainable Farm Families session. PHOTO: Simon Crase

Bruce and Annette Holm from Ringer Reef thoroughly enjoyed the National Centre for Farmer Health-led program and workshops and believed the benefits were tangible and stretched beyond the boundaries of the program.

"It's been really good; we'd been considering our health at the time this started and it confirmed that we'd been thinking and gave us reinforcement," Mr Holm said.

Mr Holm said the SFF had also had the unintentional benefit of creating

a support group of sorts and discussions on health now permeated social occasions.

Mr Holm has lost 10-15kg in the last three years and feels in better shape for having done so, after recognising the need to take charge of his health.

"We have a small business and need to be fit and well to run our business," he said.

"It is up to you and you can control things by putting strategies in place for the benefit of your health in the future."

He said one of the pluses in taking part in SFF was the physical health checks and the data which is provided, meaning there's something measurable to take to a doctor down the track.

Having seen the way he and his wife have benefited and the broader positive aspects which have flowed from SFF, Mr Holm would like to see the government acknowledge the program's need.

"I think it's been a fantastic thing for all of us

and I think it should be kept in place," Mr Holm said.

"The health message needs to be kept out in front of people."

AVV executive officer Michael Freudenstein said the SFF had helped the group immensely and he would be sending a letter to Bill Sykes (MLA, Benalla) in regard to the funding cut and the need to revisit the decision.

Western District Health Service chief executive officer Jim Fletcher said he also believed it would be a sad day for the whole agricultural industry when the last workshop was completed in July.

Mr Fletcher said the SFF program's strength was its ability to retain grassroots support and remain in touch with participants to consolidate the work they have done.

"SFF was recognised very early on with awards, and came through independent and numerous external evaluations with flying colors, having clearly demonstrated both its value for money in saved health costs and its value to individual participants, and in many cases, their families."