

## Right prescription for solving farming ills

The “full house” sign has gone up on Deakin University’s second HMF701 Agricultural Health and Medicine Unit at Hamilton’s National Centre for Farmer Health.

And it has drawn registrations from Cloncurry in Queensland to Horrocks in Western Australia, representing every facet of service delivery to agricultural communities.

The National Centre for Farmer Health also provided six scholarships, further boosting the profile of what is now the premier agricultural training of this type in Australia.

Deakin’s unit chair Dr Scott McCoombe says the most important aspect of a productive agricultural industry is a healthy workforce.

He says HMF701 will increase participant’s understanding of the social, environmental, physical and mental health factors that result in higher rates of injury, illness and death in rural and remote communities.

“The information it will provide will be incredibly beneficial to professionals looking to improve agricultural production and sustainability or to improve health provision, research, policy and literacy in rural and remote communities,” he says.

NCFH director Sue Brumby says the five-day intensive unit, running from February 28 to March 4, has been developed to appeal to multidisciplinary graduate-level students and professionals from nursing, medicine, health, agricultural science, agribusiness, social work, veterinary and environmental science backgrounds.

Associate clinical professor Brumby says rural professionals, health professionals, healthcare administrators and policy makers will enhance their knowledge of the physical and mental health issues facing today’s rural and remote communities.

“At a time when rural and agricultural Australia is under siege from one end of the country to the other, with drought, flood and fire on an unprecedented scale, never has a course such as this been more relevant,” she said

“Importantly, it aims to develop the next generation of rural and agricultural health leaders to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of rural and remote Australians.”

She says on completion graduates with a relevant health degree will also be eligible to become an AgriSafe clinic provider.

“This unit has no prerequisites. It is available to all postgraduate-level students but also to interested professionals from agricultural, education, policy or health backgrounds,” she says.

“If you work with, or for, the farming industry, this course is a rare opportunity to not just boost your own skills but become a proactive contributor in your community.”

The National Centre for Farmer Health is an initiative of the Victorian government Future Farming Strategy and the Helen and Geoff Handbury Trust.

The five-day intensive curriculum will cover the following topics:

- Agricultural medicine conditions and co-morbidities
- High risk remote populations and chronic disease
- Rural respiratory health
- Climate impacts on farmer health
- Vision and hearing injuries
- Common cancers in agriculture
- Traumatic agricultural injury
- Remote emergency medicine
- Addiction, suicide and mental illness in rural Australia
- Pesticide and veterinary chemical hazards
- Musculoskeletal health and ageing
- Zoonotic diseases

Dr McCoombe says a better understanding of these agricultural health, safety and wellbeing issues will help improve the health outcomes of farming men, women, children and agricultural workers.

Further details are available from Director Susan Brumby, [susan.brumby@wdhs.net](mailto:susan.brumby@wdhs.net) or 0355518460.