

Media Release

SFF program gets the big OK from RIRDC

It's official. Eight years down the track, the benefits Sustainable Farm Families is providing its original participants are still having a "profound impact".

An independent report by Roberts Evaluation says SFF has "altered the way participants think about their physical and mental health and safety" and has "clearly created awareness amongst farmers of the importance of their health".

Importantly, the report also says SFF workshops have been equally positively received by, and been beneficial for, both men and women, for farmers of different ages, and for farmers working in different industries.

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation senior research manager Ken Moore says the outcome of the evaluation proved SFF was achieving "exactly what we wanted when we set out".

SFF began as part of the RIRDC Future Directions program.

It was initiated in 2003 in response to the gap between rural and urban population health outcomes, and clinical observation of injuries and premature death amongst farming men and women.

Mr Moore says SFF was an innovative, and essential, concept because it looked at farm families as a whole, rather than addressing single issues.

"A lot of industry research is very specific, but the big picture of the whole farm family and its wellbeing and safety seemed to get overlooked," Mr Moore says.

"But SFF interacts with families and although the current Victorian Future Farmers' strategy program only runs until June 30 next year, I would genuinely hope it gets wider, in all sectors of agriculture and across Australia .

"Hopefully we will also be able to get others involved, groups not in it now. If that happens we will be able to take a much more aggressive look at the growth of the whole project."

"Until then, having the National Centre for Farmer Health in Hamilton managing the program is a big step in the right direction – it is a good organisation and they are very good managers."

NCFH director Sue Brumby says she commissioned the report as the final benchmark to demonstrate its value to agricultural Australia.

Associate clinical professor Brumby says Western District Health Service in Hamilton took a “significant risk” when it backed the SFF launch in 2003, providing the infrastructure and input to get it off the ground.

“But it had the confidence of its vision to comprehend the breadth of the problem facing agricultural Australia and work to find a total approach solution,” she says.

WDHS chief executive officer Jim Fletcher says the diversity of SFF program means there is something to take away for virtually every farming family involved in the program.

He says the evaluation’s rates “are quite extraordinary”, with 97 pc indicating eight years on it has increased their knowledge of health issues and their own health.

“And an amazing 96 pc said the program provided tools to make lifestyle changes to improve their health, wellbeing and safety in the farm family and business environment,” Jim says.

“What everyone involved has learnt from the SSF program about structure, delivery and content to sustain changes to improve health, wellbeing and safety is, in my view, transportable to other health preventative and promotion programs,” he says.

“SFF has brought about substantial changes improving farm family health outcomes relating to nutrition, physical activity/exercise, taking time out from the farm to de-stress and seeking treatment for health matters as well as positive outcomes relating to health issues, safety on the farm and some life-changing experiences.”

Professor Brumby says in 2010 the Collaborative Partnership for Farming and Fishing Health and Safety managed by RIRDC funded follow-up workshops for participants.

She says the evaluation saw 54 of the original 191 participating farmers interviewed and showed approximately two thirds, particularly men aged between 45 and 64, had altered their previous “she’ll be right” attitude to one of preventative action.

“Given the current climatic situation, people who went through the SFF course will be better equipped to better manage change, and be more resilient in the face a major events such as drought or flood,” Professor Brumby says.

“Given the events farming has been going through in Queensland, northern NSW, Victoria and WA, this competence will prove a vital mechanism in managing adjustment in the face of devastation.

“That was such a valuable outcome of SFF. Participants learnt they do not have to carry the load alone and in silence. They can share it with family, and with outside support systems such as counsellors, advisers, bankers and accountants.

“All of which helps make farming families sustainable, come what may.”

Further details are available from Susan Brumby 0355518533