

Traumatic harvest delivers a life-changing lesson

Amy Fay's father was stacking hay last harvest when he lost his attention – and almost his life. Exhausted after 2 weeks in the field he was driving at almost 40 km/hr when he reached for his mobile phone knocking the joystick forward and driving the hay forks into the ground. He was pitched forward into the windscreen, smashing his head, then flung back into the cabin cracking vertebrae.

With two crushed vertebrae in his back, Amy had to abandon her work with the Grains Research and Development Corporation and rush back to the family farm.

Not to help dad so much as to help with the harvest.

She was joined there by contractor boyfriend Giles Cunningham.

Who almost immediately joined the critical list with a debilitating salmonella infection.

It was a disastrous start to a bad harvest, at the end of one of the State's worst droughts.

That was November 2009.

In February 2010 Amy, already an Agricultural Science graduate from Melbourne University, undertook the Western District Health Service/Deakin University Agricultural Health and Medicine course at Hamilton's National Centre for Farmer Health.

"I did not just want to do the course after all that happened at home, clearly I needed to do it," Amy says.

"With the limited health resources available to farms, and regional areas, the industry has to learn how to take care of itself," she says "At least one person from every farm should do this course to get a better understanding of what can be done, and how to do it.

"It is perfect for extension workers, agronomists and stock agents, who can then help spread the message."

The 2011 Agricultural Health and Medicine course (HMF701) will be run from February 28 to March 4 in Hamilton. There are also *five* scholarships available to help offset the costs of attending.

Agricultural Health and Medicine unit chair Dr Scott McCoombe says the five-day course "aims to

develop the next generation of rural and agricultural leaders to improve the health, safety and well-being of rural and remote Australians”.

He says HMF701 has been developed to appeal to a wide variety of graduate level students and professionals from nursing, medicine, health, agricultural science, agribusiness, social work, veterinary and environmental science backgrounds.

“Rural professionals, health professionals, health care administrators and policy makers would greatly enhance their knowledge of the physical and mental health issues facing today’s rural and remote communities by undertaking this unit,” Dr McCoombe says.

“Upon successful completion of this unit, graduates with a relevant health degree will also be eligible to become an AgriSafe provider,” he says.

Now working in sustainable agriculture with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in Canberra, Amy says the course will also be invaluable in her work.

She says it has widened her understanding of the socio-economic impact of farm health and safety.

“In my policy role with DAFF, the socio-economic aspect has been invaluable as we work on the future of farming,” Amy adds.

“But on a personal level I have discovered what a valuable resource the *National Centre for Farmer Health* and its team are and built a valuable network with the staff there and other people who did the course with me,” she says.

“Because if we were ever in need of help it was last harvest when dad was so badly injured and Giles was so sick – someone on every farm has to know what to do and where to seek help.”

Ends: For further information on the Agricultural Health and Medicine unit HMF701, contact the National Centre for Farmer Health on 0355518533 or visit our website www.farmerhealth.org.au