

# FARMING FOCUS



Editorial contacts: Brian O'Brien, Nathan Anderson Phone: 5572 1011 Fax: 5572 3800 Email: specnews@spec.com.au

## Farmer's health examined

By BRIAN O'BRIEN

THE health of farmers and their families — and the impact on their farm's sustainability — has been explored in a workshop in Hamilton over the past two days.

The workshop is the last of five undertaken out in the first year of a three year study. About 120 farmers have taken part in workshops at Benalla, Swan Hill, Horsham and Clare (SA), as well as Hamilton.

The 'Sustainable Farm Families' research project explores the link between farming family health, health indicators, profitability, farm accidents and the sustainability of farming operations.

It looks at the possible links between farm performance and the health and the wellbeing of farm families.

The research project is being led by Western District Health Service, assisted by Hamilton RMIT, Farm Management 500 and Land Connect Australia.

WDHS community services director, Sue Brumby, said there wasn't much point in farmers 'having a better bottom line' if they weren't there to enjoy it.

### Farmers' poor health

Research has shown farmers have poorer health than their city cousins.

Ms Brumby said the project would have wide social and economic benefits.

"Often we only look at the financial and natural resource indicators without addressing the health of our most important resource — our human resource," she said.

"The project is a diverse partnership with industry, health, training, research, education, and farming organisations all coming together to assess and challenge the health status of farmers."

Parliamentary secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Judith Troeth — who dropped in on the Hamilton workshop on Thursday morning — said it was estimated farm injury and illness cost Australia between \$500 million and \$1.3 billion a year.

Senator Troeth said the health and safety of people working in agriculture was critical to the sector's wellbeing and productivity, as well as to the long-term future of rural and regional communities.

The workshops provide health education, physical assessments, help for farming families to identify strategies to improve individual and family health, and help to identify potential for more efficient farm management.

### Lost production

Senator Troeth told the Hamilton workshop that farm injury and illness resulted in lost production, and increased farm and health care costs.

"Over three years, the program monitors and evaluates the health of those taking part in the workshop, and the subsequent impact on farm management production," Senator Troeth said.

"While the initial benefits go to the participating farmers, the data and information collected will be an important part of health training in future mainstream farm management planning."

"We know it is better to teach than treat," Senator Troeth said. "The collaboration of many groups through the Sustainable Farming Families program is central in addressing the health issues for rural people, particularly farming families."

The Sustainable Farm Families program has brought together a diverse range of groups interested in farm health. They include Western District Health Service, Meat and Livestock Australia, Victorian Farmers' Federation, local farming groups, Australian Women in Agriculture, Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation, and RMIT.

The Federal Government is providing \$206,231 to the three-year Sustainable Farm Families program while in kind and industry support provides another \$104,000.



PICTURED at the Hamilton workshop are farm manager, John Marriott, WDHS community services director, Sue Brumby, WDHS men's health educator, Stu Wilder, and Senator Judith Troeth.

Picture: JOSIE HAYDEN. 040429/h4