

# New project aiming to boost health of farming families

A NEW project led by Western District Health Service is helping to improve the health status of farming families across Hamilton and rural and regional Australia.

The Sustainable Farming Families project aims to promote and educate on the importance of health care to rural and regional farming families.

This innovative three year program is being run in collaboration with RMIT, Land Connect and Farm Management 500.

The Rural Industry Research Development Corporation (RIRDC) has provided \$206,351 over three years for the project, while industry contributions and in kind support have brought the total figure to over \$310,000.

According to project leader, Sue Brumby, this project will build on the men's health program already implemented by WDHS and the benchmarking and indicator work undertaken by Farm Management 500.

"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," she said.

## Issues ignored

"In the past men and women's health issues on the farm have been almost ignored as occupational health and safety issues have taken focus.

"We aim to make health a primary issue for farming families."

This new program plans to integrate key farmer health issues with rural research, farm management analysis and quality assurance programs.

"We believe this project will have wide social and economic benefits, addressing rural social health issues that have been largely overlooked in farm management training," said Ms Brumby.

Farm Management 500 members, which



WESTERN District Health Service is leading the way in rural health with a new project aimed at improving the health status of farming families across regional Australia. Getting the project up and running this week were RMIT's Dr John Martin, project leader, Sue Brumby, Farm Management 500's Andrew Patterson, Victoria Mack of Land Connect, and men's health educator, Stu Willder.

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includes 30 farmers from surrounding areas, will participate in the initial two day health program with annual reviews in 12 months and then 24 months time.

Farmers in Benalla, Swan Hill, Horsham, Clare in South Australia, along with Hamilton men and women will be able to access the project.

## Farming background

During the two-day seminar, Ms Brumby, and men's health educator, Stu Willder, will speak to the farming group. Both have come from farming backgrounds and have extensive health experience and will use this knowledge to focus on issues relevant to the farming area.

For Hamilton this is largely cardiovascular disease, and both educators will be speaking on how best to manage and offset the risk of getting the disease. A variety of other topics will also be covered.

"The men and women will also be separated and Sue will speak on breast cancer and menopause, and I might speak on prostate cancer or heart disease," Mr Willder said.

Mr Willder said that in 12 months time these farmers would be coming back, after following the management program, hopefully to record positive health results.

## Protecting the greatest asset

"If you are running a farming enterprise you have to keep your most important asset healthy," he said.

"There is a lot people can do to manage and understand these health issues further, and this new program is aiming to implement that.

"Rural men and women don't get the same medical services and education, or don't access the services as well as city people. This project will help implement this health education to rural men and women."

Strong industry support for the program has been received from the Victorian Farmers Federation, Australian Women in Agriculture, FarmBis, Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women, and the Department of Primary Industries.

"Farming families will have the opportunity to look at the relationship between the environment, workplace, health and risk factors and how they all affect each other within a business management framework," said Ms Brumby.

"The project promises to be fun, worthwhile

benefits for rural farming communities."

Farming men and

women interested in the program can contact Sue Brumby on 5551 8460.