

Dairy '09 conference - Plug In, Charge Up and Power On

THE 2009 Victorian Dairy Conference to be held on March 30-31 at Warrnambool in Victoria's south-west, will focus on plugging into new technology, charging up people and businesses in the industry, and powering on with new talent, skills, enthusiasm and vision.

Chairman of the conference committee Laurie Hickey said the aim was to have delegates leave the conference with a clear view and direction on local and global forces that would be shaping the industry in the future, and a healthy respect for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Equally, the committee wanted dairyfarmers and their families to recognise the importance of looking after their own health – physically and mentally, Mr Hickey said.

The 2009 conference will be held in the Warrnambool Entertainment Centre, 18 Timor Street, starting with a welcome dinner on Sunday night, March 29, and followed by two days of conference on the Monday and Tuesday.

The annual conference is supported by the WestVic Dairy extension committee and the Dairy Extension Centre, a partnership between the Department of Primary

Industries (DPI) Victoria and Dairy Australia.

Mr Hickey said the conference committee, which included dairyfarmers from the south-west region, DPI Extension staff and industry representatives, had put together a program that provided interest and inspiration for practising dairyfarmers, for people looking at entering the industry from another field of business and also for young people considering dairying as a career.

He said support for the conference from industry organisations was terrific, and he wished to acknowledge and thank all the sponsors. **D**

Health checks a key focus at conference

AN IMPORTANT part of the conference will be on Tuesday, March 31, when two sessions will focus on the physical and mental health of dairyfarmers and their families.

The conference breakfast, to be held at the Warrnambool RSL, will feature as guest speaker the deputy chairman of Beyond Blue, John McGrath, who will talk about depression and its potential impact on people living in rural communities, particularly in isolated areas.

He will talk about the need for communication and seeking help, how to recognise signs of depression and the role Beyond Blue plays in providing support.

Before sitting down for breakfast, all

delegates will have a free "fasting" health check done as they arrive for breakfast. These sessions are being co-ordinated by the Sustainable Farm Families Team.

After breakfast, the focus switches to the Entertainment Centre, where the Sustainable Farm Families Team, general practitioners and nursing staff from practices across the Otway Division of General Practice will conduct a range of assessments on a number of health issues such as cholesterol, blood glucose and blood pressure levels. An optional blood alcohol testing station will give interesting information for some who have enjoyed themselves the night before.

Delegates at the dinner on the Monday

night, will be encouraged to curtail their beverage consumption after about 10pm, if they want an accurate health check done the following morning.

Later in the morning, director of the National Centre for Farmer Health Sue Brumby, who is also with the Sustainable Dairy Farm Families project, will report back to the conference on the results of the assessments conducted earlier in the morning, with some interesting comparisons planned. For example: How will dairyfarmer health status compare with other industry groups or the urban population? How do the regions compare? This is shaping up to be a fascinating, if not potentially controversial session. **D**