

# Farmers told to milk health to the last drop

By BOBBIE HINKLEY

A TOTAL of 400 dairy, beef and sheep farmers, agricultural students and dairy industry experts attended last Friday's Dairy Innovation Day hosted by Brad and Kathy Boley at their Scott River dairy property.

Dairy health was the day's theme, which culminated in expert presentations on farm, farmer, cow, soil and pasture health, all of which impact on the health of a farmer's bank account.

Representatives from the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) were on hand to carry out four minute health checks on volunteer farmers, including host Brad Boley.

Statistics from the NCFH's Sustainable Farm Families program, have shown that farmers have a higher rate of obesity than the average Australian.

"They also show farmers have a 30 per cent higher rate of raised blood glucose levels than the general population," Sustainable Farm Families program manager Cate Mercer-Grant said.

A total of 84 farmers took part in the tests and the preliminary findings were a reality check for many.

Of those tested, 12pc smoked, which was much higher than the national average of 4pc.

"A total of 32pc had high stress levels, 60pc had high blood pressure and 24pc had high blood glucose levels," Ms Mercer-Grant said. "These levels were high enough to refer the particular

participants to their GPs.

"About 48pc of people tested today are categorised as obese and 40pc have high risk levels of alcohol consumption.

"As a group, farmers have some work to do in terms of their health.

"We believe the key to a truly healthy Western Australian dairy farm is a healthy Western Australian dairy farmer."

Two such farmers were Dairy Innovation Day hosts Brad and Kathy Boley, who were described by the chair of Western Dairy, Peter Oates, as a great example of WA dairy farmers who set an example by continually reinvesting in the health of the WA dairy industry.

"Brad and Kathy's absolute willingness to host the Dairy Innovation Day is a shining example of the WA dairy farming spirit," he said.

"This day is something of an institution because it's the one day dairy farmers leave behind the dairy farm and the challenges to come together and meet with a remarkable collection of industry specialists, researchers, veterinarians, nutritionists, agronomists, business consultants, milk factory field staff, artificial breeding experts, bankers, dairy equipment manufacturers and the list goes on.

"They're here to provide farmers with the latest information that has the capacity to make a difference to the way WA dairy farmers farm.

"There's no single bullet that provides the key to great productivity margins.

"Rather it's a collective of



□ Sustainable Farm Families (SFF) health professionals Jenny Williams (left), and Lana Kelly, with National Centre for Farmer Health lecturer Scott McCoombe join SFF program manager Cate Mercer-Grant as she announces the health status of WA dairy farmers to the crowd.

ideas, techniques, attitudes, equipment and strategies in the dairy industry."

Mr and Mrs Boley have a very healthy dairy business.

"We might have WA's biggest dairy but we don't claim to be the best," Mr Boley said.

"Our philosophy is to grow our farming business to keep in front of small profit margins and ruthless milk companies."

Mr Boley's parents started a beef enterprise in Chapman Hill in 1966.

Since then the business has continued to expand and develop into the new Scott River dairy which currently milks 2060 Friesian and Jersey-cross cows.

"Our farming operation is clearly large but every effort is made to keep it simple," Mr Boley said.

The Boleys consider the investment of time as being as important as the investment of cash, when making crucial decisions in and around the dairy.

"If a desirable opportunity becomes available the background work has to be completed," Mr Boley said.

"In running a health dairy it's vital to know what is going on out in the paddocks with the herd and the employees who are handling your herd.

"Fundamentally, the key to maintaining a healthy dairy business is to get the basics right.

"The key is to get good people and key management within the ranks.

"Keep it simple and don't rely on fixed ideas, because there's a need to be flexible.

"But most importantly we as an industry need to learn to make the most of every opportunity.

"Grab them with both hands even though they're not always easy options at times.

"It involves a lot of hard work but that's how we've got our dairy to where it is today."

□ More DID reports in next week's *Farm Weekly*