

Labour-saving devices have a downside

By Gabrielle McLeod

MILDURA farmers say they are healthier due to labour-saving machinery and not the reverse.

Studies from The National Centre for Farmer Health has found most farmers are more overweight and less healthy than the average Australian.

Professor Susan Brumby, from the national centre, said 2000 farm men and women had been surveyed over three years to determine their overall health.

"We're seeing farm people become much more sedentary when it comes to their work because of advances in technology," she said.

"Many people are surprised by these facts, with most perceiving farmers as strong and healthy."

However, Mildura farmers at the field days yesterday disagreed with these findings.

Graeme Barker, director of GBC motors, said if anything it was keeping farmers healthier.

"Personally I think it is better for their health," Mr Barker said.

"These days the carbon filtration is better rather than in the old days.

"When they didn't have these they just breathed in the toxic chemicals.

"Farmers are able to work longer these days because of the new technology."

Peter Brooks, sales support manager for New Holland Tractors, said he agreed new machinery was labour saving.

"All round it would be true (that farmers are less healthy) because there is less manual labour required," Mr Brooks said.

"But the new technology does have many benefits that improve and protect farmers' health.

"Having all the latest gear ensures safety - in terms of hearing especially.

"Also farmers aren't exposed to things like toxic chemicals which they once were exposed to.

"Tractors and farm machinery are more supportive and easier on farmers' backs meaning they can work longer.

"The physical labour may be dropping but the new machines are protecting their health."



PRETTY: New Holland sales support manager Peter Brooks cleans the Breast Cancer Foundation pink tractor at the field days.

Picture: Casey Groves