

Locally-devised program spreads across the state

LIZ MCKINNON

HAMILTON'S own Sustainable Farm Families program is set to be delivered to 20 new locations across the state from July this year.

The program, which was the brainchild of Sue Brumby, is being expanded to towns such as Willaura, Peshurst, Lake Bolac and Portland among others.

The \$205 million program rollout aims to improve the health and well-being of farming communities.

"Through the Future Farming strategy we have set out new investment to provide farmers with the tools they need to grow – to boost productivity, build up skills, to attract young people to farming and to help farm businesses plan for and adapt to climate change," Premier John Brumby said, launching the program at the Rural Women in a Changing Climate this week.

"Farmer health is paramount to the future of our agricultural sector. Farmers will often place all other responsibilities above their own health, well-being and safety.

"That's why we have also put in place measures to support farmers and rural communities through the new \$2 million National Centre for Farmer Health and the Sustainable Farm Families program which is about educating farmers

and their families, and raising awareness about the importance of farmer health."

Since the program was launched, 100 per cent of farmers who participated recommended it to other farmers.

The program will be delivered in Willaura and Peshurst from July, Portland in October and Lake Bolac by March.

Agriculture Minister Joe Helper said farmers and community groups had suggested the new locations.

"Farmers in the 20 new areas where the Sustainable Farm Families program will be held are invited to attend. Registration will be open to all farming men and women in those communities," Mr Helper said.

"The workshops include a health assessment and many previous participants have discovered health programs that they didn't know about, such as early stage cancers and elevated blood glucose levels.

"The program has also helped some participants to identify symptoms of stress and depression, understand what was causing it and developed strategies to overcome it."

To register for the program contact Western District Health Service' Cate Mercer-Grant on 5551 8508.