

# The fat of the land

## Farmers' health at risk

By TERRY SIM

SOUTH-WEST dairy farmers need help with their health, according to check-ups done at the Victorian Dairy Conference in Warrnambool on Tuesday.

National Centre for Farmer Health director Sue Brumby said about 38 per cent of the 101 farmers and industry workers who took the health check-up indicated their health had interfered with their daily life in the past four weeks.

"That's actually pretty high," she said.

"It shows that they are a target group that needs to be considering their health and well-being and safety.

"That they are probably in some chronic pain, some chronic conditions — it is hard to run a sustainable farm if you are not in your best peak condition, isn't it?"

Only 4.4 per cent of the 101 people were smokers.

But of the 90 people that described their alcohol consumption, 40 per cent drank at high-risk levels at least monthly, measured against the old drinking guidelines.

"You're looking at nearly



Considering the health data are (from left) Susan Brumby, director of National Centre for Farmer Health at Hamilton, Bessiebelle farmer John Pye and Dr Daryl Pedler.

090331DWD1 Picture: DAMIAN WHITE

63 per cent of the people are drinking at high-risk levels," Ms Brumby said.

She said about two-thirds of the 64 males and 37 women that had the check-up were overweight or obese.

"So I think that is sort of leading towards diabetes and cardiovascular disease," Ms Brumby said.

Several health and government bodies united to run the health checks at

the conference, with NCFH and Sustainable Farm Families staff processing 9999 bits of data for results.

Collaborators also included the Western District Health Service, Otway Division of General Practice, the Department of Primary Industries and major dairy companies.

Referrals were handled by former Warrnambool doctor and Monash University's Gippsland Medical

School clinical training director Dr Daryl Pedler, along with Warrnambool Medical Clinic's Dr Tatiana Cimpoesu.

Ms Brumby said 29.7 per cent of the males and 27 per cent of the females checked had high blood-sugar levels, consistent with the group's body mass index "picture".

She said 21.9 per cent of males and 16.2 per cent of females had high levels of

cholesterol. Blood pressure was high in 42.4 per cent of the men.

About 11 per cent of the people had a high result for psychological distress, indicating a need for stress management.

Conference chairman Laurie Hickey joked: "The results were unusually high — but if we didn't have the blokes from Tat(ura) or Sale here we would have done a hell of a lot better."