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Highlight on farming health

PASTORALISTS By EUGENE BOISVERT

participating in a program to improve their health have reported various levels of success.

The group of 20 cattle station owners and employees took part in the Sustainable Farm Families

pilot program and reported on their progress at a workshop held at the Katherine Motel on Thursday and Friday.

Twelve months earlier, they underwent a physical health check to assess blood sugar levels, chole-

sterol, body mass index, waist-hip ratios and blood pressure in between workshops on rural health, cardiovascular disease, cancer, farm health and safety, stress and nutrition.

The co-ordinator of the Katherine pilot, Sara Pot-

ter, said the results from last year's session were compared with new ones taken this year.

"They're very modest about what we think are marvellous achievements," she said.

Harder to measure results included better bal-



Garry Riggs from Lakefield Station and Jim Sullivan from Cave Creek Station tuck into a healthy lunch between sessions.

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ancing work and family life.

Caroline Butcher from Montejinni Station said she had tried to make more time for herself and her family but it was difficult, with station work not being restricted to 9 to 5 Monday to Friday.

"I'd like to try to keep making efforts to change lifestyle patterns," she said, "just looking after your own health and fitness and also trying to educate employees on the importance of health and at an early age it makes such an impact on later life."

Mrs Butcher said she also tried to pass the importance of safety on to ringers who often thought of themselves as "invincible".

"They've got a really stoic attitude so we try to bring it into table discussion," she said.

Ms Potter said participants could "take away from it what they want", even if it is just more awareness of health issues.

"Rural people are notorious for not accessing services and the less services they have to access (the less they do access)," she said.

"This project is about giving them the information to do what they want and talking about it."

Getting people from

remote areas to look after themselves better can save money for the governments, but it can also improve efficiency on properties.

Jim Sullivan from Cave Creek Station said the workshops had been "good value" but he had not changed his lifestyle too much.

"What it's done for me is reinforced that lifestyle is important and your health is a big variable on productivity and how your general outlook is," he said.

Sustainable Farm Families was developed in western Victoria by Susan Brumby in conjunction with farmers, health services, universities and farming industry groups in response to higher illness and premature death rates in farming families.

Ms Brumby, in Katherine for the two days, said the program was tailored to the needs of different areas.

"It's working with how it works best here," she said.

In Katherine, Sustainable Farm Families was funded by the Federal Department of Health and Ageing and supported by the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines and Katherine West Health Board.

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