



Sustainable Farm Families workshops, building a stronger rural economy

THE health of farming families and how it impacts on the productivity of their business was brought home to residents in Walgett and Burren Junction through Sustainable Farm Family workshops in February.

Twenty people attended the two-day meeting in Walgett and another nine in Burren Junction which began with a health check and discussion about what the results meant for farm health and safety.

Men and women's groups then discussed gender related health issues before a trip to the supermarket to read the labels on food products and relate it to their health.

Despite the belief that fresh air and country living should lead to better health, participants learnt that rural people die, on average, seven years earlier than city folk and the reasons why could not simply be explained as the shortage of doctors.

Farmers live where their work, and it is easy to get into a routine where the work never ends. They suffer fatigue, injury and chronic complaints. More children under four years of age drown on farms than anywhere else in Australia. And the work they do has its own hazards for instance dust inhaled from sheep and cattle yards can contain particles which are dangerous to health.

The workshop was an eye-opener according to participants.

One participant remarked that "it in-

creases your awareness of really 'basic' what you should know about health issues, and makes you more conscious of your health."

Nanette Watson of 'Fairfield', Wee Waa agreed.

"The graphic video footage and virtual shopping tour were particularly helpful in making my husband sit up and take notice about the dietary recommendations as well as the need to be ever vigilant about farm safety," she said.

"Being part of a two year programme is an added incentive as we have now committed to several goals to improve our health and we know we will be "followed up" so hopefully that will keep us on track!"

The project will continue over the next 12 months as participants identify and work on specific areas to improve their health, well-being and safety and will meet again at the end of that period.

Sustainable Farm Families is funded by the Department of Health and Aging, and was brought to the Walgett Shire by the Western District Health Service, Hamilton, Victoria, the initiator of the project. It is supported by Walgett Shire Council, the Greater Western Area Health Service, the Hunter New England Health Service, the Burren Junction RSL Club, Burren Junction CWA, John Anderson, MP and Kate Schwager.