

Sustainable Farm Families

"No point in a better bottom line if you are not there to enjoy it!" is the motto of Sustainable Farm Families (SFF) an initiative of Western District Health Service, Hamilton VIC.

The principal investigator and researcher Susan Brumby and Stuart Willder saw there was a gap in farmer/pastoralist health and designed the program with the help of many collaborating partners to provide farmers/pastoralists with the access and knowledge to health related issues, well-being and safety.

Farm family health, is now being recognised by families and their businesses as an important resource for investment of both individual time and funding. Farming families have been integral to the success of SFF and have helped to shape the project so it is highly relevant to farm family and pastoralist needs.

SFF has won numerous prestigious awards including: Excellence in Service Delivery, Public Health Awards for Excellence and Innovation 2006, RMIT University Research Award 2005 for Regional Partnerships (on shore), Excellence in consumer involvement in their own care inaugural Victorian Public Healthcare Awards 2005 and Victorian Primary and Community Health Network Award for Innovation and Excellence

in Primary Health Care 2005.

Currently, the program has the support of over 30 collaborating partners and is reaching out to many locations across Australia in differing agricultural industries. We have categorised these locations into 6 main projects, Broadacre, Dairy, Cotton, Sugar, Reaching the Remote and our Train the Trainer programs. To date SFF has been run with over 520 Farmers and over 26 sites across Australia, 6 states and territories, and 100% of the farmers would recommend the program to other farmers and industry associates.

The SFF program is based on a three year or two year workshop model, depending on funding of the project. Participants attend a workshop in their local area for two consecutive days in the first year, and/either a 1 ½ day workshop in the second year, or 1 day in the second and one day in the third year. At each year's workshop participants undergo a physical assessment and the results are recorded in their health record and in the participant's manual for their own reference. The participant manual contains information on the health, well-being and safety topics to be used as a reference tool for the participant.

The SFF sessions cover differing health issues each



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Sustainable Farm Families (cont)

year where the participant is actively involved with group discussions and activities such as Label Reading/ Nutrition for food supply orders, supermarket tours either virtual or real depending on location..

Remote Participants have made the following comments about SFF

"Health equals production and happiness. Rural and remote Australia is important to the Australian economy"

"I always believe health is important – need to treat the cause, not just band aid it"

"It really reinforced how it's vital to have good health to enjoy our life and cope with our workloads"

"The workshop had a good choice of subjects applicable to our lifestyle"

"I enjoyed the wide variety of topics, and hearing from other participants"

Our 'Reaching the Remote' pilot program, funded by the Department of Health and Ageing for two years, has just completed its first year in the following locations, Katherine (NT), Tennant Creek (NT), Georgetown (QLD), Mount Surprise (QLD), Walgett (NSW), Burren Junction (NSW), Cascade (WA) and Esperance (WA). In each location we have trained local facilitators who coordinate the programs in conjunction with Western District Health Service. We have found the program to be suitable and transferable to these locations and plan to expand the SFF programs in these areas as opportunities arise. The participants in this program highlighted that the SFF program is a great program to have running in these remote locations to increase health awareness and prevention.

The SFF program has plans to grow and cover more areas through the training of other health service professionals to roll out the SFF program in their area.

For more information on the program please visit our website www.sustainablefarmfamilies.org.au or contact 03 5551 8450.

Below: 'Reaching the Remote' Workshop Katherine. "Learning to read supermarket labels"



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