

Farmer health in focus

Local dairy farmers learnt the importance of a healthy living when Western District Health Service conducted a Sustainable Dairy Farmers Family Course in Kerang last week.

The 2 day course formed a part of a project overlooking the dairy industry and the overall health of dairy farmers and their families.

A number of activities were performed during the 2 days, including physical evaluations of participants, focus group discussions, nutrition, farm safety, fitness, health and mental health issues. According to registered nurse and course coordinator Susan Brumby, the aim of the project is to deliver a health education program to assist dairy farmers and their farming families to identify strategies to enhance individual and family health.

Western District Health Service started working this year with dairy farmers aged between 18 and 75 who have volunteered for a 3 year period.

"We do hope to have worked with 200 dairy farmers Victoria wide, particularly family groups by the time our research is completed," Ms Brumby said.

"We will collaborate information as we go along, then we will deliver results to the industry."

The project, which has been conducted by RMIT's Centre of Regional and Rural Devel-



Susan Brumby lectures dairy farmers on the importance of a healthy lifestyle at the Sustainable Dairy Farmers Family Course in Kerang last week.

opment in conjunction with Western District Health, is funded by the Gardiner Foundation, WestVic Dairy, Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Human Services.

"The unique thing about this course is that we have health, industry, research and government sectors working together," Ms Brumby said.

Stuart Willder, who is a principal researcher and men's health lecturer with Western District Health, said that good health is an important factor when running a business.

"Farmers need to know how to make health decisions for themselves," he said. "People do not always see their health as being an issue, so when they first come in to these courses, their attitude is a little stand-offish."

Local dairy farmers who attended the course found the education useful and many are

willing not to be dismissive about their health and start incorporating their well being into their business strategies.

"I think the course is very relevant in that it addresses health issues with farmers," Kerang dairy farmer, Helen Olcorn said. "Anything like this helps us health-wise and makes us all aware."

"It is not just for us, but for the future of our next generation of dairy farmers."

According to Cohuna dairy farmer Denise Fehring, the course has taught her how easy it is for people in her line of work to take it for granted.

"It's our work, our play, and our life," she said. "We need to think of our priorities when it comes to our health."

Ms. Brumby is hoping that the study will be presented at the National Rural Health Conference upon its completion by March 2008.