

THE RURAL SCENE

Good health crucial to working the land

Colac and district dairy farmers received tips to improve their health and work life during a two-day workshop in Colac.

A Sustainable Dairy Farm Families' workshop at Colac Otway Performing Arts and Cultural Centre showed farmers how important their health was to continue working on the land.

The workshop included physical evaluations, individual health assessments and talks about nutrition, disease, farm safety and stress.

Topics included the state of rural health, cardiovascular disease, cancer, farm health and safety, nutrition, diet and women's and men's health.

Western District Health Services led the workshop with research partners West-Vic Dairy, the United Dairy-farmers of Victoria, Colac Area Health, RMIT and the Department of Primary Industries.

Western District Health Services community services director Susan Brumby said the workshops helped farmers identify health and lifestyle issues they needed to improve.

Ms Brumby, also Sustainable Dairy Farm Families' project leader, said 20 Colac district dairy farmers attended the workshop with health professionals from Ararat and Skipton.

"The major thing is people



HEALTHY LESSON: From left, RMIT associate professor John Martin, Western District Health Services men's health educator Stu Willder, Birregurra health nurse Cheryl Lang, Colac Area Health Nurse Damian Melican and project leader Susan Brumby.

need to stay healthy if they want their farms to stay healthy," she said.

Colac Area Health home and community nursing nurse Damian Melican said statistics revealed Victoria's dairy farmers were less healthy than city residents.

"It could be that they're healthy but it's probably because they are trying to get on with their everyday lives," he said.

Mr Melican said he and Birregurra health nurse Cheryl Lang might provide similar

workshops across Colac district later this year.

Ms Brumby said the project was part of a three-year study to investigate health issues in rural communities.

The Gardiner Foundation provided funding for the \$649,000 project.

"The Sustainable Dairy Farming Families project will involve 200 dairy farmers - men and women - from across Victoria in a three-year study that focuses on farming family health and wellbeing and its impact on farm safety

and the farming business," Ms Brumby said.

RMIT Centre for Regional and Rural Development associate professor and project research advisor John Martin said the project showed how rural communities could capitalise on resources from universities in regional Victoria.

"A significant factor in the success of the SDFP project is the collaboration of health services, universities, industry and farmers," Mr Martin said.

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