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HEALTH PUSH

Project targets dairy farmers

By Christine Chudley

Dairy farmers have a chance to improve their health and the health of their farms by registering for a new project.

Sustainable Dairy Farming Families is a three-year project involving a variety of partners including the Victorian Farmers Federation, United Dairyfarmers of Victoria (UDV), Western District Health, the Gardiner Foundation and RMIT.

The project will involve 200 dairyfarming families across Victoria and explore the link between farm financial performance and the health of people on farm.

Project co-ordinator Sue Brumby said participants would attend a workshop run over two days comprising health education sessions and an initial health check.

They would be given further health checks in the second and third years to monitor any changes and investigate how any changes in the health of farmers related to the health of their farm.

Ms Brumby said the project would be similar to the highly successful broadacre project involving 128 farmers at six locations in Victoria, NSW and South Australia which began in November 2003.

About 80 per cent of those involved in the broadacre project had learnt a huge amount and been able to make changes, she said.

Ms Brumby said people in the country tended not to be as healthy as their city counterparts, with higher rates of cardiovascular disease and cancer. Rural residents died earlier and often did not seek help for mental health problems.

Stress, inadequate exercise, excessive drinking, smoking and being overweight were all part of the problem.

The health of the farm and the health of those who ran the farm was interwoven, Ms Brumby said.

"There's no point in having a better

6 There's no point in having a better bottom line if you are not there to enjoy it."

— Sue Brumby

bottom line if you are not there to enjoy it," she said.

"Your health and wellbeing should be a part of your overall farm plan."

UDV president Peter Owen said the project was an important study into the way health impacted on the successful operation of dairy farms.

"Most people working as dairyfarmers do so as a husband and wife partnership so the lifestyle the family leads has to have some impact on the way a farm is operated," he said.

Executive officer of Campaspe Primary Care Partnerships Emma Brentall welcomed the project, saying the impact of the drought on dairy farmers' health was a particular concern.

Campaspe Shire's social recovery committee was set up in 2003 to help people cope with the extra stress caused by the drought. The committee focused on keeping communities together and encouraged people to be physically active, Ms Brentall said.

The dairyfarmers project will involve a total of 10 workshops across Victoria including one at Shepparton in June or July.

Anyone interested in joining should contact their local UDV or the Western District Health Services on 5551 8450.