

It's time to look after the most important asset on your farm

YOU!

Young Dominic Pye probably doesn't appreciate the healthy living workshop course his parents have undertaken. The nine-year-old can't find chocolate biscuits in the cupboard any more.

But for Bessie Belle suppliers Naomi and John Pye, the three-year course has meant fitter bodies and a commitment to good health, wellbeing and safety.

They joined the pilot program called Sustainable Dairy Farm Families, an initiative of Western District Health Service and funded by the Gardiner Foundation, WestVic Dairy and the DPI in 2005.

Since then, they've come to realise their own health is as much a production input as water, pasture, cow genetics and milk harvesting.

The couple joined the course just as John was standing for the board of Murray Goulburn and, while the farming season had been good and prices high, the pair had to find a new manager. "That was a big thing," said Naomi. "It was a time of increased commitments."

"But we didn't have a stress period because we planned for it," John added.

"We were the first group, drawn from leaders of WestVic Dairy and the UDV Central Council," said Naomi.

The grouping meant that many of the participants were industry leaders, driven and successful farmers, and in the older age-range. The project involved spouses and partners and, if the farm was a family partnership, sometimes the other family members as well.

The initial two-day workshop involved measuring blood sugar, cholesterol, waist/hip ratios and body mass index as well as pulse rates and blood pressure. Anyone with anything out of the ordinary was given a referral to see their doctor.

"But there were no nasty surprises," said Naomi.

The group visited a supermarket to learn about food ingredients and labelling.

"We learned that the breakfast cereals most heavily advertised tend to be the ones that are bad for you," John joked.

Part of the course involved a relaxation exercise – lying on the floor, eyes shut, and learning to let go.

"It was one of the most-popular elements of the course, said Naomi. "A lot of participants afterwards said that was really worthwhile."

They also received instruction on nutrition, fitness, mental, sexual and general health and OHS.

Some sessions were gender-divided. And after each group had discussed reproductive and gender-specific health, they swapped. The women heard about prostate health and the men about breast cancer.

Naomi said: "For some people that was the first time they'd discussed some things – especially the men. When men get together all they talk about is footy and grain prices and all those important things in life."

The study participants were retested 12 months later and asked to specify three things they

SUE WEBSTER talked to an MG director and his wife about how they felt after undertaking a three year course on good health, wellbeing and safety.



Reading and relaxing are all part of the wellbeing program and Naomi Pye catches up with the latest issue of the *Donaider*.

Avoiding burn out

Here are some tips offered to course participants. They come from Wallace and Benson's *Physiology of Meditation*, published in *The Scientific American*, in February 1972.

1. **Personal responsibility:** Only you can effectively manage yourself – self-management is the key to how you respond and interpret the stressor.
2. **Talk care of yourself:** Regular exercise, a healthy diet, reading, relaxing, laughing and sleep do help.
3. **Be aware:** Know your triggers, understand them and how you can handle them. Respond, don't react and replace old habits with a new perspective.
4. **Laugh:** Laughter drops blood pressure and releases endorphins which are naturally produced by the body and raise the pain thresholds and produce a euphoric and/or sedating effect.
5. **Sleep:** Take power naps when needed as they improve alertness and performance, or catch-up on the weekend.
6. **Meditation:** Meditation is a powerful relaxation aid and assists in using reservoirs of energy that are frequently dormant. Studies have shown that meditation will decrease metabolic rates, oxygen consumption and reduce lactate in the blood.

hoped to achieve, health-wise.

Naomi recalls: "Mine were to my fitness, to improve my nutrition and diet and myself some time for more family things."

In the next few months Naomi will need lots of time for family things – February 3 sees the marriage of her eldest daughter Melissa, 26 and Naomi's deter-

mined to be anything but a frumpy mother-of-the-bride in fetching lilac.

The Pye's other daughter, Felicity, 23, is research and administration officer at the UDV. "She's no longer at home but hopefully taking in all the good information," Naomi added.

Then her son Jeremy turns 21 in May.

"So I've got to get through that," she sighs, rolling her eyes.

"Out of my three targets I still have to tackle is the fitness one – that one wasn't good," she said. "We think that working on a farm automatically means that you're fit. We do lots of walking, we're in the open air, but we discovered that that's not enough."

"You need to do regular activity that lifts your heart rate for 20 minutes at a time. And you need to do that about three times a week."

For Naomi, a non-impact aerobics video seems to be doing the trick.

John added: "Leisurely walking is good for overall health but it's not for weight reduction."

He is a convert to the program – being initially reluctant to devote two precious days to the Melbourne-based sessions.

"But having completed it I would say it is suitable for many groups. For some of the people who went to this course, even if they were sceptical about its worth, they would have come away with some benefits out of it."

Naomi is a big fan. "You really felt you were helping others by being in the discussion groups. This was an excellent program."

Young Dominic, however, probably has another opinion.

Naomi said: "One thing I have definitely attempted is to improve the nutrition of the family. Less processed foods. Dominic's lunchbox is much healthier and there are no chocolate biscuits in the cupboard any more. Overall, I'd say our diet's a bit better."

One of John's vows was "to try to be a bit more organised with his time to get some more time off".

The couple also allowed themselves some time off with a holiday to Kununurra – albeit tacked onto the end of an Australian National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage conference in Darwin.

"But for us that was also enjoyable," said John. "It was a complete break away from what we knew – meeting new people and seeing new parts of the country."

"Another benefit of the project is that it collects statistics and data on farmer health. It gives researchers a real-time benchmark across rural Victoria."

The program has been working with 211 dairy farmers across 11 Victorian locations. It is led by Western District Health Service (WDHS) Hamilton.

The project is led by WDHS Director of Community Services, Sue Brumby, as principal investigator and Men's Health Worker, Mr Stu Willder, as principal researcher, in conjunction with other WDHS staff, RMIT and La Trobe Universities, Colac Area Health and other partners.

Ms Brumby said: "The program was based on the fact that farmers were ageing, working harder and experiencing death, injury and suicides at higher levels than the Australian population, while increasingly relying on family members to provide the extra labour needed to cope."

There is a website for more information: www.sustainablefarmfamilies.org.au or phone (03) 5551 8460 for details about the program.