

S-W health effort on world show

A UNIQUE Western District farmer health project, Sustainable Farm Families, will be explained to the world at an international agricultural conference in Italy next month.

Western District Health Service community services director Susan Brumby has been asked to present a paper on the project at the 16th Congress of Agricultural Medicine and Rural Health at Lodi in Italy on June 18-21.

The highly successful project is investigating farmer health and its impact on decision-making. It started with broadacre farmers in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia in 2003 and with south-west Victorian dairy farmers in 2005. This year cotton and sugar farmers in Queensland will participate and interest is being shown by the horticultural industry.

As the project's principal investigator, Ms Brumby has received a Department of Human Services travelling fellowship, with WDHS support, enabling her to go to the Lodi conference. She will also visit and talk about the project at three centres of agricultural health excellence in the United States and confer with researchers at the University of Bangor in Wales. "I hope to expand

our understanding of how health impacts on farming families, the farm and the community," she said. "I will be able to get a grip on what international people are doing in terms of best practice of delivering health services to farmers."

The driving force behind the three-year project is recognition that farmers are ageing, working harder for longer, and experience death, injury, suicide and morbidity rates at a higher level than the Australian population. It aims to change attitudes and behaviour towards personal health and safety among farmers and their families, and to improve rural health practice through training of health providers.

Participating farmers undergo an annual health assessment and attend a workshop on health, safety and well-being. They also develop a personal action plan with health, occupational health and safety, and stress-related challenges.

The project is funded by the Gardiner Foundation, with support from lead agency WDHS, RMIT, WestVic Dairy, Colac Area Health, the Department of Primary Industries and the Victorian Farmers Federation. See latest south-west project news in *Farmtalk* on page 3.

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Susan Brumby : to Italy.