

FARMER HEALTH

Workshops to save lives

By MEGAN McNAUGHT

DAIRY farmers might worry endlessly about the health of their cows, but they often neglect their own health, according to Western District Health Service community services director Susan Brumby.

She is co-ordinating a series of two-day workshops, called Sustainable Dairy Farm Families, aimed at encouraging dairy farmers to take more care of themselves.

The first session was held in Melbourne last week.

They will also be held in Colac, Cobden, Warrnambool, Warragul, Leongatha, Maffra, Wodonga and Kerang in coming months.

Each workshop will be followed up with single day sessions annually for the next two years.

Ms Brumby said dairy farmers ignored health warnings and were working harder and for longer hours than ever before.

As a result, they suffered

higher rates of cancer, heart conditions and other ailments than in other professions.

"It is an issue that people need to be more aware of," she said. "Healthy farmers are also likely to be happier and run more profitable farms."

She recently received a \$250,000 grant from the Geoffrey Gardiner Foundation to help in her mission. The money will be used over three years.

"The aim is to get farmers to

change their overall approach to their health in the long term," Ms Brumby said.

"There is no point just changing one aspect like their diet, it goes a lot further than that."

Twenty farmers took part in individual physical evaluations and health assessments.

They also took part in other activities, including a supermarket tour to look at product labelling and a discussion on the health risks for cancer, heart disease, stress and

gender-related health issues.

Ms Brumby said it was important for people involved in the industry to change their attitude to health.

Raising awareness among farmers would have a flow-on effect to policy makers, medical practitioners and other decision makers.

"Dairy is one of the biggest industries in Victoria and it is vital that the people who work in it are healthy," she said.

"There is no point pouring

everything into your bottom line if your health and your family's health suffer as a result."

The initiative is funded by the Gardiner Foundation, Western District Health Service, West-Vic Dairy, RMIT University, Colac Area Health, the VFF and the Department of Primary Industries.

Anyone interested in participating in upcoming sessions can call Susan Brumby on (03) 5551 8450 or Caroline Pearce at the VFF on 1300 882 833.

Learning a little respect for health

By MEGAN McNAUGHT

MOE dairy farmer Chris Griffin has never given much thought to his health.

It is not that it isn't important, he is just too busy with day-to-day jobs to worry about looking after himself.

But after attending the Sustainable Dairy Farm Families program he said he would rethink his attitude.

"Just because you work outside does not mean you are necessarily healthy," he said.

"I played sport in my younger days and have always been active, but I should still probably be taking steps to look after myself."

After attending the workshop he said he would make a few changes in the way he did things on the farm.

"Instead of taking the bike to get the cows, I will walk sometimes," he said.

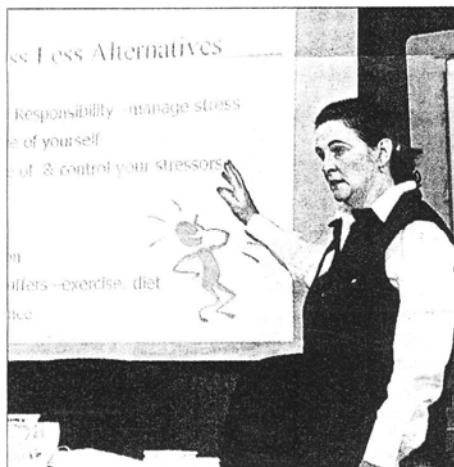
"I will try to exercise for longer periods to get my heart rate up."

"It is easy to make little changes like that."

Mr Griffin said stress was another risk dairy farmers could easily ignore.

Katamatite farmer Lenore Mundy had a similar attitude before attending the workshop.

"Health has never been a big priority," she said.



Picture of health: Susan Brumby delivers her lecture.

"We lead such busy lives that it often seems to get forgotten."

Mrs Mundy has three children and wants them to grow up living a healthy lifestyle.

"We have always been pretty healthy, but it pays to be more conscious of the way we do things," she said.

"You feel better about yourself when you live healthily."

Mrs Mundy found the gender-specific sessions particularly beneficial.

She said the health test was also interesting and everyone should have their health assessed to learn how fit they really were.

Follow-up tests over the next two years would be even more interesting, she said.



Learning process: (above from left) Glen Britnell, Barbara Collins, Matt Glowery, Chris Griffin, Roma Britnell, Joe Giblin and Julie Giblin. New ideas: Chris Griffin and Lenore Mundy.

Pictures: GREG SCULLIN