

GROUP SCOOP FOR MAY

Pt. Campbell Discussion Group tackles Health and Well Being issues with two day workshop.
By Melanie Green, Timboon & District Healthcare Service and Helen Chenoweth, DPI Warrnambool

Members of the Pt. Campbell Discussion Group and local farmers recently attended a Sustainable Farm Families workshop as a part of a statewide initiative to help improve the health of local farmers and their families.

Sustainable Farm Families is an award winning initiative of Western District Health Service based in Hamilton, and is delivered in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) as part of their longer term drought work.

The Sustainable Farm Families program aims to develop the knowledge of farmers regarding their own health, well-being and safety issues, with a focus on what practical steps can be taken to improve the lives of farm families and the improvement this can deliver to their farm business.

One of the sessions was held at the local Timboon supermarket, where participants examined a range of products with health professionals on hand to explain the contents of each product in the context to their nutritional requirements. Many participants commented that it was

valuable to learn what to look for and how to make better decisions for yourself and the family.

One of the participants, Nick Renyard, found the information very relevant and interesting, and delivered in a format that was easy to understand and apply to your own situation. Nick also found the workshop format meant that as topics were covered, there was the opportunity to discuss the implications for both our own farm and our own health.

"Having blood tests done on day one for things such as diabetes and cholesterol were also things that many farmers just don't get around to."

Another participant highlighted the importance of the program. "We book our tractors and balers in for regular maintenance, but never see our own health as a priority, so put off getting ourselves checked over until something drastic gets us to the doctor".

Jan Raleigh found the two-day workshop a great refresher. "Often you know you should get things checked, but being on the farm and thinking one day I'll get round to it isn't really a great way to think".



The participants of the Timboon Sustainable Farm Families workshop, now better informed and motivated to better manage their health, well-being and safety.



Jenny Aynes and Sam Doolan looking at bread options at the Timboon supermarket with Sustainable Farm Families Sue Watt.

Jan, along with farm worker Rachel, have taken on board the workshop's messages about improving fitness levels and they have identified practical ways to get going. "We were talking the other day about getting a pushbike so we can get a bit fitter as well as maybe use it around the farm".

Participants included people of all ages, with both younger couples and older farmers discussing issues and freely sharing their life experiences, ensuring that topics were applicable for all those involved. The number of near misses that were discussed regarding potential farm accidents really showed how farmers cannot afford to take their eye off the ball in relation to Occupational Health and Safety.

Melanie Green from the Timboon and District Healthcare Service said the program covered a range of areas including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, women and men's health, stress, depression, farm safety nutrition and exercise.

"It was a really great group of farmers, who were comfortable with sharing information with each other. They all felt they had learned something from the program and walked away with lots of motivation to tackle health, well-being and safety issues for their farm business.

"It was a great project to be involved with encouraging farmers to be pro-active in managing both their own health, well-being

and safety and that of their families, and ensuring that their OH&S plans are both practical and up to task. A highlight for many was the discussion about the importance of modelling good behaviour for others to see, such as dad or mum putting on the bike helmet before getting the cows so that children learn that it really is a good idea to do the same."

Facilitator Helen Chenoweth from DPI Warrnambool also found the two days a motivating time. "The penny really dropped on day one for us all when the group identified that the most important issue that could affect the long-term viability of the farm business wasn't milk price, the cost of grain or the 2 in 1 fertiliser price, but the health of the farmer and their family because without them, the business just couldn't go on."

Farmers who have completed the program have reported that it enhanced their overall health with everything from better eating to improved farm safety. Some also found that they were able to make better decisions because they had a new perspective on how important their health and families were in their lives.

All of the participants will return to complete another two-day workshop in 12 month's time, again receiving a health assessment so they can track their health indicators over time. For more information contact the Western District Health Service on (03) 5551 8508 or visit www.sustainablefarmfamilies.org.au



Farmers Jan Raleigh, Nick and Simone Renyard with Colac Area Health's Sue Mulder examining some dairy products as part of the Timboon workshop.

