

Health check for farming families

FARMERS in South Gippsland will have an exciting opportunity to attend a Sustainable Farm Families program in May.

The program aims to improve the physical and mental health of farmers and their families.

Sustainable Farm Families is an award winning initiative of Western District Health Service, Hamilton, delivered in partnership with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries.

Already 600 farmers have participated in the program and 100 per cent of participants recommended it to other farmers and helped shape the program.

Sustainable Farm Families health project leader Anna Langley said the program covers a range of areas including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, women and men's health, stress, depression, farm safety, nutrition and exercise.

"All participants also have a health assessment and it is available to farming men and women," she said.

State Minister for Agriculture, Joe Helper, said

the State Government will deliver \$2.9 million over two years for a program to help farm families across Victoria address the physical and mental health impacts of prolonged drought.

"This program is about recognising that for many Victorian farming families the drought's impact continues to affect their lives, and helping people get through that," he said.

Farmers who have completed the program have reported 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 of how important their health and families were in their lives.

According to the Sustainable Farm Families website the objectives of the program are:

- identify and track farming family health indicators for inclusion in Farm Management quality assurance processes.

- Design and deliver a training program that assists farming families to identify strategies to enhance individual, family health and relevant occupational health and safety practices.

- Communicate program findings to farming families and the health and agriculture sectors.

- Provide information on the relationship between family health, health as a social issue in rural communities and farm productivity.

The program was developed by Western District Health and trialled with 400 farm families across three years from 2004 to 2007.

It was awarded a Victorian Public Health Award in both 2005 and 2006 for excellence in service delivery

and farmer participation. Mr Helper said the trial produced significant improvements in health indicators including blood cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose levels and also a halving of medical referrals.

"Evaluations found that farmers who took part in the trial believed they coped better with stress associated with the drought and 100 per cent of participants recommended it to other farmers," he said.

"The roll-out of the program will mean farmers and their families across Victoria will have access to support that directly targets the impact of drought on mental and physical health."

Farmers interested in attending should contact Anna Langley, Project Coordinator, Gippsland



Health check: Kylie Alger, Anna Langley and Evie Harle are excited to be working with farming families in South Gippsland.

Southern Health Service 5667 5524.

More information on

the program can also be obtained from the Western District Health Service on

5551 8450 or visit www.sustainablefarmfamilies.org.au.

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