



Rural issues: Sustainable Farm Families seminar participants John Ventre, Joe Ventre, Rosa Crea, Mick Grillo and Charlie Gattuso at St Margaret's, Cobram this week.

Seminar for fruit grower families focuses on a Healthy outlook

By Grahame Whyte

Cobram and Invergordon fruit growers met for a two-day seminar this week at St Margaret's church hall.

Facilitator, Yarrawonga District Health Service community health nurse, Sue Crowther, said this was the first time the popular Australia-wide Sustainable Farming Families program had involved fruit growers.

"It was started in 2002," Ms Crowther said.

"Western District Health Services is conducting a SFF research project.

"Farming people have different risk factors — they are living at their workplace, doing heavy work and using machinery and often working long hours.

"They are also more stoic, and as a result are often reluctant to visit a doctor.

"There are also time and travel factors."

Ms Crowther said the research project also looked at rural community's access to health services.

"This program is covering Cobram and Invergordon fruit growers," she said.

"This is the first time SFF has been delivered to the horticulture industry—we're breaking new ground.

"We started the day with health assessments such as cholesterol, blood glucose levels, heart rate, blood pressure, waist/hip ratio and weight for height.

"Then after an introduction to our project we looked at the state of rural



Organisers: At this week's farm families seminar are facilitator Aaron Wales, Ray Pool, Philip Pullar and Sue Crowther.

health with its higher risk factors of heart disease, cancer and suicide."

Victorian Peach and Apricot Growers Association vice-president Ray Pool said the program had many benefits.

"The aim is to get fruit growers to understand what can go wrong," Mr Pool said.

"We want them to be aware of things like melanomas and to go to the doctor for a regular check-up."

"It will help the industry by helping the people."

Koonoomoo fruit grower Mick Grillo said growers were inclined to take a lot of

things for granted on the farm and OH&S measures could be impractical for the farming community.

"This program has opened my eyes to some of the problems that are there," Mr Grillo said.

"As farmers we need to be more vigilant.

"We should be more practical with our common sense — like tying a ladder in place so it doesn't slip under you.

"And a bit more care driving an ATV or farm bike around.

"Maybe we need to slow down — we work far too long hours and put ourselves under too much stress.

"This program is eye opening and informative," Mr Grillo said.

The event was part of the Western District Health Service Sustainable Farm Families project and was run in Cobram by Cobram District Hospital and Community Health Centre in conjunction with Yarrawonga District Health Service — with the VPAGA as industry partner.

To date, the Sustainable Farm Families project has undertaken educational programs and physical assessments of farmers and their families from more than 100 postcodes throughout Australia.