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CENTRE LIVES ON ... FOR CANADA



THE Wiggles hit town yesterday on their latest tour of the country with friends including Captain Feathersword and there were some little local fans on hand to welcome them to town! The Wiggles are great supporters of SIDS and Kids and Red Nose Day and Jack, 3, Jack's mum, Georgina, Makayla, 4 and Tamika, 3, were happy to join everyone's favourite kids' entertainers to promote their message! Photo: ABBY HAMILTON

DANIELLE GRINDLAY

CANADIAN farmers will reap the benefits of an award-winning program that was developed in Hamilton, but a lack of State and Federal Government support means it will cease to exist on home soil.

The National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) will run its flagship 'Sustainable Farm Families' (SFF) program for the last time over the next month, but international interest could mean its unique methods will be implemented overseas.

The program has been delivered to more than 2050 Australians since it started in 2003, engaging both health professionals and farming families in tackling the disturbing rates of premature death and disease in farming communities.

Representatives from New Zealand's dairy industry have already visited the centre and this week Canadian delegates, funded by their Federal Government, landed in Victoria to attend the final SFF workshops.

Alberta Farm Safety Centre chief executive, Laura Nelson said there was nothing like the SFF program anywhere else in the world.

"There's nothing comparable and we checked, because it was an awful long way to travel," she said.

"They've found that magic key for how to engage adults in a discussion about health and safety.

"It's a holistic approach and shows that being safe and healthy is absolutely essential to running an effective farming business."

As in Australia, Ms Nelson said Canadian farmers were an ageing population with appalling health statistics.

The Alberta centre has been targeting the next generation of farmers, visiting 50,000 to 60,000 children in classrooms every year.

"We get the evaluations back from teachers and literally 100s say 'we love your program, but what are you going to do for the adults?'" Ms Nelson said.

"This visit is an opportunity – in Canada there's an interest from the government and industry are keen; they would like to do something but they just don't know what. "There's potential we could answer questions for a lot of players."

Meanwhile in Australia, the centre has been lobbying to secure \$1 million in core Government funding since it was left out of the 2012 State Budget.

The centre is a partnership between Western District Health Service (WDHS) and Deakin University, combining research with education and training, on-farm workshops, data collection and policy advice.

Only five staff members remain.

Victorian and Federal Health Ministers have declared in-principle support, but pass the buck when it comes to funding responsibilities.

Victorian Health Minister, David Davis, has pledged a conditional \$250,000, only if his Federal counterpart matches that with \$500,000.

WDHS chief executive chief executive, Jim Fletcher, has a meeting with Mr Davis to discuss the centre's plight and continues to lobby Wannon MP, Dan Tehan, in the lead up to this year's Federal election.

"(Mr Tehan) certainly supports us," Mr Fletcher said.

"We've just got to continue to push and try to get it on the Coalition's agenda in the lead up to September."

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