

# NCFH unique course offering

NOW entering its 10th year, Australia's only postgraduate agricultural health and medicine unit for professionals servicing farming communities continues to attract participants from across Australia.

To date, almost 200 professionals working in agriculture, medicine, allied health, and nursing from all over Australia have undertaken the award winning Deakin University unit.

Students were welcomed to Hamilton on Monday night with a reception supported by the Southern Grampians Shire, celebrating the 10th offering of the course and the 10th anniversary of the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH).

Western District Health Service delivered scholarships to a number of interested professionals from both the region and internationally, in order to build the capacity of communities to respond to farmer's health needs across Australia, while also benefitting others around the world.

The scholarships have enabled these professionals to take part in a five-day intensive course, focused around improving health, safety and wellbeing of primary producers.

Designed to confront the high morbidity and mortality rates in the agricultural industry, the internationally recognised course better equips health providers, rural professionals and farming communities with the knowledge and skills required to help turn things around.

Each year, the course attracts students from across the globe, with students from Pakistan and Ghana undertaking the course in 2019, with the aim of transferring the knowledge to rural communities in their home countries.

Ebenezer Owusu-addo is a Doctor and PhD accredited research fellow at the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Ghana, received a scholarship to attend the course and is aiming to take away as much as he can from Australia's approach to the health of farmers and agriculture workers.

"One of the main issues back home, which is



STUDENTS, health professionals and scholars from around Victoria and the world gather to celebrate 10 years of the National Centre for Farmer Health. Photo: BILLY EASSON. 190225b/j12

why I decided to do this course, is that over the years there have been a lot agricultural policies that focus on production, production, production and no one seems to be talking or caring about the health of those are producing," Mr Owusu-addo said.

When he found the NCFH website online, he realised the course they offered in agriculture, health and medicine was what he had been "searching for all these years."

"One of the things I intend to do after this course is to meet with the staff in our college and say, 'hey guys, we've been training farmers focusing on production - what about issues to do with our health and psyche?'" he said.

"I hope to meet with the staff of the college and

update them on the new knowledge and skills I have acquired from this course and how best we can really get into farmers health.

"I have also been thinking of replicating the Sustainable Farm Families Project in Australia in Ghana, so I have been in close contact with Professor Brumby (NCFH) to see how best we can collaborate to implement that project back in Ghana."

NCFH professor, Susan Brumby, said the course was important for many reasons.

"We know that a healthy workforce is vital for a productive agricultural industry, but through the work of the NCFH, we have learnt that farming families and their communities face poorer health outcomes than their urban counterparts," she said. "Agricultural workers have a high rate of injuries including fatalities and suffer chronic diseases at high rates."

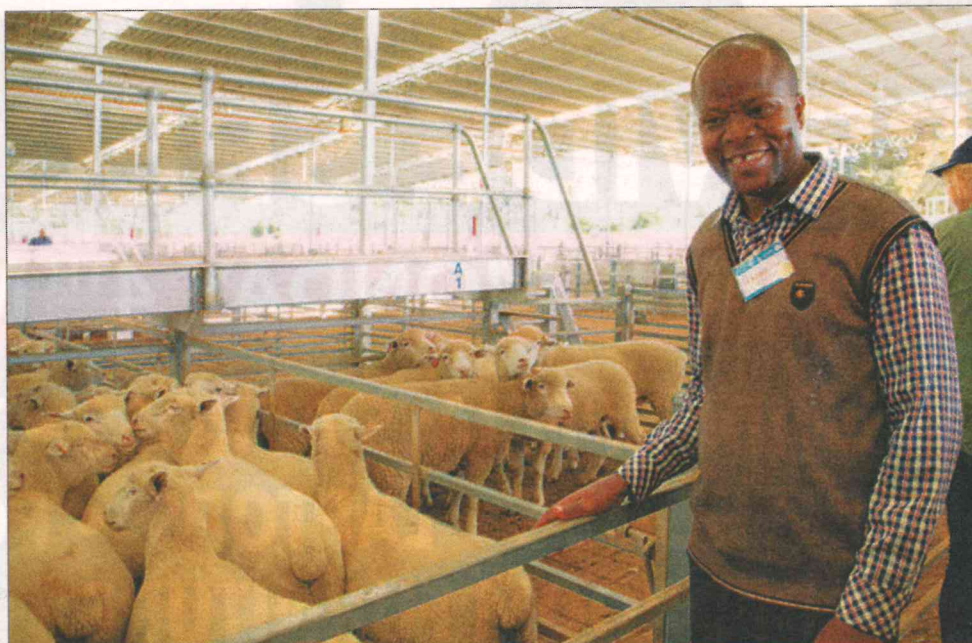
The thought provoking five-day-intensive Agricultural Health and Medicine unit (HMF701) is offered through Deakin University, School of Medicine and the NFCH, and began on February 25, finishing yesterday, in Hamilton.

The presented topics cover a broad range of health, safety and wellbeing issues ranging from mental health, addiction through to emergency medicine, agrichemicals, zoonotic disease and agricultural trauma.

"After 20 years of working in various health roles in East Gippsland, to be able to use that local knowledge with what I will learn from this course means getting in and hopefully reaching that hard to access group, and making a difference to their health outcomes and longevity," registered nurse and First Aid instructor from Gippsland, Bernadette McHugh said.

"The drought is tough, and has brought many to the edge, some over.

"I mentioned to a farmer from Ensay that I was doing this course. He got a tear in his eye, and said 'wow ... you're really going to do that, to help us?' That meant a lot to him...and it means a lot to me too," she said.



EBENEZER Owusu-addo is a Doctor and PhD accredited research fellow at the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Ghana, and was one of many students to visit Hamilton this week to undertake a five-day course. Photo: SUPPLIED.