

“Active Farming” study: Arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions in Victorian farmers

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Farmers and arthritis

Farmers at **increased risk of arthritis:**

- Physically demanding occupation
- Risk of traumatic injuries, repetitive strain
- Reduced access to health services - distance, time



Farmers and arthritis

- Average age of farmers **52** ¹
- many work > 80 yrs
- Osteoarthritis main disability cause in elderly ²

¹ *12 years older than average for other professions*

Source: Farm Facts 2012, National Farmers Federation

² *'Identification of new susceptibility loci for osteoarthritis (arcOGEN): a genome-wide association study' 2012, Lancet, 380, 9844, pp. 815-823, MEDLINE, EBSCOhost, viewed 16 September 2012.*

Farmers and arthritis

- Tend to “soldier on”, keep working with pain
- Increased out of pocket costs – medications, visits to health professionals, time off farm
- In our NCFH – Sustainable Farm Families TM study
 - two thirds had joint or muscle pain
 - one fifth had back pain
 - 10% arthritis

Study aims and rationale

To explore the **impact of arthritis** on
farming men and women

Especially **out of pocket costs**



“Active farming” study

Arthritis Victoria Grant



Aim: **100 farm men and women**

- Arthritis and pain symptoms
- Medications (prescription, over the counter)
- Access to health services: distance, cost, frequency
- Out of pocket costs

Study approved by Multidisciplinary Ethics Committee of South West Health Care (#1/2012)

Methods 1

Identifying potential participants

1. 950 SFF participants – initial letter
2. Identify SFF participants with
 - Arthritis or musculoskeletal conditions
 - Body pain
 - Analgesic or anti-inflammatory medications
3. Letter and plain language statement / consent sent
4. First phone contact to schedule time for interview

Phone interview

- Baseline demographics, years farming
- Type of farm, off farm work including hours
- Pension, HCC, veterans, private health insurance
- Smoking and alcohol intake
- Arthritis medical history: parts of body affected, injuries, surgery, family history of arthritis

Phone interview (cont'd)

List of all health professionals / services used

- GP(s), specialist(s)
- Physio, gym, exercise class, hydrotherapy, massage
- Blood tests and medical imaging
- Alternative therapists

For each, distance in km, costs, bulk billing recorded

All medications: prescription, over the counter, vitamins – including dosing and costs

Phone interview (cont'd)

Validated Quality of Life Questionnaires:

1. **Arthritis Impact Measurement Scales 2**

26 questions

2. **AQoL** (assessment of quality of life)

12 questions

- Diary posted to record all expenses connected with arthritis for **2 months** then returned to us
- Letter for GP advising of study participation
- Optional consumer needs assessment survey by Arthritis Vic.

Results: recruitment

- Letters to 950 SFF participants for data access
- 4.5% not wanting data access/participation
- Identified potential participants in two rounds:
 1. Round One n=156
 - Very mild body pain or more
 2. Round Two n=92
 - Moderate body pain or more
 - Musculoskeletal or arthritis in medical notes
 - Arthritis / pain medications

Total number of potentially eligible participants: **248**

Results: recruitment (cont'd)

Of the 248 potential participants:

- Interviews completed (n=71) 28.7%
- Interviews scheduled (n = 2) 0.8%
- Uncontactable 14.9%
- Declined/not eligible 29.8%
- Still to contact 25.8%

+ 3 recruited by other means = total **74**
enrolled

Of these, **14** completed and returned diaries

Results: baseline data (n=74 to date)

Age: Mean 56.3, median 57, range 29-78 yrs.

Gender: Male 51.4, female 48.6

Birthplace: all but 2 in AUS (NL-1, UK-1), ATSI: none

Years on farm: Mean **38** (range 6-74)

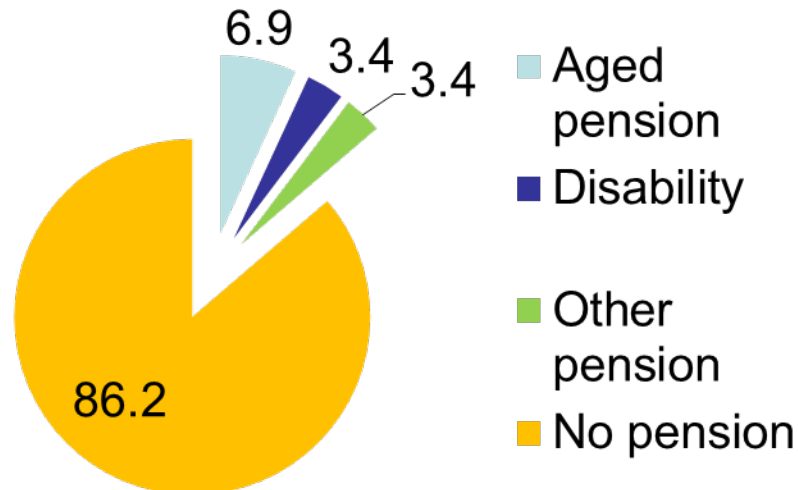
Off farm work: 22/74 participants (29.7%)

Median no. of hours worked off farm: **19.5** (range 2-60)

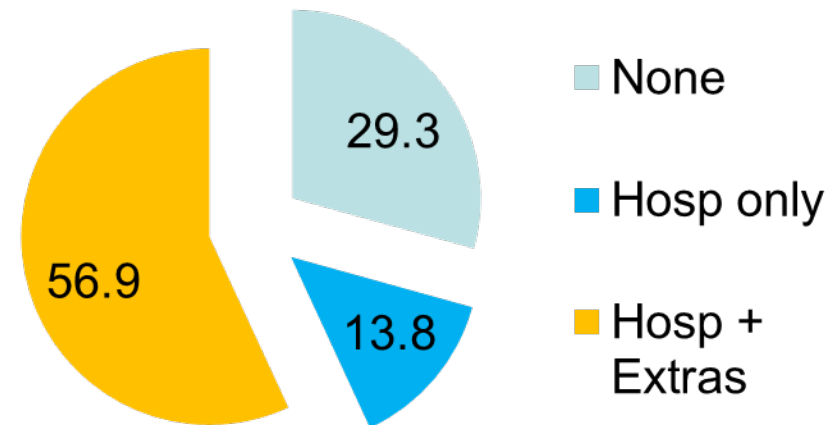
3/74 had 2 off-farm jobs

Results: Baseline data 2 (n=74)

Pension/benefit (%)



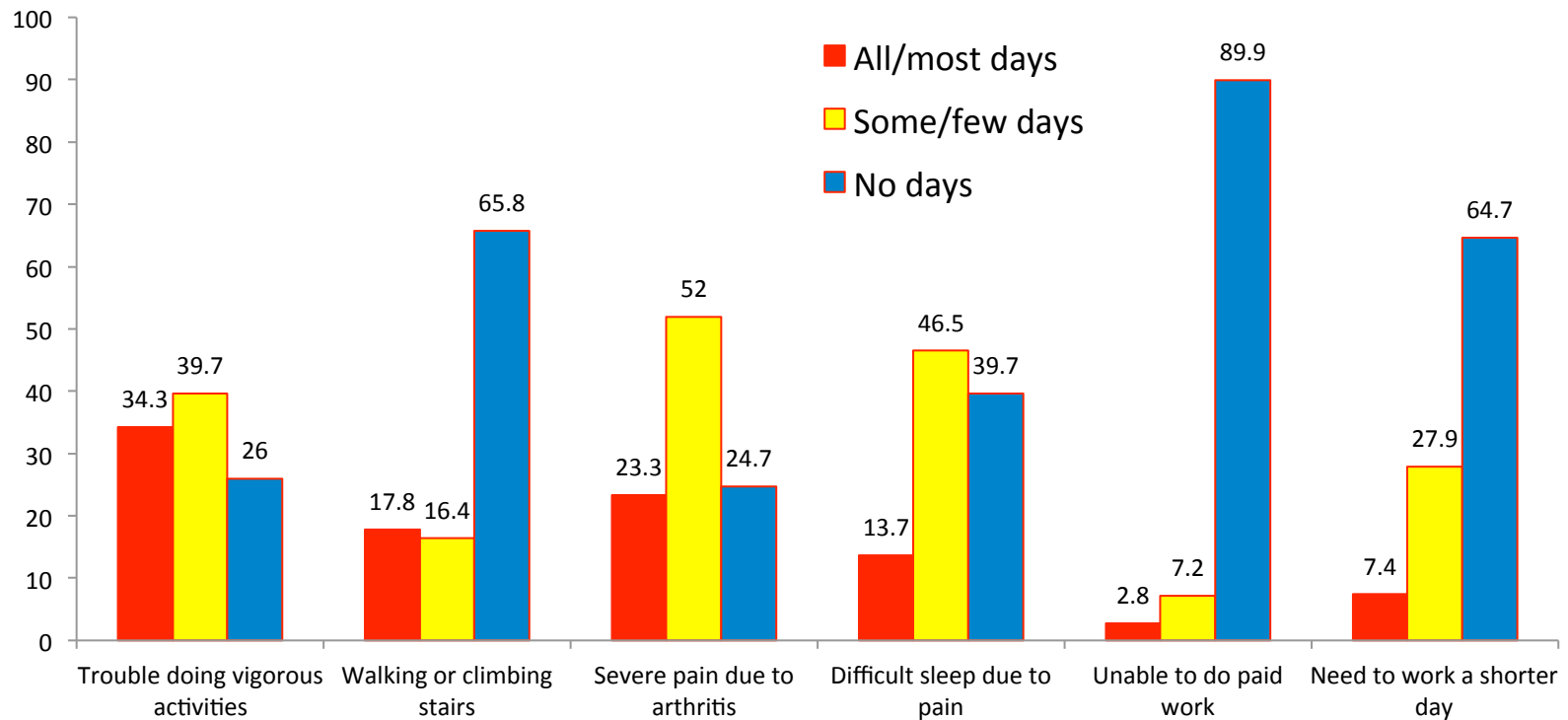
Private health insurance (%)



Health Care card 25%

Baseline data 3: selected AIMS QOL

(n = 73)



Baseline data 4: selected AQoL

(n = 73)

q. 10 ***“thinking about how you sleep”***

Without difficulty most of the time	31.5%
Interrupted some of the time	34.2%
Interrupted most nights	31.5%
Sleep in short bursts only	2.7 %

q. 12 ***“How much pain or discomfort do you experience”***

None	15.1%
Moderate	76.7%
Severe	6.8%
Unbearable	1.4%



Alcohol intake: general comments

In general, not a high risk drinking group:

- Almost ¼ (24.3%) were **non-drinkers**
- 50% only 1-2 drinks on one occasion
- Only 5.5% drank “high risk ” \geq once a week



Returned diaries: initial results (n = 14)

11 of 14 had expenditure items entered

Mean **\$224**, median **\$125** (range \$3-1201) over **2 months**

Mean itemised out of pocket costs after rebate:

Item	n	Mean cost (\$)
GP	3	35.47
Allied health	5	87.00
Medical Imaging	1	125.45
Fuel	6	86.33
Accommodation	1	240.00
Prescriptions	2	144.45
OTC medications	7	33.83
Vitamins etc	6	85.09

Some initial conclusions

- Arthritis and body pain significant in farmers
- Most continue to work full time despite this
- Although only early results, considerable out of pocket expenses incurred, especially prescriptions and complementary medicines and allied health therapists

What is next?

- Finish recruitment
- Collect diaries
- Conduct at least two focus groups



Questions?

