

# Evaluation of Sustainable Farm Families RIRDC Future Directions

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Prepared for

*National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service*

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**Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd**

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We appreciate the contribution of all farmers interviewed for the report; and thank them for their time and reflections on their experiences.

## Acronyms

NCFH	National Centre for Farmer Health
RIRDC	Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation
SFF	Sustainable Farm Families
WDHS	Western District Health Service

# 1 Executive Summary

The *Sustainable Farm Families - the human resource in the triple bottom line* program was initiated by the Western District Health Service (WDHS) in 2003 in response to the discrepancy between rural and urban population health outcomes, and clinical observation of injuries and premature death amongst farming men and women.

The program was implemented as a series of health education workshops delivered by two registered nurses with expertise in rural health and gender health who also had farming experience, and with the support of a social scientist (Brumby, Wilder et al, 2009). A total of 191 farming men and women participated in the original series of workshops, across ten locations, with each group attending one workshop per year over three years.

In 2010 the Collaborative Partnership for Farming and Fishing Health and Safety managed by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) funded a series of follow-up workshops for the same participants who had attended previous workshops to see what changes had been made.

Roberts Evaluation was contracted by the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) at WDHS to conduct an independent evaluation of the impact of the original program and follow-up workshops on farming participants. The evaluation questions were whether the SFF program has:

- Altered the way participants think about their physical and mental health and safety
- Influenced participants' health and safety decisions in their daily lives
- Impacted on participants' resilience and the way they deal with change
- Influenced the way that participants see their health in relation to their farm practices and productivity

A total of 54 out of the total 191 participating farmers were interviewed in October – November 2010 to provide data for the evaluation. Seven of these (including three couples) were interviewed at greater depth to provide case studies of the impacts of the SFF program. Six industry partners, three of whom had also acted as workshop facilitators, were interviewed, and two of these interviewees' responses were also used as case studies.

## 1.1 Findings

The results of the evaluation show that the SFF workshops funded by the Collaborative Partnership at RIRDC over 2004 – 2010 have had a profound impact on the farmers involved. Importantly, the workshops have been equally positively received by and beneficial for both men and women, for farmers of different ages, and for farmers working in different industries.

In particular, the program has:

### Altered the way participants think about their physical and mental health and safety

SFF has clearly created awareness amongst farmers of the importance of their health. Approximately two thirds (32; 68%) of the respondents, particularly men aged between 45 and 64, had altered their previous "she'll be right" attitude to one of preventative action.

They are now going for regular checkups in order to maintain their current level of health, and mitigate the risks which they now know are increasing as they age.

The workshops have empowered farmers to understand and manage their own health:

- The program has increased 46 (97%) farmers' knowledge of relevant health issues.
- 45 of the farmers interviewed (96%) state that the program has provided them with tools to make lifestyle change.
- The program has stimulated increased discussion of health, wellbeing and safety in the families of 42 (90%) of the farmers interviewed.
- 35 of the farmers interviewed (74%) feel that their confidence to manage their own health has increased as a result of the program.
- 28 farmers (60%) feel that the program has helped connect them to relevant health service providers.

This has translated into increased health management behaviours, and farmers report having greater confidence to request more information and follow-up when dealing with GPs and other health providers.

### Influenced participants' health and safety decisions in their daily lives

Farmers' increased priority, awareness, and confidence with regard to their health has translated into a series of health-supporting behaviours, including: improved diet (reported by 26 farmers interviewed; 55%), increased exercise (21; 45%), taking time away from the farm, doing activities to de-stress (21; 45%), and seeking treatment for health issues (9; 19%).

These new practices have created positive results for many farmers. Half of those interviewed (24, 51%) reported improved physical health, eight (17%) that their mental health was better, and 23 that they had positive responses and involvement from their spouse and/or family in these changes. There have also been some excellent outcomes for those who detected serious medical issues as a result of SFF health assessments (see in particular the case studies).

Almost all the farmers interviewed (45; 96%) say they are now more aware and conscious of safety on their farms and 18 (38%) have improved their safety practice; particularly in areas where expense is not an issue, such as wearing appropriate protective clothing and thinking through or changing their actions in risk situations.

### Impacted on participants' resilience and the way they deal with change

Twenty farmers interviewed (43%) felt that the workshops had increased their ability to "take change in my stride"; awareness of the need for change, and "confidence to change".

This is likely to stand farmers in good stead in the challenging and unpredictable nature of farming; particularly in light of larger issues such as climate change. Furthermore, the wider findings that farmers' physical and mental health have improved is a good indication that their capacity to make good decisions in the face of change will be enhanced.

Specifically with regard to dealing with climate change, the majority of the farmers spoken to did not "believe" in climate change as an issue, and if they were adapting their practices

to be more responsive to climactic conditions, this was attributed to the need for drought adaptation or compliance with regulations.

### Influenced the way that participants see their health in relation to their farm practices and productivity

Twenty two out of 47 farmers interviewed clearly link their health and farm productivity. The data shows that the SFF workshops reinforced the idea that “if you don’t have your health, you can’t run your farm”.

## 1.2 Recommendations

### 1. Continue to implement and support the successful elements of the SFF workshop model:

- **High calibre presenters** with skills to build rapport with farmers, using language and examples relevant to the target audience, and with a high degree of clinical and professional experience; as all of this is appreciated by farmers and is important for their confidence in the program and the information presented.
- **The holistic message** that health, wellbeing and safety are integral to the farm business.
- **The comprehensive content**; farmers appreciated all the health, wellbeing and safety topics covered, as all were relevant and constituted a complete package.
- **Practical activities such as the supermarket tour** which are an engaging way to communicate health messages and build the skills of farmers to take charge of their nutritional health.
- **Gender bender sessions**, as these have served to address ignorance and increase understanding between couples, and were enthusiastically received by farmers.
- **Social interaction**: The opportunity for farmers to interact with other farmers in the workshop; as this both acts as a learning tool and provides farmers with the support of knowing they are not alone in their experiences.
- **Individual health assessments**: which provide farmers with the opportunity for privacy to discuss health issues, to have a comprehensive health check (to an extent which many have not experienced before with their GPs or other health providers), and which then makes the information presented pertinent and personally relevant.
- **Working with industry partners**, as their networks and credibility with farmers are important for workshop promotion and recruitment of attendees. This also reinforces the message that health, wellbeing and safety go together with considering the farm business and productivity.
- **Follow-up over time**: This supports farmers to see their progress, reassess their priorities, and address any difficulties they are having with making lifestyle change.

## 2. Some suggestions for improvement:

- **Maintain the high standard set by the two original presenters.** The selection and training processes should ensure that new presenters have:
  - High level clinical and medical knowledge and experience
  - High level communication skills, including ability to present health information in plain language and engaging, audience-appropriate ways
  - Familiarity with the farming context and ability to build rapport with this audience; particularly through being able to relate information back to farming examples.
- **Maintain the balance in communication about the program being both about benefits to farmers and the research study;** to manage any potential sensitivity amongst farmers that the research is more important.
- **Investigate the possibility of models for further follow-up with farmers.** This could be as simple as providing a morning of health assessments and catch-up for participants. Farmers clearly value the opportunity for in-depth and personable health advice, as many have difficulty accessing health services or getting the attention they need.
- **Continue to implement the program to new groups of farmer participants.** The program has been successful across different locations, industries, and for farming men and women of different ages, and is clearly tapping into the interests and needs of farmers.
- **Investigate the possibility of further social research into the socio-cultural aspects of farmer health.** This study hints at a number of attitudes and shared perceptions within the farming community with regard to health, for example; the gendered aspects of health in farming families, or the ways in which mental health is discussed in rural communities. We recommend that where possible there be further research into these issues as a complement to the health outcomes study being completed.



## 2 Background

### 2.1 The Sustainable Farm Families program

*Sustainable Farm Families – the human resource in the triple bottom line* was developed in 2003 by the Western District Health Service. The program aimed to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of farm families, thereby redressing the economic impact that poor health and safety amongst farmers has on their families, their farms, and in turn on rural communities. Its motto was ‘No point in a better bottom line if you’re not there to enjoy it.’

Now managed by the National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) at WDHS, Sustainable Farm Families is preventative health program where farmers attend group workshops (one a year over a period of two or three years), each time receiving an individual physical health assessment and presentations of health information. The physical health data collected in the workshops will form a research study into the health of Australian farmers. Local industry groups assist with the promotion of the workshops and recruitment of farmers, and local health professionals (RN Div 1) from rural health services take on the role of presenters with industry facilitators, supported by WDHS staff.

### 2.2 RIRDC Future Directions

The Joint Venture of Farm Health and Safety managed by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) was the first agency to fund the SFF program, enabling the delivery of SFF workshops to a total of 128 farming men and women (predominantly operating mixed farming systems) in Victoria and South Australia in 2004 and 2005. This was followed in 2006 by a program for 63 cotton and cane growers in New South Wales and Queensland.

In 2010, the Collaborative Partnership for Farming and Fishing Health and Safety managed by RIRDC supported NCFH to conduct follow-up workshops and assessments with these original participants, six and four years respectively after the first SFF workshop. The workshops were offered to all 191 of the original participants, and involved a review of the health material and advice, follow-up physical health assessments to measure change over time, plus some and new information on respiratory illness and pesticides as had been previously requested by participants.

### 2.3 The evaluation

The evaluation examines whether the SFF program has:

- Altered the way participants think about their physical and mental health and safety
- Influenced participants’ health and safety decisions in their daily lives
- Impacted on the way that participants deal with change
- Influenced the way participants see the relationship between their health and their farm productivity

The collaborative partnership and the NCFH were interested in understanding the specific perspectives of a number of sub-groups of the total workshop/program population, according to:

- Gender (men and women)
- Age (above and below 50 years)
- Industry (sugar, cotton, grains, livestock)
- Attendance (attended follow-up workshop, did not attend but submitted paperwork, did not attend nor submit paperwork)
- Industry partners

## 2.4 Methodology

Roberts Evaluation completed telephone interviews with 47 farmers of the total 191 participants in the RIRDC funded workshops (contacting a total of 73 farmers in this process) during October 2010. The sample comprised:

- 25 men and 22 women
- 9 farmers aged under 45 years, and 38 aged 45 and above<sup>1</sup>
- 4 to 5 participants from each of the 10 workshop locations
- 19 mixed farmers, 8 sugar, 5 cotton, 5 grazing, 3 cropping, 1 dairy, and 5 no longer farming
- 41 people who had attended both the first and final/follow-up workshops, 31 who had attended all four workshops, two farmers who had not attended the final workshop but completed their health assessments at a later time, and four who did not attend the final follow-up workshop

Six industry partners were interviewed; two of whom also acted as facilitators/presenters in the workshops.

Roberts Evaluation also conducted in-depth interviews over the telephone to compile six case studies; four with farmers, and two with industry partners. The case study respondents were selected by the NCFH, and chosen on the basis that they represented exemplary instances of the impact of the program, and/or highlighted particular aspects of the program that are instrumental to its success.

The interview responses and case studies are described in detail in the Appendices to the report; *Farmer case studies*, p. 20, *Interviews with farmers*, p. 32, *Industry partner case studies*, p. 59 and *Interviews with industry partners and facilitators*, p. 63. The questionnaires used for the data collection are also included in the Appendices section, under *Data collection instruments*, p. 69.

This is a qualitative study, and findings are descriptive and illustrative. The sample of farmers is not representative of the total population of farmers who participated in the program, and the figures given should not be treated as such. This is especially the case for comparisons across different sub-sectors of the population (age, industry, gender); while comparative comments have been made where differences appear, the sample sizes are not sufficient for quantitative conclusions.

<sup>1</sup> Age categories used in the interviews were mid-decade; 35 – 44, 45 – 54, etc.

## 3 Findings

There is strong evidence that the SFF program has had a profound effect on many farming families. There have been significant learnings in relation to health, as well as the reprioritising of health, wellbeing and safety in relation to their farms. The SFF workshops successfully communicated the importance of farmer health, and many of the farmers spoken to in this study now see their mental and physical health as important factors in the viability and productivity of their farms.

These positive impacts have been experienced by both men and women, for farmers of different ages<sup>2</sup>, and across the different industries. There were no strong trends in the interview data to indicate that one group had benefited more or less than another. This was also the case in instances where there was a prior assumption about need; for example, several interviewees expressed a preconception that men need health information and support more than women, who are seen as more aware and better linked in to health services. The results show that regardless of prior attitudes, both men and women learnt and changed the way they think about and act upon their health, wellbeing and safety.

### 3.1 Impacts on how farmers think about their physical and mental health and safety

*"I think it's the best course I've ever done. It reinforced the message that you need to be on to health all the time."*

*Male broadacre farmer, 45-54 years of age*

Although the first workshops were many years ago, nearly all interviewees had a good recollection of the information and/or discussion around health issues. Topics they recalled learning about included healthy diet and good food choices, effective exercise, the dangers of being overweight, cholesterol, heart disease, sexual issues, cancer, prostate, genetic/hereditary health issues, farm safety and accident prevention, and other general health information.

The strong, overall message they have taken away from this is the importance of prioritising their health. As one of the women interviewed in the case studies commented, it is as though the SFF workshops gave farmers' *permission* to spend time on and pay attention to themselves and their health.

There is evidence that as a result of their involvement in the SFF workshops, participants now feel more in control and empowered concerning their own health. Approximately two thirds (32; 68%) of the respondents, mostly men aged between 45 and 64, had altered their previous "she'll be right" attitude to one of preventative action. Whereas they previously tended to see a doctor only when they "really needed to", they are now going for regular checkups in order to maintain their current level of health, and mitigate the risks of prostate problems, heart disease and other issues, which they now know are increasing as they age.

<sup>2</sup> Noting however that the majority of the interview sample were aged 45 or above.

There is also some evidence of changes in the way participants think about safety, as well as improvements in their knowledge of potential risks on farm. Awareness and consciousness of safety increased for most participants, and this translated to some practice change (outlined below). For the respondents who had *not* changed the way they thought about or practiced safety, the self-perception was that they were already up to speed with safety, as opposed to any perceived lack of focus on safety in workshops.

### ***3.2 Impacts on the decisions farmers make around health and safety in their daily lives***

The learnings outlined above have contributed to better, more informed decision-making and positive action to change lifestyle with regard to health, wellbeing and safety for workshop participants. People are increasingly taking time off from farm work, and seeking medical assistance and advice and, notably, are *happier* to do so, as those things have been given greater priority in their lives.

The focusing of farmers on the importance of prioritising their health has been instrumental in prompting more frequent health checks, especially in farming men and women between 45 and 64 years old, who feel they are nearing an age when they may start to experience more health issues. This has lead to some excellent outcomes for those who detected serious medical issues as a result of SFF medical testing.

*“[We felt] empowered about our future and securing a better future in relation to health. I was pleased we went. We had to juggle a few things. It was hard to get there but worth it. That first workshop saved my wife’s life. They found a mole on her leg, so we got that taken off. She also had a hysterectomy – she went to gynaecologist as a result of the tests that day [at the SFF workshop], then after the hysterectomy they found a pre-cancer in her uterus. So the program probably saved her life. We owe them a lot”*

*Male broad acre farmer, 45-54 years of age*

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Significant numbers of participants (35 respondents; 74%) have increased their confidence and ability to look after their personal health. They are more knowledgeable and confident in their dealings with health providers, and have a much-improved understanding of their own health. Apart from two instances, participants have had positive experiences with local practitioners; who have been happy to follow up on workshop tests, and expressed enthusiasm for their patient’s proactive approach. In the cases where individuals had disappointing experiences with their GPs, they nevertheless displayed the confidence and motivation to pursue their personal health agenda. The respondents generally blamed an overloaded health system and overworked doctors for any lack of response and interest.

SFF participants have been equipped with tools and knowledge, which aid them in looking after themselves and their health, wellbeing and safety more effectively and it is clear that these tools and knowledge have stayed with them over time.

*“By the time I went again [to the 4<sup>th</sup> SFF workshop], my cholesterol was right down, I had been on holiday. I thought more about the future and talked with my family about where did we want to go? What did we want to do? We looked more deeply at “Why are you farming? Do you love it?”...We were going through hard times with 24D, broad acre are spraying and that damages the cotton when it drifts...there’s no insurance, nothing you can do. We were very stressed and the workshops helped us to realise our mental state was borderline depression. That awareness was helpful, we were in a bad place, and they gave us steps to get out of that, to get on top before it happened. Suicide rates are probably high up in farming. You don’t communicate with people. Don’t see the signs”.*

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*Female cotton farmer, 35-44 years of age*

There are positive indications that farm family relationships have been improved, through increased discussion within families about health (reported by 89% of farmers interviewed), and a number of farmers attempting to achieve a more balanced approach to their personal, family and work lives, in response to what they have learned in the SFF workshops.

Almost all farmers interviewed (45; 96%) are more aware and conscious of safety on their farms and some (18 respondents; 38%) have improved their safety practice particularly in areas where expense is not an issue, such as wearing appropriate protective clothing and thinking through their actions in risk situations.

### **3.3 Impact on the way farmers see the relationship between health and farm**

*“The farm relies a lot on my health, if my mental or physical health is not good, it can reflect rapidly on the health of the farm.”*

*Male broadacre farmer, 55 – 64 years of age*

*“[The SFF workshops] let you realise that it’s ok to put health and happiness first - if they are not right nothing else will be.”*

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*Female cotton farmer, 35-44 years of age*

Approximately half of the farmers interviewed (22; 47%) saw a clear relationship between their health and farm success. They believe that the impacts of the lifestyle and farm management changes they have made are reducing their stress, and improving their ability to work effectively and well, which will in turn contribute to farm success. There has been an increase in farmers planning and taking holidays or breaks away from the farm, in response to the workshops (one third, 34% of

respondents), which also is a positive factor in supporting the health, wellbeing and management capacity of farmers.

Many other farmers did not think the program had contributed to improved farm management capacity or farm success. However, it is reasonable to expect that the wider findings; which show that the SFF programs have lead to improved physical and mental health, and better life-work balance for farmers, will lead to farmers who are better equipped to plan, prioritise, and make decisions about their farm management.

### **3.4 Resilience: dealing with change**

*“Change out here is dramatic and speedy, this [SFF] helps. It builds the confidence to change.”*

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*Male broadacre farmer, 55-64 years of age*

There is evidence that the workshops have impacted on how farmers deal with change. Twenty people (42%) mentioned increased ability to “take change in my stride”; awareness of the need for change, and “confidence to change”.

For those whose attitude to change had not been greatly altered by their involvement in the workshops, this was mostly attributed to the self-perception that they were already open and responsive to change.

As mentioned previously, there were strong responses from both farmers and industry partners concerning the benefit of attending the workshops with spouses. Both men and women commented on the value of this when attempting to then make lifestyle changes. Indirectly then, the workshops have been able to demonstrate to farming couples the advantages of beginning on the same page when dealing with change.

#### **3.4.1 Climate Change**

Nearly all the farmers interviewed<sup>3</sup> said they do not support the idea of climate change. They believe climate is constantly cycling and that the short history of climate records in Australia cannot shed any light on broader patterns of weather cycles.

*“Not a strong believer in climate change. Climate has always been very variable just look at the history. It’s very politically motivated, they want funding to do a study on it. On the other hand we farmers are trying to deal with wet weather, but it’s happened before...”*

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*Male cane farmer, 35-44 years of age*

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<sup>3</sup> Only 37 of the 47 farmers interviewed were specifically asked about climate change, as this question was added later. Nine of those *not* asked were broadacre farmers, and one was a cane grower.

One third of respondents have however, changed farming practice due to the drought conditions, which they see as part of a natural, although difficult cycle. Others (9 farmers; a mix of cotton, cane and broadacre) see much of their farming difficulties and subsequent practice change, as arising from *regulations* around climate change, which in that sense, are then seen as arising from government policy.

The upshot is that farmers are feeling very uncertain about their future, but connect this mostly with the drought and shifting government policy around irrigation and water.

## **3.5 Key success factors in the workshops**

### **3.5.1 Delivery and implementation**

The content and delivery of the SFF program has been very successful. The information presented was interesting, relevant, and the informality of the sessions worked well.

The successful delivery followed good *adult education* and *theory of planned behaviour* lines, and was pitched at the right level. Also in line with a two-way flow of information, participants had many opportunities to express their opinions and ideas, and some of these contributed to the final form of the workshops (for example, the gender bender sessions arose from a participant suggestion).

*“I’ve been to hundreds of seminars, and often don’t take stuff in, but the way it [SFF] was presented added up to a really well worthwhile thing. I haven’t been to a seminar that I have got as much out of and learnt as much as this one. Highly qualified presenters brought it down to a good level...personal topics. They got people to share.”*

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*Male broadacre farmer, 35-44 years of age*

The quality of the presenters has been key to the successful delivery of the workshops. Their breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of farming issues engendered respect and confidence in the workshop participants. This and their ability to build rapport further enhanced participants’ reception and retention of information disseminated. There were some concerns that other presenters may not be able to match the standard set by the two main presenters.

*“Everyone came back, so that says a lot! One guy [presenter] was a professor, but I could have taken him fishing! He was straight down the line, easy to listen to, no “you should” or “you have to” going on there”*

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*Male cane farmer, 55-64 years of age*

Part of farmers’ retention of information can be linked to the style of delivery which saw individual health assessments conducted at the start of the workshop, to which the broader health information could then be linked. This process gave the health information a firm grounding, and relevance and

significance for the workshop participants. Farmers could personally relate to the information they received, rather than it just being statistical or abstract.

*“They do the medical first, in the room, so then they are talking about you, not Joe Bloggs from another town. The focus was on those in the room. You identify the problems you have, at the beginning, and that focuses you in on the task at hand.”*

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*Male cotton farmer, 45-54 years of age*

### **3.5.2     *Attending with spouses***

There were many responses from both farmers and industry partners concerning the benefit of attending the workshops with spouses. Both men and women commented on the value of this.

*“[You] need both spouses to go, if you don’t go together there’s not as much impact. We both knew what changes to make, so we were both prepared to make them, and we were supportive of each other. We had both heard the information.”*

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*Female broadacre farmer, 45-54 years of age*

The value was linked mostly to two areas. Firstly, it increased understandings of and empathy with each others’ perspectives and experiences concerning health and wellbeing (often gender specific) as well as safety issues. Secondly, people were saved time and frustration when attempting to implement changes in the family. They did not need to justify or explain the logic of changes to a partner who had also attended the workshops. In most cases, the spouses supported each other in the changes they were trying to make.

Several interviewees (both men and women) commented on the value of couples attending together for addressing men’s lack of engagement with and knowledge about their health, and relieving some of the burden borne by women in encouraging their partners to address health. These comments reflect gendered stereotypes about attitudes towards and responsibility for health and it is unclear to what extent these are shared across the farming population, or evident in farming couples.

### **3.5.3     *Gender Bender sessions***

*“To me as a sixty-five plus man, to learn how a baby sits in a woman’s anatomy and what they go through... My wife had a couple of miscarriages, if I had known then, it would have been easier to help her and share that with her. All 15yr old males should have that education to know what women go through in pregnancy etc.”*

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*Male cane farmer, 65+years of age*



*“[The gender bender session] was an eye opener on the different sex aspects, and your roles.”*

*Female broadacre farmer, 45-50 years of age*

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The benefits of attending with a spouse/partner included an improved experience of what have become known as the ‘gender bender’ sessions. The original workshops included sessions where men and women discussed health relevant to their own gender, but then following a suggestion from a participant, sessions were added where the men and women ‘swapped’ and spent a session learning about the health issues facing the opposite gender.

These sessions were extremely popular with participants, with strong learnings for both genders, increased empathy and understanding of each other’s health issues, and thus potential to contribute to better family relationships.

### **3.5.4 Social aspects of the workshops**

Farmers particularly appreciated the opportunity to interact with their peers, swap ideas, and discuss topics with those in similar situations. This process was helpful for many in alleviating feelings of isolation and stress.

At some of the workshops, participants already knew each other from other farm organisations, particularly FM500 and CRDC. This was valuable in promoting a comfortable and empathetic atmosphere in which to explore confronting or sensitive topics.

### **3.5.5 Supermarket tour**

Participants, both males and females, remembered the supermarket tours with a lot of clarity and found them very useful. The information allowed them to make healthier food choices and to avoid misconceptions about the nutrient value and composition of what they eat and serve at home.

### **3.5.6 Value of the follow-up workshop**

Farmers and industry partners interviewed were on the whole very positive about the follow-up workshop, and described it as a useful reminder and refresher of the messages and learnings from the program. The health assessments were particularly valued as a good way to revisit their goals and check progress, and the social aspect of meeting up with their group again was highly valued. A small number commented that it had simply revised the material, were concerned that their workshop had not had a high return rate, or had the impression that the workshop was more research-focused than for their benefit.

*“It felt good. You forget over a couple of years, so we got revved up again to look at our goals. Had we followed up etc? I’d encourage younger families to do it, you don’t get much health help out here, and to know other farmers are*

*doing, how they live, that you're not the only one, there other ways of doing things..."*

*Female cotton farmer, 35 – 44 years of age*

*"Pleased I'd hit the targets and was within parameters, felt chuffed. Reassuring, I'd like to see it continue every few years."*

*Male sheep farmer, 55 – 64 years of age*

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On the whole, it appears that the follow-up workshops were appreciated as an opportunity to round off the program as well as reignite farmer's focus on their health goals. There were several farmers who expressed a desire to have further follow-up assessments in years to come; in order to continue checking in on their health and meeting up with their peers.

*"It was just excellent. I hope more people have the opportunity to do it in future. It's always good to have a reminder every couple of years. I hope they come back!"*

*Female broadacre farmer, 55-64 years of age*

*"It's good to see younger people accessing that sort of information. Follow ups in 5 years time would be good...you might get in a rut and need reminders. Get the younger ones in, so they can carry that information for the future."*

*Female cotton farmer, 35-44 years of age*

*"I'd love to see it rolled out further across rural Australia, so more can get the benefit. It's a shame if the government wouldn't get behind [it] to put it into all small communities. The benefits far outweigh the costs. It was a really great program...we owe them."*

*Male broadacre farmer, 45-54 years of age*

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## 4 Appendices

In support of the findings and recommendations presented in the report, the following appendices detail the data collected for the evaluation, in the following sections:

- Farmer case studies, p. 20.
- Interviews with farmers, p. 32.
- Industry partner case studies, p. 59.
- Interviews with industry representatives and facilitators, p.63.

## 4.1 Farmer case studies

### 4.1.1 Case study 1. Permission to focus on health

*Jenny and Bill both found the program very beneficial to them and their family. This was not only because they were able to obtain diagnoses and treatment for their health problems as a result of their participation in the workshops, but they were also given tools and strategies to improve their health and wellbeing. In spite of the difficulties in putting some of the changes into practice particularly regarding nutrition and exercise for themselves, they have gained better awareness of health risks, better health knowledge, better awareness of the need to talk about problems, and the necessity to seek medical advice if they have a health concern.*

*Cane farmers, Queensland*

#### Experience of the workshops

Jenny and Bill found the SFF workshops were not only informative, but gave them what they needed to follow through; they gave them some idea of what they needed to do to try to remain healthy, to lose weight, and methods to give yourself more time to exercise rather than just saying 'I'm busy.'

Jenny said that the presenters also talked to them about the beliefs that they held about health, and told them what they should know about health matters such as breast cancer, Pap smears, things that they may have taken for granted. The workshops highlighted the health checks they needed and the importance of having these done especially in their age group; of between 45 and 60 years.

She commented that it was particularly valuable to have time and someone to answer questions, as compared to the normal time available with doctors:

*'I thought it was really good in that, instead of a doctor's appointment taking 10 minutes ... we actually had all day where we could talk, they could answer your questions, things you wanted to ask but you knew the doctor didn't have time was discussed.'*

They observed that the workshops were beneficial for allowing farmers to express their health concerns. Jenny said "it was almost like they were given permission to follow it through; you know you put it off, oh no I've got too much to do". At the workshops, they were told that 'if you're concerned it's usually a good sign that there's something there'. At the next workshop, they were then asked if they followed up on the issue and what happened.

All the participants at the workshops exchanged phone numbers and intended to see each other but Bill and Jenny have not had the time to catch up with the others. They thought that it would be good to encourage young farmers to attend the workshops, even though Bill commented that they are likely to be difficult to attract because "they haven't got the right attitude, they're still too young and think 'we'll be alright.'"

They knew that some farmers committed suicide but only found out during the workshops that this applied to a very high number of farmers. Jenny said that the workshops highlighted the need to talk to other people and listen to them if there was a problem. Bill said that they went through a

period that was “the lowest that the sugar industry had had” and even though he would never contemplate suicide, he knows some farmers who do. He described a recent loss:

*“We had one this year who couldn’t see a way out of his dilemma, and he used to talk openly that he was going to kill himself and he did.”*

They felt the workshops had equipped them to recognise the signs of depression in others “in the way they talk and their demeanour to give you a clue”, and to take the time to talk to them and suggest they go to see the doctor. Jenny said that there was a tendency among farmers ‘to feel you’re on your own’, and rather than talking to other farmers about their problems, they tend to assume that other farmers do a lot better than they are.

They both found it very beneficial to attend the workshop as a couple because they thought that as an individual “you still get the opportunity to pretend it’s not happening”, whereas both having participated, they have talked about what they learned in the program.

They also said that it was important for somebody outside the family to inform them about health and make recommendations, as when it is somebody from within the family who makes these suggestions, it is easy to not listen and dismiss them. Bill said

*“A couple of the ladies that were there, I know their husbands ...they went home and started to talk about it, and they went ‘Ah bullshit’. They wouldn’t listen. If they were there [at the workshops] stuck to a chair, they would have to listen to it, because it wouldn’t be their wives trying to ram it down their necks.”*

### Impacts of the SFF program

After the first workshop, Jenny identified that she had knee problems. She said “again it gave you that permission to take that step and do something about it”. She knew before that she had these problems, but she kept putting it off, due to cost, a lack of time, a lack of knowledge about what was going to happen, the type of procedure, and the benefit of having it done, and also anxiety about the procedure.

Bill underwent heart bypass surgery in his late forties which had put him off medical procedures. Even though he knew he should probably have a colonoscopy to check his intestinal health (as his sister had had problems and it was possible that her siblings could also have similar issues) he had been putting it off for almost five years. The SFF workshop prompted him to go ahead with the procedure, where in fact they found and removed several polyps. He later on had an operation to remove most of his colon to lower the risks of him having cancer later on. This has motivated his brothers and sisters to also get health checks.

For Jenny, the program “highlighted everything that I knew but wasn’t doing anything about it”. The surprise was that she realised that health advice she had seen elsewhere applied to her: before the program when she saw advertisements about getting health checks, she never thought they meant her, whereas in the workshops, “it is me they were referring to”. She also realised that it is not ok to procrastinate about health checks or taking action on health:

*“This course highlighted that you need to take these checks, you do need to take time out, if you want to be healthy in 10, 20 years time. . . it brought to reality that I have to do something about it, that nobody else can do it for me, and if I wanted to live longer, it’s up to me.”*

Jenny has suffered from depression and was already treating it, but prior to the program she used to feel that she was “neurotic”, she was afraid to admit to people that she had depression, now she is no longer ashamed of it. Now if she feels it can help somebody else with depression, she will tell

them about hers. Since the workshops she has also been feeling more confident about talking to the doctor about her depression.

Jenny went swimming for three months after the workshops and said that it was “brilliant” but that this had been difficult to maintain:

*“The pool times changed over winter, it didn’t make it as convenient therefore it went into the too hard basket and now the pool is back open full-time but it’s still in the too hard basket, I have to get back into the mental frame of do it, you’ve got to go, making it a priority”.*

Bill stated that he wasn’t doing any exercise, even though he knew that he should. Jenny tried to coax him into joining her at the pool through the interview:

*Jenny: ...Usually around Christmas, January, that’s a good time to start and hopefully we can continue, Bill did you hear that?*

*Bill: Yeah.*

*Jenny: I’m having a go at Bill [laughs]; I want a commitment out of Bill. Yes, he’ll try.*

*Bill: Well, I didn’t start anything yet.*

*Jenny: I know but I wanted you to say it in front of Lise [interviewer] and then I can say yes you said you were going to do it too [laughs].*

Bill spoke about his diet, and said that even before the workshops that he knew he drank and ate too much but he has not changed anything in that regard since then; he always finds ‘excuses’. Barry said, “when you’re busy on the farm it’s very difficult because you do eat on the run . . . you can’t change these things overnight because you’re just too busy sometimes.” Even though he said that at the workshops they indicated ways in which they could give themselves more time ‘rather than saying I’m busy’, they have not been able to put this into practice. Jenny pointed out that it was difficult for farmers to not eat too much because eating was central to the farming culture. The farmers’ wives always have something cooked that they can offer to people. When there are meetings or people visit one another, they always offer food and food is always expected.

In terms of changes to their safety practices on the farm, they put a chemical container on site which according to Bill “cost me a bloody fortune!” The workshops made them realise the risks and they decided to take action. They would not have done it just because the government told them to do so, whereas as a result of the program, they gained knowledge that led them to make that choice. They did not make any other changes to farm management practices.

The workshops have also “highlighted that if there’s something wrong outside normal” with them or the children, they will now go to the doctor rather than dismissing or postponing it. Bill has back problems, and as a result of the program, he was told that it was an injury that he had in his youth but he does not know when it happened. He says that when he was young they never went to the doctor.

The workshops have opened communication in their family, now if they have health concerns, they will talk to each other about it. Jenny said that “it ignited a whole fresh approach”. As a result of the program, Bill said that he also encourages his children (aged 9 and 14) to do more sports, and he also keeps an eye on them to make sure that they do not get an undiagnosed injury that could cause them health problems in their lives later on, as was the case for him.

### 4.1.2 Case study 2. A stitch in time saves big trouble

*Dave and Annie both found the program very beneficial to them and their family. The health assessments uncovered serious health problems for Annie, which were able to be resolved. They came away from the SFF program with tools and strategies to improve their health and wellbeing. As a result of the SFF program, they have made some changes to their lifestyle and diet, and are improving their farm safety practices.*

*Mixed farmers, Victoria*

#### Experience of the workshops

Dave talked about how they decided to take part in the SFF program,

*“A few years before we went I had an accident on a motorbike which put me in hospital, and I wasn’t expected to leave hospital, and as a consequence I sort of worked out that my health was a pretty important part of what we did and when the opportunity presented itself I said to Annie, well we’re going [short laugh] that’s how it happened.”*

Dave said that when they decided to go to the workshop, they were “hoping to get educated about looking after our health.” It turned out that they “got that and a bit more”, as the comprehensive health check “probably saved Annie’s life.”

Annie stated, “Every workshop we discovered something”. She talked about the pictures that they were shown during the workshops about illnesses and health conditions that could happen to farmers. She found that very good, even though some of the pictures “were very confronting seeing some of the gruesome and what can happen”. The value had been that “it made us realise oh yes it can happen, we’re not indestructible. It was all very very good”.

They also learned to be willing to spend a bit more time to have checkups. Dave said,

*“The trouble is in the bush, is you virtually have to set aside a day to go to see a specialist and if you’re busy you say well stuff that I’m not going to bother to do it, it can wait or I can’t be bothered to do it at all because we’re busy, but if you don’t the consequences can be very dire”.*

They knew some of the other participants at the workshop but not all of them. Annie mentioned that they did not make strong friendships with the other participants, but if they happen to see each other in the street or at an event they will talk, “you’ve got some sort of bond with them”.

#### Impacts of the SFF Program

Annie described her experience of the first health assessment:

*“When they did the skin checks, it came up with some moles and she suggested that I get it checked and the one that was on my left side was cancerous . . . and I had some female troubles and she said that’s not right, you need to check it further”.*

She was given the name of a female doctor two hours away from where they live, and following further diagnosis ended up having a full hysterectomy. She said “and it’s a jolly good thing I did have because I would have ended up in trouble perhaps down the track.” She had previously been to two doctors in her area before attending the program but they had not sent her on to a specialist, and had just told her “to get over it.”

Dave found it very useful that they were taken to the supermarket to teach them about how to read the product labels. He said

*"They told us what to look for in a label . . . the good fats from the bad fats and try to avoid food with too much sugar and too much salt, we've got a couple of young boys and we give them greens, they tell us we're not rabbits, which makes it a bit hard [laughs]!"*

Annie said that at the workshops they also taught them how to avoid being tempted in buying junk food in the supermarket by avoiding certain aisles.

Dave thought that it was very important for them to attend the workshop as a couple. It was useful for them to learn about men's health and women's health and learn how to watch out if something is wrong with your partner's health. He also thought that it was very important for both partners to be there during the supermarket walk so that they both learned about the food items that are good and bad for them. It is important for them to also be on the same page as far as the nutrition of the children is concerned. Annie agreed, and commented that she thought it would have been useful for other women (unlike her) who were not directly involved in their farm with their partner, because "they have no idea of the risks that the men take out there." Annie does the bookkeeping for the farm, and supports Dave by buying modern equipment and paying attention to safety. She also pointed out that by both attending the workshops, they were also able to discuss what they learned and to this day they still talk about the strategies that they learned.

They both feel that their health has improved since the workshops and feel better physically and mentally. They were comfortable before but now they feel happy and healthier. Dave was enthusiastic about the way he had been able to incorporate more incidental exercise in his day:

*'We've got machinery is at a reasonable distance from our house instead of driving down there, I walk down, and there's a lot of little things like that you can do that give you more exercise rather than jumping in a vehicle driving everywhere.'*

He feels much better from doing more exercise, he has found that it reduces his stress levels and increases its fitness levels. Since the program, their children also do more exercise as they play hockey, football and badminton.

Since the program, Dave and Annie and their two sons aged 12 and 11, also try to go on a bicycle ride as a family on a regular basis. He said that he also spends more time with his family than he used to. They have built a holiday house on the coast and they try to go there regularly. However, he made this decision more as a result of his motorcycle accident than his participation in the SFF program. Dave reflected:

*'That's something that really came home for me after being in the hospital not knowing if I was going to live or die and two little boys...I thought well I've got to spend more time with my family if I get out of here'.*

Prior to his accident he worked very long hours and did not spend much time with his wife and children. His focus was more on earning a good living but since his accident he has realised that 'the most important thing in life is being with your family'.

Annie said that they already ate quite well before the program but now they are more careful when buying groceries at the supermarket. They read the labels carefully, and have taught their children how to be conscious about what they are eating and to read the labels by themselves. They have even taught their friends how to read the labels and their children teach their own friends. They have not made significant changes to their diet but they try to eat less fat and less salt. Annie explained,

*'We still eat cheese but now we buy the lighter cheese and it's not the light cheese that's written on the packet, it's the lighter in the fat on the packet . . . we still eat meat, we still eat fish, we still eat chicken . . . but you know, you're more conscious of it'.*

When the children were smaller, they used to take them to McDonalds and buy them a happy meal but since the program they have stopped going there, now they go to Subway instead. They eat



healthier options when they are on the road. They cannot really avoid the junk food aisles so much at their local supermarkets as they are very small but when they go to the big supermarket (located 130km away) they avoid the aisles with candies, chips and other junk food.

Since the program, Dave goes to the doctor once a year to have a checkup. It takes him half the day to do that, due to the time to get there, and as Annie added, in rural areas doctors are often called out somewhere, so they may have to wait for a few hours. But he finds now that it is worth it to get regular checkups rather than waiting for something to be seriously wrong with their health,

*“With heart issues or cancer or things like that, time is of the essence so you can’t afford to muck around with it”.*

Before the program, he only went to the doctor when he “felt crook. Otherwise I didn’t bother”.

Annie used to go to the doctor regularly even before the program. She said,

*“I wasn’t as bad as the men because I had kids and it’s mum that takes the kids and when taking the children, I’m more likely to book me myself . . . whereas men are buggers, we could be half bloody dead, he wouldn’t go, they don’t have time”*

However, since the workshops, ‘Dave if he gets a lump on his arm or something, he’ll go and you know he is happy to get it checked out now’. Since the program, she puts sunscreen on when she goes on the farm to avoid skin cancer.

They did not need to make many safety changes as according to Annie

*“Our farm was pretty good safety wise ... but I suppose Dave is more aware now if a cover gets damaged, needs repairing, you know he fixes it up”.*

Dave uses a respirator much more than before to avoid breathing the toxins and gas on the farm. He has also installed sprinklers to keep dust down. Dave is also more aware of the health risks when inoculating sheep and is more careful.

They did not make any changes to farm management practices. Dave says,

*‘now that I spend more time with the family, the productivity of the farm has suffered a bit, I don’t get to do a lot of the things that I used to do . . . it affects the bottom line in the long run but at the end of the day, that’s probably worth the cost’.*

In spite of that, they are still managing quite well financially.

They will continue to look after themselves and try to stay fit and healthy. Annie wishes that they “could get away from the farm a bit more” as it’s a hectic lifestyle, but as long as they are “fit and healthy to do it”, “that’s fine”.

### 4.1.3 Case study 3. A connection between health and the farm

*Tom and Marg found the workshops very beneficial and as a result made changes to their lifestyle and safety on the farm. They were not always able to maintain these changes because they left farming and started a new life in a regional city. However, they have made a conscious effort to lose weight and have succeeded in the last year by doing regular exercise and eating less fatty foods and smaller portions. They intend to maintain this lifestyle. On the whole, the workshops have made them more aware about health risks and about the importance of having annual checkups and looking after one's health.*

*Ex-farmers, Victoria*

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#### Experience of the workshops

Tom and Marg heard about SFF through their Farm 500 group. Marg commented that

*"Because it was part of Farm 500 it was looking at our personal health in correlation with our farming business health so that's probably what was most interesting to us."*

Tom added that "I guess we were probably a bit older than the other guys so we're always a bit more interested in our health".

Tom said that although it was difficult for them to get to the workshops, because they were always busy, they always felt that they learned something, and enjoyed the workshops: "We found it quite good, it was quite entertaining, and you bounce things off the other people who were going as well."

Between them they couldn't remember exactly which of the workshops they had attended throughout the program. Tom thought that he had been to all of the workshops, and that Marg had missed a couple, but she wasn't so sure. Tom had still gone to one of the workshops after leaving farming, because it was not far for him to drive and he still thought that it would be useful. Neither of them was able to attend the follow-up workshop in 2009-10 due to work commitments.

They thought that the workshops were very worthwhile, and Marg said enthusiastically, "we're very glad that we took part, that's for sure". She particularly liked seeing how blood pressure, cholesterol levels, weight measurement and other things changed in the course of the program. They also liked the sessions on personal health, wellbeing and diseases.

Marg thought the emphasis on mental health during the workshops was valuable,

*"Because at that stage we were in the early stages of the drought and it was interesting to see how all that worked out and we got out of farming sort of the 3rd year of the program so it was interesting to look back now and see a lot of our peers, friends and other farm families around us at the time and see how that worked out".*

They knew quite a few of the other participants as they were also in their Farm500 group but not everybody. They have not really kept in touch with them especially since they left the farm.

## Impacts of the SFF program

They had both found out through the health assessments that their cholesterol was high, and they had been able to “bring it well under control since then”. They did this by being more careful about what they ate, cutting down the bad fats and eating more healthy foods. Overall, they were pretty healthy already before the workshops.

They found it very useful to attend as a couple. Marg said

*“because we got the same information but it’s interesting to see how each one interprets things differently...instead of one person coming out and saying “No you can’t do this, you have to do this that way” you actually heard why you’ve got to do it that way”.*

For a similar reason, she particularly liked the sessions they had on OH&S at the workshop: “I was with Tom going, “You do that, you do that wrong” [she laughs] and he goes “Yeah I know but””. She felt that being told about safety and health risks at the workshops had a direct impact on him.

They found that being taught how to read product labels during the workshops was very useful, and that it had made them “more aware” and that they now knew what to buy. They commented that it “was something that took a long time to evolve” but that “now it’s second nature.”

They both agreed that since the first workshop they have changed the way they cook and eat, that they are now conscious of portion sizes, eating low fat meals, and more fruit and vegetables. They commented that even though they eat out more now that they live in a large centre, that they choose healthier options and don’t eat fast food any more:

Tom: *I can’t remember the last time we went to McDonalds or...*

Marg: *Had take away food*

Tom: *Oh we had fish and chips about 3 months ago and we didn’t like it I remember*

Marg: *[laughs] no that’s right!*

Before attending the workshops they played sports on weekends. Tom used to do a lot of walking on the farm during particular times of the year, although he found that

*The problem with farming is that you have a lot of time at some stages and no time for about 3 months in a row, and when you’re busy all exercise ceases’.*

They have been doing more exercise and more consistently since they have been living in the regional city. They started to make changes to their lifestyle when they were still on the farm but as Marg pointed out, “it evolved and we got better as time went by”.

While they were still on the farm, Tom had made some safety changes as a result of the workshops, stating that he “became a lot more risk aware”. This had worked in well with the fact that he had an apprentice working with him at the time:

*“to bounce things off him because he was doing occupational health and safety in farming as well, it was actually quite good what we did, we started a sort of a program really of looking after yourself, having rest breaks, and how to do it.”*

Marg added that they had started to use guards and protective clothing, and they both said it was about “how to do things safely” (Tom) “instead of quickly” (Marg).

Marg mentioned that for the first three years since leaving the farm their focus on health and exercise “went all out of the window.” She had put on quite a bit of weight but managed to lose 12 kilos in the last two years. The first year they moved into the city, their diet was not so good but in the last 12 months they have improved their diet and exercise because they felt that they needed to lose weight. Now they each have a personal trainer and do two exercise sessions each per week.

They also both play golf a few times a week, they go for walks, and Marg tries to walk the five kilometres to her workplace.

They already went to the doctor for ad hoc checkups before participating in the program but now they have an annual checkup as they are more “aware of the need” to do so.

The transition off the farm had been a big change, especially for Tom. Working with his brother on the farm had in the end become “untenable”, which was the motivation for leaving. Even once the decision had been made it was difficult to make the shift:

*“The actual physical leaving of the farming yeah was incredibly difficult, once the decision was made it took years to really work things through and finalise the situation.”*

Leaving the stressful situation on the farm has given him the opportunity to do other things; he has acquired a lot of new skills, and feels “better mentally now that what I have been for the last 5 or 10 years”. It was also something they had talked about previously; that he would leave farming when he reached his fifties, but this was brought forward by the conflict with his brother. However he always had a vision of himself as a farmer, and reflected that:

*“probably I feel a little bit, I still sometimes probably feel that I’m not really...fulfilling what I should have done perhaps, I don’t know, yeah my life’s changing I guess, I’m 50 so I’m probably at the mid-life crisis.”*

Marg added “He wants to swap his car for a motorbike but anyway we’re still working on that!”

#### 4.1.4 Case study 4. A woman aware

*Gina found the program very beneficial, and her participation was also indirectly beneficial to her husband. As a result of the program, her husband has had a medical checkup and she now has a mammogram every two years. They have not made many changes to their lifestyle and diet, as she feels that they were already healthy, had a good diet and exercised regularly. But as a result of the workshops, they have made some safety changes on the farm and she has gained better knowledge and awareness of potential health risks and has been able to share these with her husband, family and friends.*

*Mixed farmer, NSW*

##### Experience of the workshops

Gina heard about SFF through her Farm500 group, and attended along with many of the other members of the group. She was interested even though she was unsure “what I was going in for”. She attended all four workshops but missed some of the sessions of the last one as by then she was working full-time off-farm.

She was very interested in what they had to say in the workshops about health and finding about ‘the ramifications of not looking after yourself, that if your farming business had to survive you had to be healthy as well’. What she liked the most was that unlike some of the workshops she had attended in the past, these focused on “you and the assessment of you”. It was also good to see how their health improved over the duration of the course, both individually and as a group. ‘The whole thing was very beneficial’.

From the first workshop, she was glad to be part of the program.

*‘For a start, you know they did your heart rate and did glucose tolerance and did our cholesterol and that was very interesting, and they did a general talk about our health and I found that very interesting, and women were told about men’s problems and what to expect, and the men were explained about women’s problems and what to expect and that was certainly very interesting and an eye opener for a lot of us anyway!’*

For instance, she did not know about prostate problems and they were told about what to expect from prostate cancer. The session also impacted on the men:

*“I know the men when they came back into the room and they had been told about what women were exposed to, one of the blokes came up to his wife and gave her a big hug and a kiss [laughs] so that was quite entertaining”*

She already knew two thirds of the workshop participants through the Farm500 group. She hasn’t stayed in touch with the people she did not know before but she speaks to them if they happen to see each other in the street. She said that at each workshop,

*“Everybody was really pleased to get together again and see how things had developed and change, and we were interested to hear other people’s stories, and to see our progress’.*

She attended the workshops by herself because her husband was busy and could not attend the first one so it would have been too late for him to go to the next one. She would have liked to attend as a couple if it had been possible. She said:

*"I wish my husband would have done it with me ... he would have got it firsthand rather than hearing it second hand from me and he would have benefited from the talks that we had when we broke off into groups."*

She talked to her husband about what she had learned from the workshops,

*'He's one of these farmers who thinks he is invincible and doesn't need to go to the doctor and... I told him you need to have a cholesterol check and I also suggested he'd go for a general check up'.*

He followed her advice, and as his father and grand-father had prostate problems and as he may have these problems too, he has to go and have further tests. Before that, he only went to the doctor if he had an accident. She also went through the book from the program with him and he read some parts as well. She still has the book and refers to it sometimes.

### **Impacts of the SFF program**

She did not get any referrals to the doctor after her individual health assessment. She knew before doing the program that she was pretty healthy. She was told at the workshop that her cholesterol was slightly high but she just needed to be aware. She goes to the doctor to for pap smears and donates blood every three months, so they take her blood pressure and weigh her as part of that. Otherwise she only goes to the doctor when she is sick. As a result of the workshops, she went to have a mammogram and is now doing that every two years. She said reflectively,

*'I was made aware if you have a history of cancer in your family, my father died of cancer, and you can go and have a mammogram before you're 50, yes so I did that.'*

The workshops made her more aware of farm accidents and other health risks,

*'You think about those things but you probably don't think about them as often as you should, and it just highlighted that sort of things, and to be aware if you've got these signs, to be aware of what could be happening with different pains and made us a bit more aware that we are not invincible and we do need to go to the doctor if something presents itself'.*

After the workshops, she became more aware about depression. They were taught how to watch out for the signs among friends and family. She said, with emotion in her voice,

*"That made me really aware of keeping my eyes open, not only to see how we were struggling but how our friends and family were struggling as well'.*

She was becoming concerned about her husband because as a result of the drought; they had failed crops and had to sell some stock, and it was difficult for him. The workshops made them realise that it was important to get involved in activities and go out. She said that she could see the signs such as mood swings for both of them, usually when there was a problem they just fixed it, but at that time "things lingered a bit longer...just things that creep in when you're under stress". She said that "there was a period of two weeks when it didn't rain, when your crops were dying around you, it was out of your control and it made you feel very sad." She made sure that they had something to look forward to short term, like going on holiday as a family and other activities. She also learned that if "things are happening you need to get help".

Gina has shared what she learned during the workshops with some of her friends and family. For example, that even if people are not overweight, if the measurement and the ratio between your hips and breast is not right, they can still be at risk of a heart attack. She also talked to other women about the importance of getting check-ups like mammograms regularly. For instance, her sisters were not aware that they were able to get mammograms before they were 50. Since she has told them, they also get mammograms.

She feels far more knowledgeable since the program and says it has "made me aware of different things to look out for and it's interesting to get your book out to remind you about things." She has also refreshed her first aid knowledge.

She used to work full-time on the farm but she has been working off-farm since April 2009 out of financial necessity. Because they had had failed rice crops, they were making little income from the farm, so she decided to take up part-time employment as well as working on the farm.

The workshops highlighted the importance of reducing weight, exercising and stopping smoking but she was already exercising regularly before the program, going to the gym at least twice a week, she does not smoke, and her weight is within the healthy range. Her children (aged 12 and 13) were already very sporting. Her husband was also exercising before she attended the workshops; he plays tennis, swims and plays football with the children.

They used to drink alcohol more, especially during the drought, if they went out with friends. Now she makes sure that both she and her husband drink less. They ate pretty healthily prior to going to the workshops, the only thing she did to reduce her cholesterol was to drink low fat instead of full cream milk.

In her action plan she wrote that she wanted to 'not yell at the kids as often' and she has 'made a conscious effort to try to reason with them more'. They were told that they needed to listen to their children more and she has been trying to do so. She also wanted to lose a few kilos, and she did without doing it deliberately. She has always been active in the community, working on different projects at the community centre, she has organised parties for farming families to get together.

In her action plan, she also decided to organise a chemical shed on the farm, and that was also done. Before the program, they stored the chemicals in the same shed as other tools. She also made sure that they have guards on equipment, 'it was highlighted to us that we need to be conscious not only people working on our farms but ourselves, to avoid accidents'. Her husband used to tend to 'cut corners'. She had bought him safety goggles when he does grinding in the shed, but they had had 5 trips to the emergency room because he did not wear them and had a piece of steel in his eye. Since the workshops, she has tried to make him more aware of the need for him to wear safety goggles, and he is more careful as they have had to go only once to the emergency room since then. She says she is "hoping that the message has got through". Since the program, she has also been making sure that she and her husband know where one another are on the farm, to be safer.

They did not make any changes to their farm management practices, other than the fact that "the course highlighted that you need to look after yourself to be fit to do the farming". She is currently feeling better about their position because it has been raining more and their crops have been successful in recent seasons.

## 4.2 Interviews with farmers

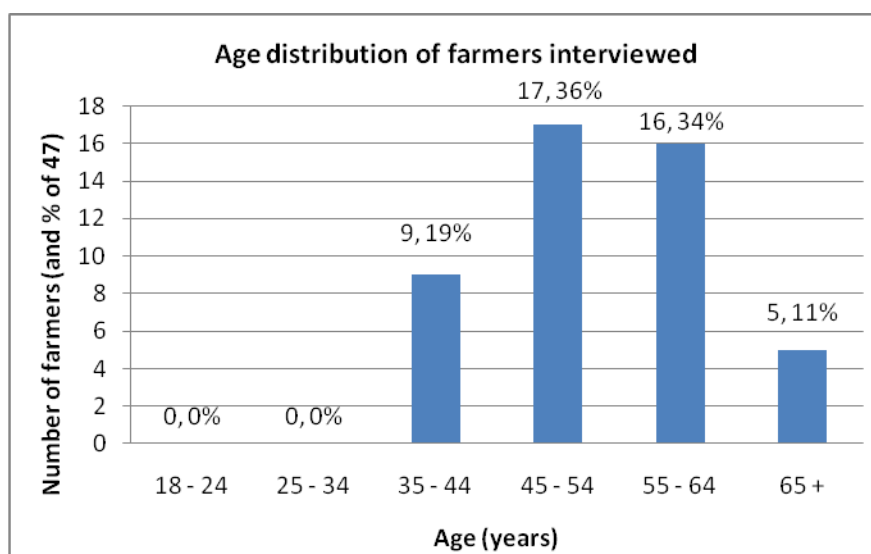
A total of forty-seven farmers who have been involved with the SFF RIRDC funded workshops since 2004 or 2006, were interviewed by telephone. Roberts Evaluation conducted some preliminary interviews on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September and the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2010, with the remainder carried out between 25<sup>th</sup> of October and the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2010.

Four or five farmers from each of the 10 workshop localities were interviewed. Twenty-five were male and twenty-two were female. See Figures 1 and 2 below for the age and gender distribution.

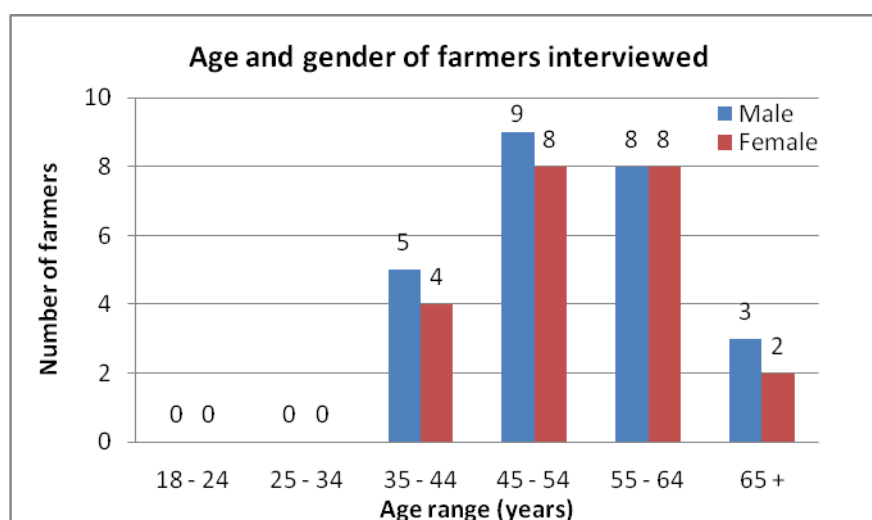
Some additional questions concerning experiences with local health providers, and with climate change, were included after a number of interviews had already been completed. This has been indicated where relevant.

Responses were analysed for trends or differences across the different categories of the interview sample; gender, age and industry. Because the findings were consistent across age, gender and industry, these categories have not been highlighted throughout the analysis summary. In any specific instances where comments pertained to a category, this has been noted. Otherwise, responses are summarised together, de-identified from age, gender, or industry, as the illustrative quotes included are representative of the wider responses, rather than the specific categories.

Figure 1. Age distribution of farmers interviewed

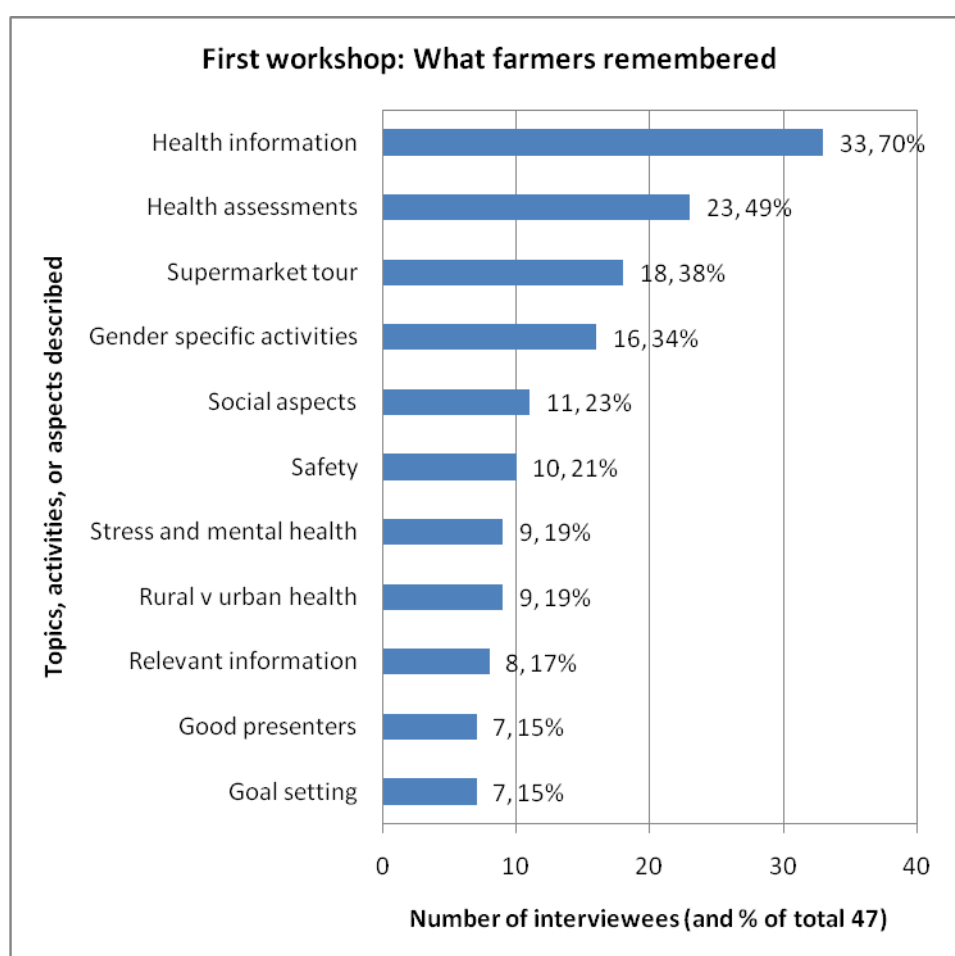




**Figure 2. Age and gender of farmers interviewed**

### 4.2.1 *Experience of the first workshop*

#### 4.2.1.1 What farmers remembered of the first workshop

**Figure 3. First workshop: What farmers remembered**

Nearly all interviewees (33; 70%) described **information and/or discussion on health issues**. Topics they recalled learning about included healthy diet, effective exercise, the dangers of being overweight, cholesterol, heart disease, sexual issues, cancer, prostate, genetic/hereditary health issues, and the importance of prioritising their health. Many of these respondents felt they had been given **tools and ideas** for looking after themselves and their health more effectively.

*"It was about giving you ideas and reflection, getting your priorities right, looking after yourself, that's not that easy. Particularly for men, women have other avenues. It forced you to stop and take stock."*

*"Things that lead on to illnesses, e.g. being overweight is a precursor for many things, and so is smoking. The importance of exercise, nutritional information...how much of nutrients we needed."*

*"I'm more aware [now] of health issues of farming families. They tested for cholesterol body mass, and where we sat in those charts."*

*"[The workshops] brought home to be careful, and about the preventative maintenance of your health."*

*"They went through our health experiences –reasons we were there, took us through the health problems for rural people, then different health issues for the sexes."*

Around half of the respondents (23; 49%) said they remembered the **health assessments** carried out at the SFF workshops, usually noting that this was a new experience for them.

*"A lot of time you wouldn't bother to go for health checks. But we got this done and got that done at the workshops. And it makes you more aware of the importance to get checkups."*

Eighteen people (38%) remembered the **supermarket tour** and the information about reading food product labels, and about making healthy food choices,

*"We went to the supermarket and learnt to read labels, I look at food differently now"*

*"They took us to the super market and showed us food labels, the traps etc with sugar etc content"*

Sixteen participants (34%) remembered **gender specific activities** and information.

*"We swapped...we did female type things - information and problems, then swapped around and heard about male problems. That was a really good idea, there are things we don't know about them and they don't realise about what we go through."*

*"Very interesting the fact that they had guys and women swap over. Men got to hear about women's issues etc"*

Eleven respondents (23%) remarked on the **social aspects** and atmosphere of the workshops, describing the "openness" and "good camaraderie" of the workshops, and on the positive social aspects such as "catching up". This included comments about the "good format" of the program, and farmers felt that it had been "well-run" and that there was effective information sharing amongst their peers as well as with the presenters.

*“The way the seminars were conducted, they were very open and interactive; people weren’t frightened to say their piece. We learnt as much from each other as from the presenters.”*

*“No one felt intimidated or compromised with how data was presented afterwards. In small groups people share their problems and a problem shared is a problem halved”*

Ten people (21%) recalled covering topics of **farm safety** and/or OH&S

*“We were most deficient on OH&S as a result... the workshop happened before there was so much focus on chemicals etc. It brought us up to speed, at a time before others were doing it.”*

*“How big the impact of some of the information was. Particularly farm safety, the photos, statistics etc of accidents, motorbike accidents, as well as skin cancer stuff.”*

Nine (19%) recalled information on managing stress, anxiety and other **mental health** issues. This included things like making more time for holidays and down time.

Nine respondents (19%) remembered learning that **rural health is worse than urban health**, and about the state of farm health.

*“A big impact [was the] statistics of living in a rural area...life expectancy was lower in the country! That was an eye opener.”*

*“One major thing, I thought people in rural areas were healthier, but apparently not. There’s pollen, dust etc.”*

There were eight responses (17%) about the **appropriateness of information** disseminated at the workshops. Respondents recalled that it was variously: “very helpful” “interesting”, and “relevant”.

*“Good information, interesting, we were in drought at the time and it was good for morale that someone was interested in our farming area.”*

*“I was probably dragged there thinking I didn’t need to know, but I soon realised...the topics seemed very relevant and I needed to take it on board.”*

Seven respondents (15%) felt that **the presenters** were “very impressive”, “well educated” and with “a wide knowledge”.

*“These programs are reliant on the calibre of deliverer; [the two main presenters] were excellent. Others have gone through the course on my recommendation, and it didn’t have the impact on them, I don’t know why but maybe it was because they had different presenters, some can do it some can’t”*

Seven (15%) remembered **setting goals**, making plans for health, such as getting regular checkups.

*“We set goals to remedy some problems, like high cholesterol etc.”*

#### 4.2.1.2 How farmers felt after the first workshop

Figure 4. First workshop: How farmers felt



Nineteen respondents (40%) described feeling that the first workshop had been “worthwhile”, that they had “gained a great deal” and “learnt a lot”. They described “feeling good” and “positive”, and pointed to various reasons that the workshops had been worthwhile and effective; including the understanding they had gained, the quality of the presenters, the ability to discuss issues with peers, and the importance of attending as couples.

*“[Prostate health was] so much more explained at this workshop, I came away feeling a lot more understanding of this, compared to what you get from doctors etc.”*

*“One guy [presenter] was a professor, but I could have taken him fishing, he was straight down the line, easy to listen to, no “you should” or “you have to” going on there”*

*“Networking is always worthwhile; discussing similar situations gives ideas, meet people from the locality.”*

*“There was a lot of value having both of us there. I’ve been to lots of men’s nights, which often are a waste of time if it’s anything to do with lifestyle and food etc. You both need to be involved with lifestyle habits, so the fact that they encouraged couples to go together was one of the best parts about it.”*

Three comments were made that there were instances where men had initially been sceptical or reluctant to attend, but that in the end they too had found the workshops worthwhile.

*“When we first went, some of the husbands felt they were just there because told by wives to go, but after they felt it was well worthwhile. All the men seemed to feel that.”*

Nineteen respondents (40%) felt **“motivated”, “challenged” or “inspired” to take action** - on their health, or on their farms. This included that they felt more in control and empowered concerning their own health.

*“Very enthusiastic about changing certain things. Keen to make some lifestyle changes, I still think back to it even though it was 5 years ago. It’s still a very positive feeling – it stayed with me”*

*“Pretty motivated, went away thinking no excuse for not getting a mammogram”*

*“More informed and determined to do some things about my health”*

*“Relieved and more at ease with going to the doctor. No longer felt guilty about taking up doctors time, felt we could ask about things, and say this is not feeling right. Our Doctors got letter from SFF and they treated that with a lot of respect and got on board.”*

*“I felt really good, and very grateful for the opportunity to do it. You can do a lot to help yourself if you have the knowledge.”*

*“Felt as if I was more empowered to make changes, had the information required... we were not lectured to, just given the information.”*

Three people felt good that their test results were “ok”.

One respondent felt isolated, as they and their partner happened to be the only dairy farmers in their workshop:

*“I found that difficult, others couldn’t relate to our workload or job description, in hindsight I would make sure I was going to one with common ground, common industry. “*

## 4.2.2 Experience of the follow-up workshop

### 4.2.2.1 What farmers experienced and learned

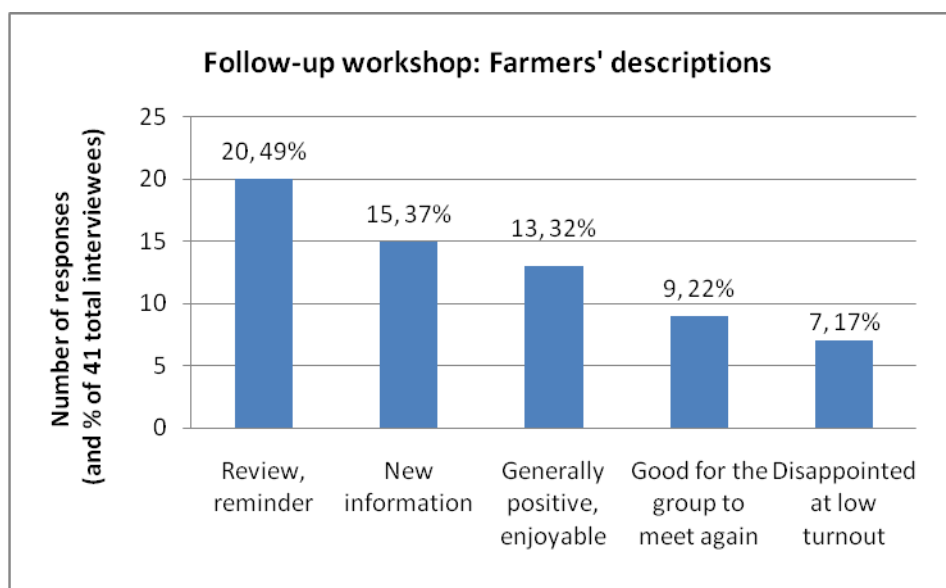
*Of the forty-seven people interviewed, six respondents had not attended the final workshop, but three of these had completed their physical tests at a different time.*

The reasons cited for non-attendance were largely being “busy”, having “other things on” – for three people this was related to the fact that they also work off farm. In a small number of cases farmers were unable to attend due to a family member being unwell (husband, parent, or children).

Those that had not been able to attend the workshop in full, but had completed their health assessment at another time (in some cases the presenter came to them personally), were grateful for the flexibility of the program in this regard:

*“We had a double commitment on that day, so we asked to alter timing, so we went early - 5.45am! They said they would, they were happy to do it. We did our tests and things. We missed out on any further info stuff. Didn’t see the other people. They were dedicated enough to alter their daily plan to compensate for us.”*

*Forty-one of the interview respondents attended the final workshop. They were asked to describe their experiences of this workshop, and what they had learnt:*

**Figure 5. Fourth workshop: Farmers' descriptions**

Twenty people (49% of the 41 interviewees who had attended) described the final workshop as a **review** or a **“reminder”**. They described “refreshing” or “revisiting” goals they had made as well as the information covered in previous years. This included the value of redoing the health checks; to “follow if I’d made progress or not” and to “keep you on track”.

*“It was a good review. It had been a couple of years this time. It was good to recap, go over what we’d done and not done”*

*“I thought it was very good. You need to refresh, re-cap, be brought up to date, medicals get out of date.”*

*“It was feel-good and a backup from what we learnt previously. To keep us on the straight and narrow and not to get complacent about health and safety”*

*“Just reinforcing what we’d done in previous ones. People gave a short report on how they were going with their goals. Some of things they had done were really great.”*

While most saw this as a positive thing, there were a small number who found this a negative aspect of the final workshop:

*“Don’t know that I got much out of it. It went back over old ground”*

*“Didn’t have as much impact as the workshops themselves, it just helped to summarise”*

Approximately one third of interviewees (13, 32%) felt **generally positive** about the fourth workshop. They had found them “interesting” “informative” and had “enjoyed” them.

Twelve people (26%) recalled that **new information** had been presented. They variously remembered “information on depression”, “chemicals”, “dust on farms”, “respiratory disease” and comparative health statistics.

*“We learnt how our industry fitted in around the nation, so the level of health of farmers in cotton as compared to others...”*

*"A few new things, chemicals and dust on farms, went over and revised some stuff, that doesn't hurt...there were some interesting comments made about handling chemicals and the so called "safer" ones. Exposure with dust on farms, wear respirators etc."*

*"Farm safety was another good topic, update on new info on chemicals."*

Nine interview participants (19%) felt it had been **"worthwhile to catch up" with others**:

*"It was good to listen to others, some had lost weight, some couldn't come but many had done a lot. Feedback – it was really noticeable some of the changes... it had been a while"*

*"Good to catch up again with people we hadn't seen for couple of years. There were those who made signs of progress, and had inspirational stories to tell. "*

*"It was good to get back in touch with the group"*

Seven people mentioned **low participant turnouts**. A number of these expressed disappointment over this:

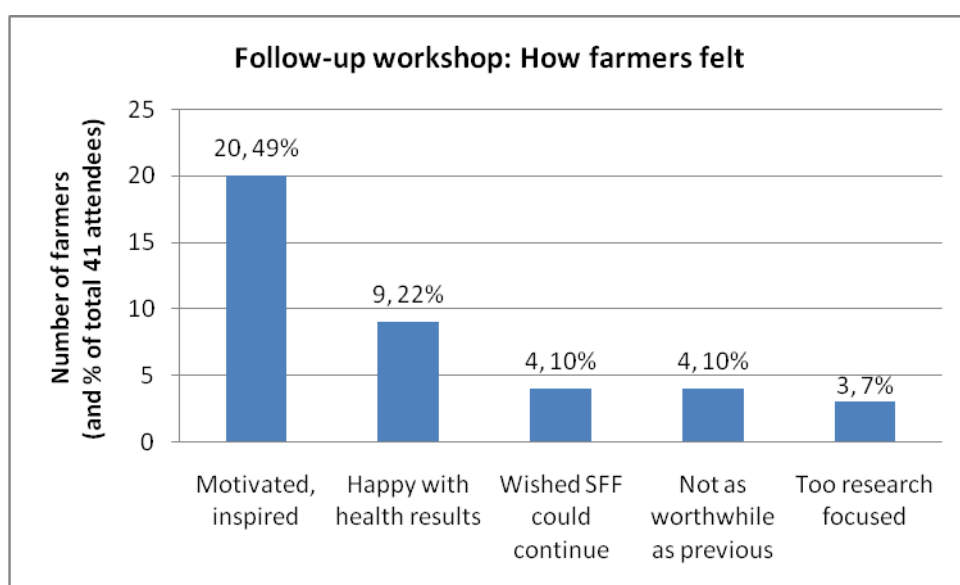
*"Disappointing that such a low amount of people showed, it was maybe the time of year, don't really know why...very wide diverse areas to cover, some even took 2 hours to get there..."*

*"I was disappointed more people didn't avail themselves of it. My concern is if we don't support these things government won't continue it. The more people who talk about it...it snowballs for next time"*

Four respondents were **unable to recall** what they had done in the fourth workshop, as compared to the first, which was quite well remembered.

#### 4.2.2.2 How farmers felt after the final workshop

Figure 6. Follow-up workshop: How farmers felt



The majority of farmers (33; 80%) described very positive feelings about the follow-up workshops.

Twenty (49%) had found the follow-up workshops **“motivating”, “useful” and “worthwhile”** and said that it was an encouragement to them to re-focus on their health:

*“Really pleased. After the last one [third workshop] I thought that was it, and you build a rapport, we got to know [the presenters], they were really lovely people, so it was good to go back.”*

*“Empowered about our future and securing a better future in relation to health. I was pleased we went, we had to juggle a few things; it was hard to get there but worth it.*

*“Felt good, you forget over a couple of years, so we got revved up again to look at goals...I ‘d encourage younger families to do it, you don’t get much health help out here, and to know what other farmers are doing, how they live, that you’re not the only one, there are other ways of doing things.”*

*“I think it’s the best course I’ve ever done, reinforced the message that you need to be on to health all the time. Really good session, reinforced previous information”*

*“Just as good as the other...I have recommended it to other farming friends - if it happens again I want to do it. Lots of people made changes.*

Nine people (22%) felt **happy with their personal health results**, and that they had achieved some or all of their goals:

*“Happy. That my health hadn’t got any worse”*

*“Pleased I’d hit the targets and was within parameters, I felt chuffed. It was reassuring; I’d like to see it continue every few years”*

Four respondents (10%) remarked they **wished “it [SFF] could continue”**

*“You get such a lot out of it. It would be good if it could keep on going on!”*

*“Sad, because I thought that’s the end of that, I’d really enjoyed, wished it continued!”*

Four interviewees (10%) felt the fourth workshop was **not as inspiring or motivating as earlier workshops**:

*“Thought it was a bit of a waste of effort, but if had I been and I found I needed some medical help, if I... had had diabetes... it would have been useful!”*

*“Not as motivated as at the first session”*

Three people (7%) had the impression that the **workshop was more for the benefit of the research study** than the farmers themselves; and commented that the presenters “wanted to see what we had remembered” and learnt.

*“That was more for their benefit than ours I think! They were keen to see what we had remembered and how our health was going.”*

*“Towards the end I got a bit cynical, was it about us or the program? Just a general feeling, my husband refused to go to the last one, he said he was not doing it anymore... it was too many or too much. Towards end it felt like we were guinea pigs and more about getting the program up and funded. I knew exactly what my health was, it didn’t help in any way, it didn’t improve it.*



One person did not have confidence in their health assessment results:

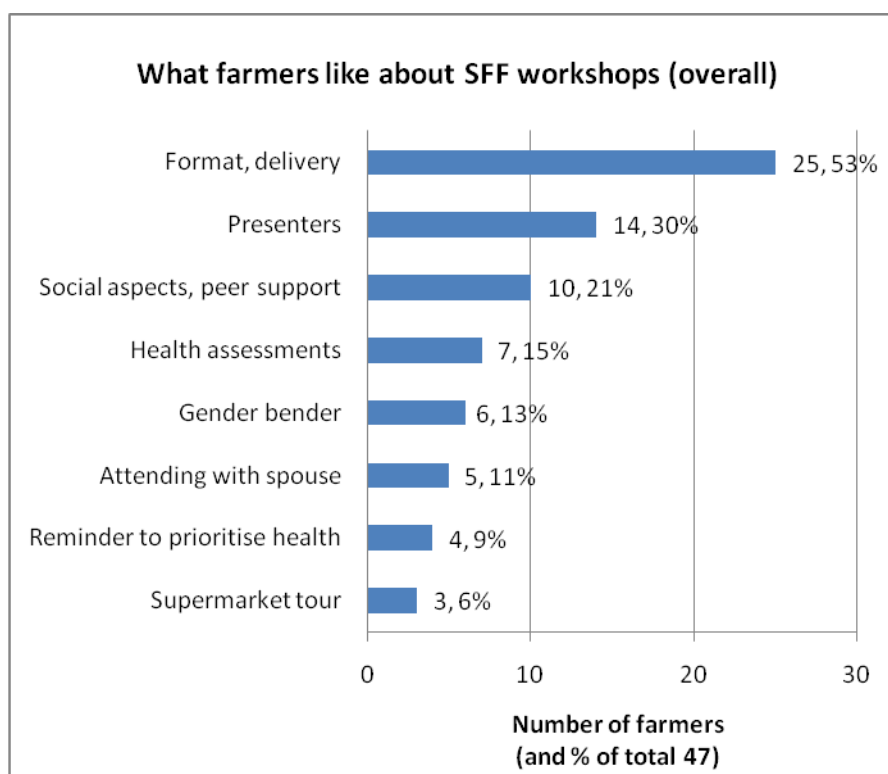
*"They told me I probably had diabetes - that was hard to believe, I don't know how accurate their readings were, not that accurate. My reading was sky high, I had to go and have other tests, and they were fine. I rang my sister who is a nurse she said I would have to have full blown diabetes with those readings. But all other readings are fine. I'm thinking something was wrong with the machine."*

One person felt uncomfortable about the level of privacy in their health assessment:

*"I felt a bit exposed, I was near a doorway, but I think they could have a curtain, or private room, I know they do a lot with the workshops, but I don't like to stand on a scale with my tummy poking out when people are walking past."*

### 4.2.3 What farmers liked about the SFF workshops overall

Figure 7. What farmers liked about the SFF workshops



When asked what they liked about the workshops, over half the respondents (25; 53%) remarked on **"the way the course was presented"**, the "content" and "delivery". They said information presented was interesting, relevant, and that they liked the informality of the sessions.

*"That they do the medical first, in the room, so then they are talking about you not Joe Bloggs from another town. The focus was on those in the room. You identify the problems you have, at the beginning, and that focuses you in on the task at hand."*

*"Right mix of information and taking on the feed back - listening to people,"*

*"I liked that we didn't get lectured to. It was up to us to decide what to do"*

*"Just the openness of it. Those sorts of things...you can get bombarded with programs etc over the years, you really need to determine if it's worthwhile, and they provided a lot of good information"*

*"I liked way they set up with small groups, it was less daunting if discussing difficult issues...and when talking about changes we'd made, I liked the small groups."*

*"Tactic of having specialists was good so you didn't get bored with the same people. The standard of presentations was first class"*

*"Having male and female speakers"*

*"I'm a teacher; I know when adults switch on and off. Everyone listened, it was good info well presented, knowledgeably and with humor."*

*"There as a fair bit of listening so that we could contribute. It was well run as far as recording stuff on butcher's paper on the walls."*

Fourteen comments (30% of farmers) concerned the skills and approach of **the presenters**. Comments included that they "used humour", and "built rapport":

*With [the presenters], it was light-hearted, no 'doctor' talk. It was down to our level - excellent"*

*"Presenters had the right attitude; they talked to you in the breaks"*

*"Presenters were very good, they were interested in what we had to say, good two - way flow, I had great confidence in their abilities"*

*"Very informal, friendly, approachable speakers. An easy environment to be in"*

Ten interviewees (21%) liked the **social aspects** of the workshops; their comments included the value of checking on each other out of the workshop situation, of already knowing the group members, and of the chance to share experiences:

*"Being able to share everyone's individual problems and how they addressed those. Different people have different ways of managing. You can learn a lot, that's where brain storming comes in."*

*"Our group knew each other already"*

*"The interaction amongst others in the same boat."*

*"I came to this through farm 500, links like that are useful, I knew a few people through that, so makes it useful to start in a group like that rather than not knowing anyone. You might make a health goal, and you know the ones you know have also done this, and you ask each other how they going."*

Seven people valued the **health assessments**:

*"Doing the tests the first time then the second time and comparing results after trying to do changes- it shows you can get results. Some who had not done anything saw they had regressed and others had made progress, they felt envious"*

*"After the second one I went to the doctor for a specific thing that I wouldn't have otherwise picked up on. I'm now doing the same thing, keeping up the checks"*

*Really enjoyed taking out the previous stats and finding out how body is performing now. The one on one – you can say what you think, it was very frank.*

Six people felt that finding out more about **opposite gender** health issues had been valuable:

*“To me as a sixty-five plus man, to learn how a baby sits in a woman’s anatomy and what they go through. My wife had a couple of miscarriages, if I had known then it would have been easier to help her and share that with her. All 15yr old males should have that education to know what women go through in pregnancy etc.”*

*“The gender bender stuff - that was confronting, but really valuable things you should know about each other. Should be compulsory for all young farmers, to learn early about what women go through. I wish I knew this 20 years ago.”*

Five respondents thought **attending with spouses** was very valuable:

*“The fact that it was husband and wife. You had to be clued in on the same ideas etc rather than living separate lives, you knew they [spouses] had to wake up about medical issues, taking time out. It was an eye opener for them on the different sex aspects and your roles”*

*“Having both there, it explained precursors...there was a lot of value having both of us there. I’ve been to lots of Men’s nights which often are a waste of time if it’s anything to do with lifestyle and food etc. You both need to be involved with lifestyle habits, so the fact that they encouraged couples to go together was one of the best parts about it.”*

*“My focus is health, but with some of the safety aspects, it was hard to get that through to my husband - he didn’t go.”*

Three people liked the message about the **importance of prioritising health**:

*“The health side was good, more aware of looking after yourself especially when you are working for yourself”*

*“Made us think about our health, what we had to do to keep ourselves healthy. Monitoring each time been good for us. A lot of the things we wouldn’t have [otherwise] done.”*

*“We all neglect nagging things that we should go to the doctor about, but after seeing the stats, we really got along to doctor. The thought that if you get it early enough it’s not curtains - we were reassured. I wouldn’t have any hesitation to ring Sue if I had health issues”*

Three people said they enjoyed the supermarket tour.

#### 4.2.4 *Suggestions for improvement*

The majority of the participants interviewed were very happy with the workshops and program and had no suggestions for improvement.

Four interviewees mentioned issues with making time to attend:

*"People get scared off by the whole day commitment, maybe an afternoon/evening could work better, trouble is health checks needed to be done in the morning...they'd have to shift it around a bit."*

*"Fewer sessions [would be good]; it got to be a bit of an imposition, spending the whole day...very difficult."*

*"The first ones were 2 day courses; that's a lot of time for farmers, maybe that's why they didn't get more there."*

Two respondents felt that mental health information could have been more thorough:

*"Maybe a little more time spent on mental health. It's a huge problem; I can't imagine what those in the Murray Darling are going through..."*

*"Disappointed with their mental health, this session just went over the notes...maybe some films, different ways it manifests..."* [Note that this participant was unsure whether they attended the second and third workshops]

Other single suggestions were:

- The presenters explain their medical background and qualifications
- Spend on farm injuries; one farmer thought that the photos used were very effective, but "they went through it too quick, maybe because it upsets people, I can understand that, but they could do a bit more than that."
- Try to get more young people involved in the workshops
- Encourage meaningful conversation in the small group or partnered discussions (one farmer found that at times people "were a little glib")

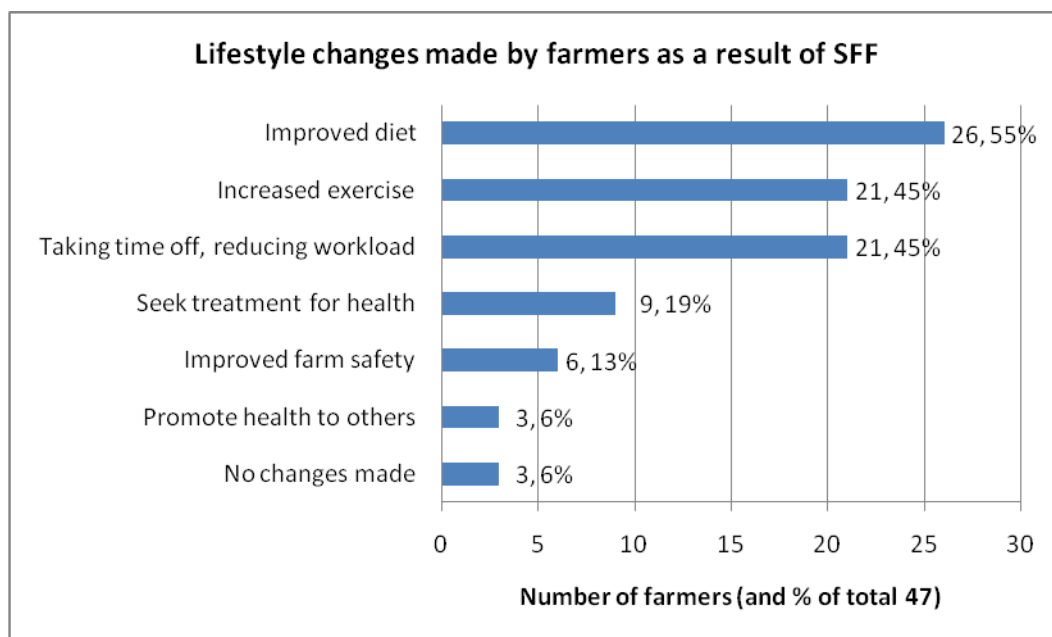
There were a small number of comments specific to particular workshop locations; including three participants from the Ingham workshop (QLD), who were happy with everything except the venue, and two respondents from Dalby who were disappointed with the low attendance rate in their final year workshop.

## 4.2.5 Changes made by farmers as a result of the workshops

### 4.2.5.1 Lifestyle and farm management changes

Interviewees were asked what changes they had made to their lifestyles after the workshops:

Figure 8. Lifestyle changes made by farmers as a result of SFF workshops



Just over half (26; 55%) of the respondents feel they now eat a healthier, “more selective” **diet**, or are more conscious of trying to do so:

*“I have changed, my mother was diabetic, and my sugar readings were not good, so I changed my diet, do more exercise. I do find myself walking more than driving. I cut down on sugar drinks coke etc. I do a lot of contracting and get very tired. I thought that would be worse without the sugar hit, but when I kicked the sugar I stopped feeling tired!”*

*“We cut out butter and use a cholesterol reducing margarine instead, junk food is off the menu, fried foods stay on the supermarket shelf, we look at labels, and we get away more.”*

*“...More informed... we know when we take the mouthful, what we are eating.”*

*“...Eat better, more appropriate food”*

Almost half (21; 45%) the interviewees reported **exercising** more, trying to “be fitter”, and “to lose weight”:

*“More exercise. I try to read food labels, watch my husband’s cholesterol rates, I do walking, and he does cycling*

*“We are encouraging kids in sport more, they are a tad overweight, that was also part of getting the house at the beach, to encourage swimming, surfing.”*

*"I did the Kokoda trail, not as result of the workshops, but in line with it, it fitted in with the idea of getting away from farm, and getting exercise."*

*"I joined a circus group; we did a performance at the second workshop! We got funding, and part of that funding was we had to do a performance to promote health awareness"*

A similar proportion (21; 45%) said they were now **taking more time out** from farm issues, including taking holidays, generally getting more "down time", doing more social things and/or spending more recreational time with their spouse, making time for hobbies and using what they had learnt in the workshops to reduce stress or manage depression.

*"[we were] Very stressed and the workshops helped us to realise our mental state was borderline depression. That awareness was helpful, we were in a bad place, and they gave us steps to get out of that, to get on top before it happened."*

*"The message of taking time out came through from the program. We always used to just keep working. Nice for us to go somewhere together not work related"*

*"Making more social time. Trying to spend more time together as couple, also to do something active. Decided to take dancing lessons, we did that, it was good fun!"*

*"... About depression etc, that information is useful when living alone in a big house with all the family away in different places. At times I feel depressed, and I remember back to the workshops and how to cope with it, they gave us guidelines."*

This included five people who had taken steps to **reduce their workload** by either employing a staff member or contracting out work, getting a new job off the farm, or looking ahead to business and succession planning:

*"They suggested trying to stay on your farm [as opposed to selling out], but not to kill yourself with overwork. I now pay someone to do the big work I can't do. SFF reinforced that, don't overdo it"*

*"I employed someone to help so I'm semi retired."*

*"...Thought more about the future, talked with family, were did we want to go? We looked more deeply at why you were farming, do you love it?"*

Nine respondents (19%) said they now have more regular **checkups**, keep a closer eye on their health, and have **health issues addressed**:

*"I was a bit overweight but had no time or inclination to do anything about that! I guess you just keep going till it affects you. After that [follow-up] workshop, well I got inspired to go to the doctor for my 50 year check up!"*

*"I had a sleep apnoea test; that improved everything. Maybe they could look at that a bit more. Now I have a machine helps you breathe through the night. I have more energy. I was falling asleep driving my car. Because of the program I was more focused on health and had the sleep apnoea checked, I have to give some credit to the course."*

*"...to have my pap smear, have mammogram...I did those"*

*"A few years ago I realised I suffered from depression, I picked up signs, went to counsellor. The workshops helped to bring my attention to it."*

Six people (13%) mentioned changes to **safety practices**; including safe handling of chemicals, sun protection, hearing protection and a general assessment of the farm. All interviewees were specifically asked about changes to safety practices in a later question, so this is discussed further in the following section.

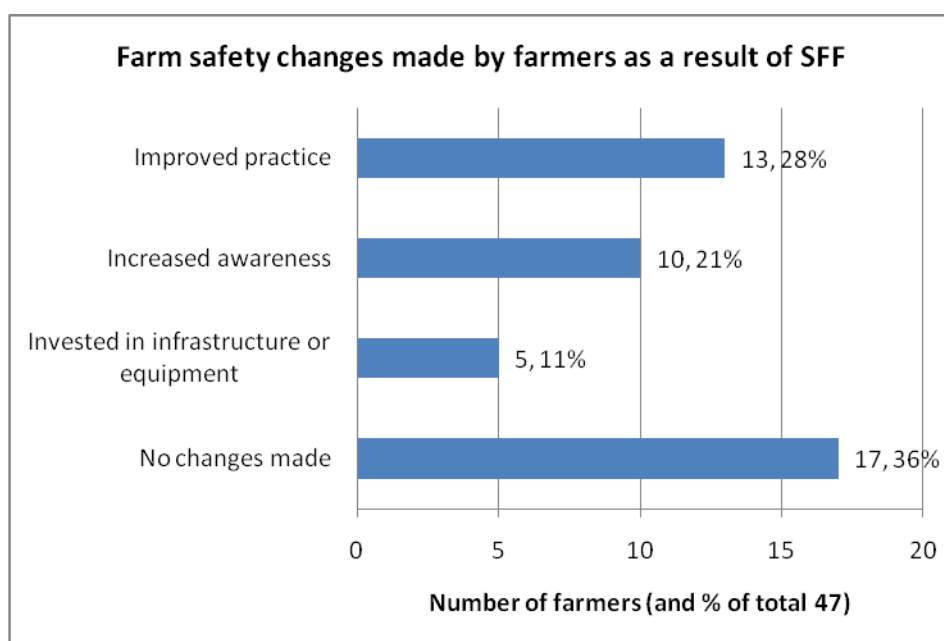
Three people (6%) mentioned **acting to improve the health of others**; one woman had prompted her husband to have a health check, a father was encouraging his children to exercise more, and another woman had become involved in a circus group which did a health promotion performance.

Three people reported that they had not made any lifestyle changes; one because they found out through the workshops that they were healthy already, one because they were busy caring for a chronically ill child, and one because they knew prior to the workshops that they had depression, had already been seeking treatment, and felt that they did not need to take any other actions.

#### 4.2.5.2 Changes to safety practice

*In addition to general lifestyle changes, farmers were specifically asked whether they had made changes to their farm safety practices.*

**Figure 9. Farm safety changes made by farmers as a result of SFF**



A total of 28 interviewees (64%) described making changes to their safety practices. Thirteen (28%) reported improved practice relating to things like helmet wearing and correct chemical handling and storage:

*"Yes we got everyone within the business thinking from a safety perspective. We've gone from "a motorbike helmet is provided and should be worn" - to 'and must be worn'."*

*"My husband did an audit of what we were doing, made changes with chemical storage, wearing helmets..."*

Ten interviewees (21%) felt their safety awareness and/or consciousness had increased. In some cases respondents also felt their existing practice was reinforced.

*"It reinforced what we do, more aware, chemicals etc. they talked about gramoxone, it can affect your eyes or breathing, so it's no good to wearing overalls..."*

*"Yeah just makes you more aware, we were already trying to do that but the workshops just reinforced it. OH&S is always a work in progress."*

Five people (11%) said they had invested in new infrastructure or equipment, or in the maintenance of such:

*"We've got a front end loader now on tractor, lifting is biggest danger"*

*"Definitely, with silage and hay bale handling, we have better equipped tractors and forklifts etc"*

Seventeen people (36%) said there had been no changes to, or impacts on their safety practices. For the majority of these respondents, the self-perception was that they were already up to speed with safety; although two felt it was because the husband had not attended. One was no longer farming:

*"Aware already, we are on top of all that. We're not a model operation, but we're certainly aware"*

*"Not for us, we had dealt with all that previously. We had good policies in place, but I saw the light come on for some others."*

*"Probably because my husband did not come, minimal change"*

*"My husband didn't come, so don't have a lot of influence on that. He wouldn't come"*

#### 4.2.5.3 Maintaining Change

Nearly all respondents (44; 94%) believed they would maintain the changes they had made into the future. Reasons for this were the benefits to health; the ease of change; enjoyment; and family support:

*"It won't alter; I hope to improve on what we are doing. I can see the benefits. Also you see in other families who aren't doing these sorts of things, you can see they are going downhill at a rate of knots, they've had heart attacks etc."*

*"When we started the course, we were smokers. Now we've stopped. We became grandparents, and want to be around for them. When 50 is in front of you, you have to behave better or you won't be there!"*

*"Yes. I have done. It's easy, it fits in. Our family is oriented that way, so they are supportive"*

*"I notice difference with walking. I feel a lot fitter, I feel better. I enjoy it."*

*"It's so important to my health and wellbeing, my quality of life in the future. I see my mother - she has problems with mobility. I want to keep mobile as long as I can."*



Three people were unsure of their ability to maintain changes:

*“Don’t know. It’s hard to keep things going if things go pear shaped...”*

#### **4.2.6 Impact on farmers’ capacity to manage personal health**

*Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements relating to the impact of the SFF program on their ability to manage their own health and wellbeing. They were also free to comment. The question was as follows:*

Has your involvement in the Sustainable Farm Families program:

- Increased your knowledge of relevant health issues?
- Provided you with tools to help you make changes in your lifestyle?
- Increased your confidence in your ability to look after your own health and wellbeing?
- Helped you change or address any farm safety issues?
- Helped connect you to relevant health service providers?
- Created more discussion about health, wellbeing and safety in your family?

Farmers’ responses were very positive:

- The program has increased 46 (97%) farmers’ knowledge of relevant health issues.
- 45 of the farmers interviewed (96%) state that the program has provided them with tools to make lifestyle change.
- 45 (96%) agreed that the program had assisted them to address farm safety issues
- The program has stimulated increased discussion of health, wellbeing and safety in the families of 42 (90%) of the farmers interviewed.
- 35 of the farmers interviewed (74%) feel that their confidence to manage their own health has increased as a result of the program.
- 28 farmers (60%) feel that the program has helped connect them to relevant health service providers.

See Figure 10 and Figure 11 on the following page for the complete breakdown of responses.

Figure 10. Impact of SFF on farmers' capacity to manage their health (number of responses)

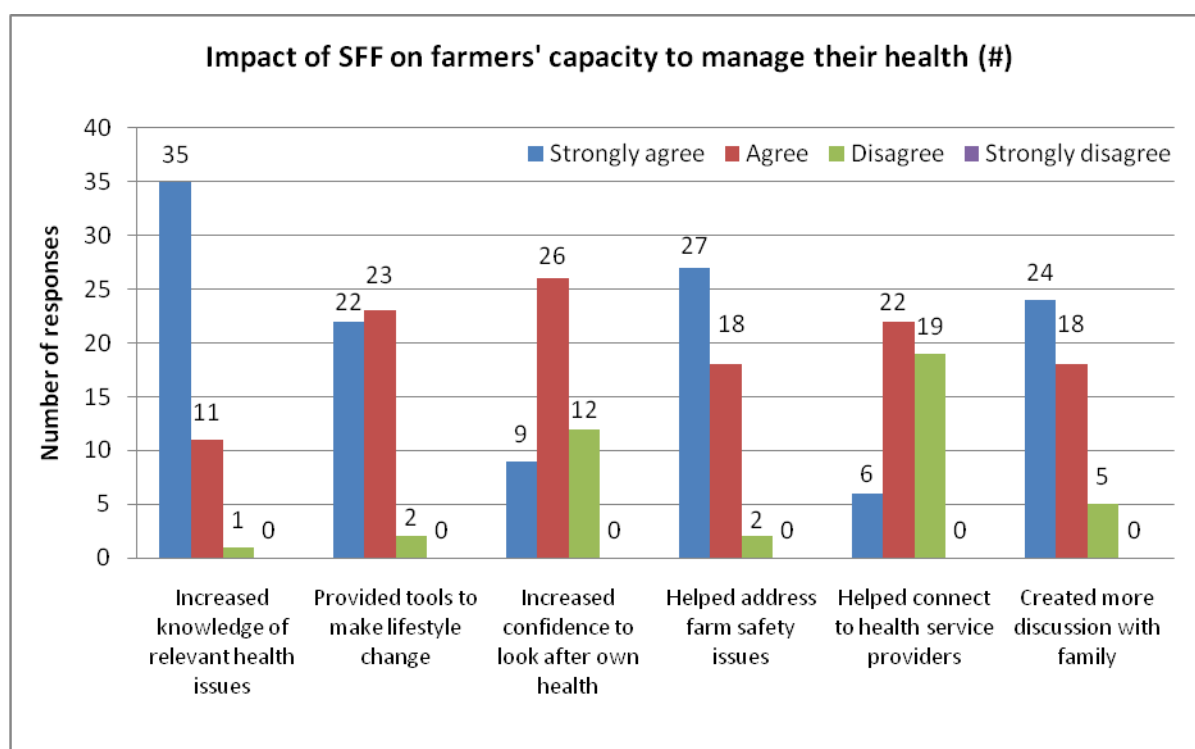
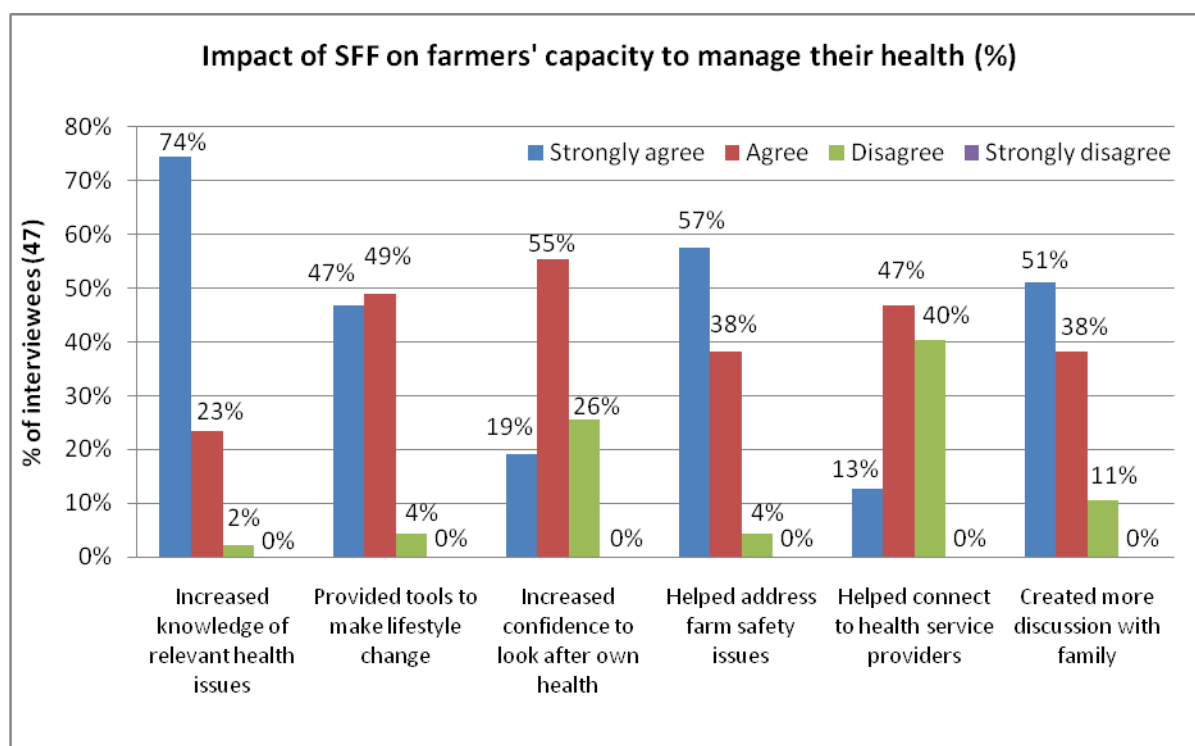


Figure 11. Impact of SFF on farmers' capacity to manage their health (percentage responses)



#### 4.2.6.1 Connections to health services

*Interviewees were asked if they had had any contact with their general practitioner or local health provider since or during involvement with the SFF workshops, and how that had gone.*

Five respondents were interviewed before this question was added.

Approximately two thirds of those responding to this question (total 42) had done follow up tests and checkups with their GPs, and had positive experiences with those interactions:

*"Jogged us to do a lot of tests, colonoscopy: all good. We did it with our own doctor. Our doctor was supportive of what we had learnt and were doing. The doctor was very positive and thought it was an excellent program."*

*"Our doctors got letter from SFF and they treated that with a lot of respect and got on board"*

*"The doctors reckon it's good, they wish more blokes would do it!"*

Eleven interviewees (26%) specifically reported feeling more confident and knowledgeable about asking for tests or information from their GPs:

*"For the men it was extra good, about asking doctor for tests...you don't wait for the doctor, you insist on the tests"*

*"Relieved and more at ease with going to the doctor. No longer felt guilty about taking up doctors time, felt we could ask about things, and say this is not feeling right."*

*"Just increased my knowledge, made me question my doctors, why have you got me on these drugs, what's this for etc"*

Six people had had no significant further contact with their health providers.

Three people had experienced difficulties with health providers. These included scarcity of doctors, long distances to travel for services, and lack of interest or response to results from the SFF workshops

*"I went in response to some results I'd had at the workshops. GPs weren't interested, they passed it off, they said I was fine; it took a few goes to get the tests I wanted. I think it's over worked GPs more than anything."*

*"I was a bit disappointed in the local GPs. They didn't take to it...They are very under pressure - lots of people and not many doctors - I interpret their lack of response or interest in relation to that. So the advantages for them from this program in that it could help them, are not appreciated by them."*

Two described experiences where they had been referred for further tests to find that their results from the workshop were incorrect or only marginally outside the healthy range:

*"They [SFF facilitators] told me I probably had diabetes. That that was hard to believe, I don't know how accurate their readings were, not that accurate. My reading was sky high. I rang my sister who is a nurse. She said I would have to have full-blown diabetes with those readings but all other readings are fine. I'm thinking something was wrong with the machine."*

*"[In the workshop they] did tests and I went to my GP - she laughed and said "you don't need to be here!" ...My test... which was sugar, was only 1% over!"*

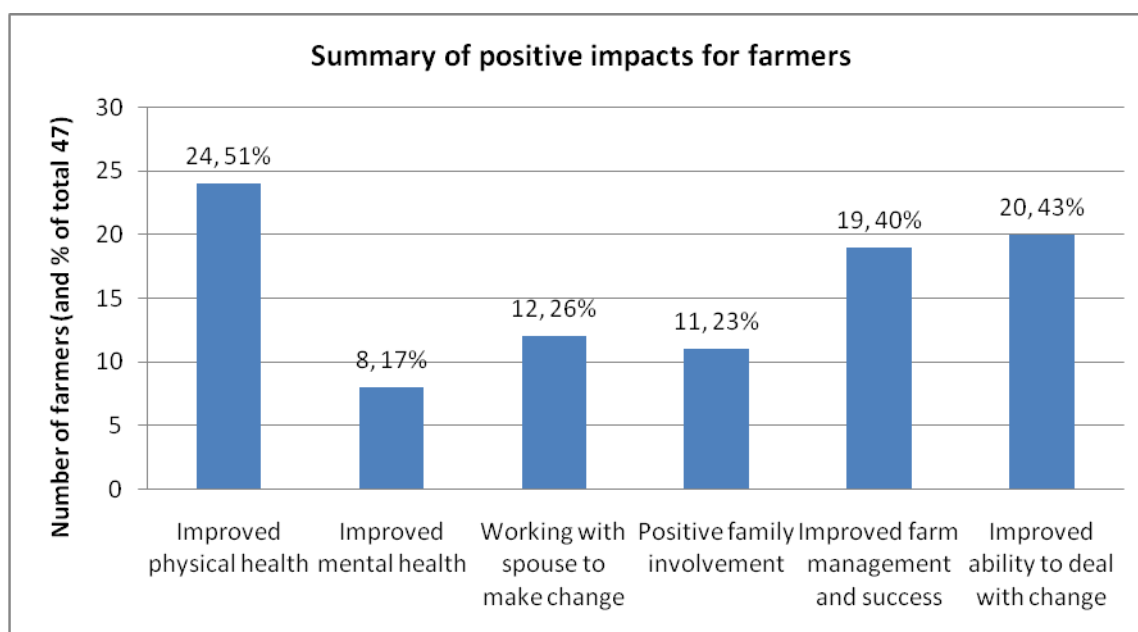
### 4.2.7 Impacts of changes

Interviewees were asked a series of questions about results they had seen in themselves, and the impacts the program had had on their family, their farm management, and the success of their farm business.

Summary of positive impacts:

- Half (24; 51%) had experienced positive physical results, and eight (17%) reported improved mental health
- Eleven (23%) farmers had had positive responses and involvement from their families, and twelve (26%) commented particularly on the value of attending with their spouse
- Nineteen farmers (40%) felt the program has positively impacted on their ability to manage their farm, and therefore the success of their farm
- Twenty (43%) reported that the workshop had improved their ability to deal with and adapt to change; largely through the positive impacts the workshop had had on their outlook, perspective, and stress/mental health management.

Figure 12. Summary of positive impacts for farmers



Total impacts are discussed further in the sections below.

#### 4.2.7.1 Mental and physical results

*Respondents were asked to describe any results they had seen in themselves physically and mentally as a result of making changes:*

Over half of the interviewees (24; 51%) reported positive physical results. They said they were “fitter”, had “lost weight”. Many now “feel better”, “sleep better” and have more awareness of health.

*“Really helped us to come to terms with the change. Feel better with the exercise.”*

*“Definitely results from phys exercise, I started in last year bit of running, and I sleep better at night. Women often complain they can’t sleep”*

*“More energy, can do more, feel better”*

Several interviewees had treated serious health issues as a result of the health assessments and/or subsequent referrals revealing conditions (in some cases life threatening) requiring action:

*“The polyps [in colon] were removed so that’s good.”*

*“That first workshop saved my wife’s life. They found a mole on her leg, so we got that taken off. She also had a hysterectomy – she went to gynaecologist as a result of the tests that day [at the SFF workshop], then after the hysterectomy they found a pre-cancer in her uterus. So the program probably saved her life. We owe them a lot”*

Eight interviewees felt that their mental state had improved, and described feeling less stressed and calmer.

*“I was very surprised, I did a relaxing thing at the workshop, I wasn’t in agreement with it, but was surprised at the good result.”*

*“I’m a calmer person, able to step back and analyse things a bit better, say yep we can still survive.”*

*“I have more free time with family since getting off the board and not having to do that travel every week.”*

*“Mentally it’s been better for my husband and me”*

Several also reported impacts they had seen in their fellow workshop participants:

*A local farmer [had been] diagnosed with prostate cancer since the course, because of the workshops, he got a test, he had an operation and will probably be fine. He wouldn’t have known the signs/symptoms if hadn’t been for that course.*

*One bloke at the first session was very overweight and stopped eating cheese, lost 10kgs!*

#### 4.2.7.2 Impact on families

*People were asked how their family responded to changes made:*

Fourteen people said there had not been much response or interest from family, or that family had initially been resistant to changes:

*"The family hated the new food! I changed the things I cooked with, a lot less chocolate cake. They got used to it."*

*"There was a bit of resistance from my husband's parents, we tried to get them to do the course, but they were quite frightened by the privacy aspect, and they have the attitude: 'you're not going to learn anything we don't already know'. He's a 65 year old who's used to doing it his own way!"*

*"The kids prefer processed food!"*

On the other hand, eleven respondents commented that their family had been interested, happy with changes, supportive, and positively affected by the respondents' involvement with SFF:

*"They [family] are more willing to listen as we are more informed about what we are saying."*

*"We discussed it at home, learning about healthier eating, how that helps physically. Wider family realised we were more knowledgeable, and we felt that too. They could see we were getting on top of issues not bogged."*

*"My husband had depression, lost his self esteem, he was always working, so he didn't go [to the workshops], but the workshops helped him, and helped me. He didn't go, but I got him to go see someone. The program helped me to understand what he was going through."*

Twelve farmers discussed the impact of attending the workshops with their spouse, and the importance of this for assisting them to work together on lifestyle changes:

*"The Wife and I did the course together initially, she fell out of it a bit after starting, she was diagnosed with bowel cancer [not through the course], the [SFF] course was a huge benefit there – kept us informed, gave us contact points, very pleased we did the course, it helped us through that time."*

*"At the moment just wife and me. We both attended, we reinforced each other"*

*"Because both went you didn't have to explain changes. It's never the same if the other is not there. My Husband has regular prostate checks, he had the info, and he acted on that"*

*"I didn't do [the workshops] with my wife and that wasn't ideal, both need to be doing the same thing if you are changing your diet. It helps to be on same page. She's done it now, now it's easier."*

Two respondents described positive flow-on effects of word of mouth to the wider community:

*"Some of the women had cancers and they found out through SFF workshops, melanomas etc. When that news circulates, it's promotion [for SFF] from the good results."*

*"We all told others how good it was. We told all our friends and they felt they should have gone"*

#### 4.2.7.3 Impacts on farm management and farm success

Over half of the respondents did not think the SFF program had impacted on the management of their farm. Reasons varied between the nature and content of the program itself, to factors that had prevented the program having this impact:

*"No because a lot [of what workshops recommended], we were already doing"*

*"No that's a bit far I'd say. Not specific with this program, but I've got more info, I'm more educated."*

*"Minimal, from my point of view. Because my husband didn't come."*

*"No. Because I've been in 10 year drought."*

Over half again, did not feel SFF had impacted on the success of their farm.

*"Not really, we're already on top of most things there anyway."*

However, nineteen of the farmers interviewed felt the workshops *had* impacted on the management and overall success of the farm. People mentioned reduced stress; improved health, energy and productivity; impacts on decision-making and improved planning, as well as the commitment to taking time off:

*"Maybe a bit more relaxed, less stressed. That's probably to do with the course, that's helped with the farm, it's helped the people who work for us!! You go through a stage around 35-40yrs old when you feel your success is tied to the success of the farm. Program helped to get that in perspective a bit"*

*"Just because of realising you're going away, that helps through the busy period."*

*"We ended up getting contractor in to work, to free up more time for kids"*

*"Yes, some of the workshops focused on stress, we now factor in time off farm in the farm budget, I don't know if that is solely because of SFF, but the workshops helped us realise stress factors"*

*"I would say the business runs better because we are healthier, haven't changed enterprise logic, we just can keep going better, less likelihood of getting ill."*

Two people said the workshops helped with their decision to leave farming and to manage that change, and one person said the course was useful in "planning how to retire from the farm".

*"In the last couple of months we've decided to move out of farming. The course had a massive impact on the direction we decided to take. We were not enjoying it [farming]; we were badly affected by stress. From the program, we became better at knowing the signs and repercussions of stress and depression."*

By contrast, one farmer felt that the increased priority they now placed on family time was having a negative impact on their farm business:

*"It has caused a negative impact because I don't get all the things done that I should, because I'm spending more time with my family. There's a trade off there. I used to work all day and*

*into the evening and not see my children, but they are more important. If we had some decent seasons and prices I could get labour in to help..."*

#### 4.2.7.4 Dealing with change

*Interviewees were asked if the program had impacted in how they deal with change:*

About half of the respondents did not think the program had impacted on how they dealt with change. This was mostly attributed to the self-perception that they were already open and responsive to change:

*"Don't think so, no. I don't have any problems with change"*

*"Someone else can't change your attitude. And that is your approach to life"*

*"I've always been accepting of change, I like to think I'm up the front with farming practice, I tend almost to invite change, that's not to do with course"*

Twenty interviewees thought the workshops *had* impacted on how they deal with change. People mentioned increased ability to "take change in my stride"; awareness of the need for change; and "confidence to change":

*"Yes I think so. Just being able to let you realise that it's ok to put health and happiness first, if they are not right nothing else will be."*

*"I suppose...we've been going through succession planning for some time....came up in workshops... so maybe indirectly we may be more confident about decision making"*

*"[They] didn't remove the outside pressure. That's outside their and my control. But you realise that it is out of your control and that's good in a way. I like to be in charge of my destiny we felt robbed of that at the time. At the moment we are pulling up 40 years of work to change to grain!!"*

### 4.2.7.5 Dealing with climate change

#### 4.2.7.5.1 On the farm

*Interviewees were asked in what ways climate change had affected their farm or the way they farm:*

Nine respondents were interviewed before this question was added to the study.

Approximately one third of farmers who responded to this question said they had changed practice, but a number of these described their actions as in response to drought and drought-related regulations, rather than to climate change. The changes included that they were less likely to take risks, and use "more water-wise crops"

*"Probably a little more conservative/cautious in my approach to way I run farm. What if we run into another shocking year, how will we manage that?"*

*"But we are getting better at using less water etc all the time anyway. To be able to produce more in drought times."*



*"It cost us huge amount of money, in feed and changing farming patterns - that was the drought, but we're having a fantastic year this year, not so sure about climate change. I tend to think it is more of a cyclical thing"*

*"Bloody regulations! I don't have a 'stick it up your arse approach' - I accept that much is credible...But government regulations have a broad brush effect and don't care about me! I've created a better situation on my property that is better than many, but my innovation is now being curtailed. Many like me are becoming rebellious because of it"*

Approximately one third of respondents stated they did not believe in climate change. While they did not describe any practice change, they did feel that other factors such as drought and government policy were impacting on their farms and lives.

*"Don't believe in climate change. Believe in climate variability. Have dry swings, we've just gone through a dry patch, we on upward swing and now begin to go back to reasonable rain"*

*"Not a strong believer in climate change. Climate has always been very variable just look at the history. It's very politically motivated, they want funding to do a study on it. On the other hand we farmers are trying to deal with wet weather, but it's happened before"*

*"Not really every 20, 30, 40 years, it goes around, climate just goes in cycles like everything. All the talk with carbons etc is just another way for government to get money out those trying to make an honest living"*

The other third of respondents felt there had been no impacts from climate change, or were unsure.

#### 4.2.7.5.2 On Health

*Respondents were asked how the situation around climate change has affected their health:*

Nine respondents were interviewed before this question was added.

Approximately one third of farmers who responded to this question felt that their health had been affected. However the majority related this to "the drought", "political factors" and "uncertainty", rather than to climate change, about which most were sceptical.

*"It's added more stress because been so dry. Even this year we're only cautiously optimistic. The price and the profit margins have been really hard."*

*"Long extended dry time has caused huge amount of stress, and that affects your health as well as the farm"*

*"I get angry because they are talking rubbish!"*

*"A lot of stress-lack of water and income. I feel it more of a cyclical thing, it may be the cycles extending. But With extended drought has caused a lot of stress."*

The remaining respondents did not feel their health had been affected either directly or indirectly by climate change.

### 4.2.8 Further comments and suggestions

Almost all who made further comments at the end of their interview had positive things to say about the SFF program. The majority were keen to see it continue and/or expand.

*"I've been to hundreds of seminars, and often don't take stuff in, but the way it [SFF] was presented added up to a really well worthwhile thing. Haven't been to a seminar that I have got as much out of and learnt as much as this one. Highly qualified brought it down to a good level, personal topics. They got people to share."*

*"Tremendously good program. I considered it an excellent format for business to run for employees etc. - to be available for hire as it were."*

*"Just excellent. I hope more people have the opportunity to do it in future. Always good to have a reminder every couple of years, I hope they come back!!!"*

*Three people reiterated the need to "get through" to others in the community who had not been there:*

*"It comes back to... we could have more advertising about the workshops, we could do more ringing around to contact people who might benefit."*

One comment was that the National Centre for farmer health needs to "involve farmers more" and be "wary of a path that is too research driven".

## 4.3 Industry Partner Case Studies

### 4.3.1 Case study 5: The Cotton Industry: Pulling teeth gets results

*As a representative of the Cotton RDC, Joanne organised the SFF workshop for cotton farmers in her area. She used a wide range of techniques for promoting the workshops to farmers and encouraging them to attend. She observed positive impacts in the farmers who attended, and benefited herself from participating in the program.*

*Representative, Cotton Research and Development Corporation*

Joanne works with the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, which co-funds various health and safety programs with RIRDC, and the SFF program was one of these joint ventures. Her general role within the CRDC is to run workshop for communicating research findings to farmers. The other workshops she has run prior to the SFF program were more technical and not about farmers' health. When she was asked what was special about this program that made the CRDC want to co-fund it, she answered that "we liked the face to face, you know, the personal contact."

While the CRDC has good networks, which made it easy to get in contact with farmers, she found it difficult to convince farmers to attend the workshop; "they couldn't all see why they should give up two days of farm work to come and hear about health issues." She added that the timing of the workshop (which had not been her choice) was an additional barrier, as it was during the growing season when cotton farmers were all busy. She advertised the program by sending emails to farmers, doing radio interviews on the ABC and visiting grower groups in the areas they targeted; Dalby in Queensland and Wee Waa in NSW. She did power point presentations about the benefit of the workshops, and emphasised the opportunity to learn something new and attend with their partner:

*"it was more that there was something else you could learn and the other thing we liked is that it was for couples not just for one person going alone, having couples there they could go home and talk about it to each other, so once I explained the benefit of coming, I think I got 26 to one workshop, and 16 in another, in another district."*

She estimated that almost a third of the farmers who attended the first workshop did not come to the second, although this was mainly due to other commitments rather than dissatisfaction with the program.

Joanne participated in the workshops herself, and felt that the best aspects of the workshops were that the "presenters had a very easygoing manner", and the atmosphere in the workshop was comfortable; "people didn't feel threatened that they had to get up and tell everyone all their health troubles".

She suggested that the final workshop could have been improved by more one-on-one time in the health assessments, for people to get the most out of the opportunity to reflect on their progress over the years of the program:

*"I think they should have done another individual assessment at the end and people could have told them what worked in a more discreet way what worked or didn't over the 5 years"*

*and I think they would have had more out of it, and I know they were pressed for time, at the end they just wanted us to put up our hand and said what was the major thing we got out of the workshops, and some people I think wouldn't tell them what really was the major thing if it was too personal in front of the group."*

The only other change she would make was to run the programs at a more suitable time of year.

She observed that there had positive impacts for the farmers involved; one person had lost 20 kilograms, and another had taken his family on holiday; which he had never done before. She saw that there had been a number of ways that the workshops had contributed to improving participants' health, wellbeing and safety, including:

*"I think it helped in different ways for different people like some people were putting OHS measures around their farm they hadn't thought of before, they were more aware of looking after themselves so they can still be capable of working on the farm, like if their blood pressure is too high or they let depression take over then they won't be able to work on the farm . . . some people took themselves off to a specialist which maybe might not have done...just generally more aware of what they can do to improve their health and wellbeing'.*

She also pointed out that coming as a couple enabled farmers to make more of an effort to improve the health of their families and farm workers.

She was enthusiastic about what she learned for herself from the workshop,

*'I learned that cholesterol starts building up at an early age, and you shouldn't really let your kids have all that junk food, which I thought just built up in your old age.'*

She also mentioned that she learned more about men's prostate compared to what she knew before, and when to go to the doctor. She also went to a specialist herself for a health issue and thinks that she would not have done so if it had not been for the workshops, as she had not thought it was an issue until she saw the workshop presentation about it.

In terms of the impact that the program had on CRDC, she mentioned that they had a lot of publicity, and as the feedbacks from farmers were so positive, she was certain that if they had the funds they would invest in the program again.

### 4.3.2 Case study 6: Successful attendance in Benalla

*Andy recruited farmers to attend the Benalla workshop, and found that through his Farm500 networks, that farmers were interested and generally willing to come. He also thought that the workshops were beneficial for he and his wife, as well as the wider group of farmers.*

*Agricultural consultant, representative of a local Farm 500 group*

As a member of Farm 500, Andy took on the role of recruiting attendees for the Benalla workshop. He used Farm500 meetings to promote the workshops. From two Farm500 groups he managed to get approximately 40% of the groups to attend SFF. When asked whether it was difficult to chase up attendees for the workshop he laughed and said “No, they’re big people, they all came as they wanted.” Farm 500 ceased to operate in October 2010 due to lack of funding available, which he noted was a pity as it had “prided itself in being innovative and leading the pack.”

He noted that as the program was new, the farmers had to “take it on face value”. He knew that the course was about farm health and was looking to engage people about their health but he did not know what the specific content was. He said that the people who did not go to the initial workshops would have gone if they had known what they were really about. Several of the people who did not go in the initial course went to subsequent courses.

Andy also attended the workshops as a participant with his wife. He talked about how people felt the workshops were of value, and commented that he thought it was a well structured program. He felt that he was already aware of a lot of the health issues that were covered, but found that the strategies for handling depression were new to him.

There was a suggestion from his workshop group that the gender sessions be swapped over; that the men attend ‘women’s secret business’ sessions and women attend ‘men’s secret business’ sessions. This was then picked up and implemented across the rest of the program. He himself requested that the workshops also talk about pesticide exposure; which was also later incorporated in the follow-up workshops.

He had the impression that the follow-up workshop in 2009-10 was research focused rather than for the benefit of the group:

*‘it was probably more for the benefit of the team rather than people, I mean there was a little bit of extra information there but I think it was more the team wanting to know how we got on.’*

He found a number of aspects of the program useful; including that it “put a whole range of health issues in context” and that it was a “supportive exercise.” He also thought that people attending with their spouses was particularly valuable:

*“Particularly where the people brought their partners along . . . because it wasn’t just one person with the information, both people had the information, it was to have a commitment that lasted more than if it was just one person that had all the information’.*

He did not feel that depression was prevalent amongst the farmers in his area, but that the program had given them “a bit of an understanding of you needed to do.” Personally he felt that if he was in a situation where someone was depressed, that the strategies he would use would be to:

*“Try to understand what these issues are and then working out who are the people that they got confidence in, that they can talk to. . . or you may talk to somebody who does know them and get them to go and seek some help.”*

In his action plan he had included losing weight, getting fit, and protecting himself from the sun. He had gone on to increase his exercise; and had a routine of running which lasted for two years, but

*‘then it got too cold in the morning and I’ve backed off, so yes there are issues of maintenance . . . I find it very difficult to maintain an exercise regime without a structure around forcing you to do it, it’s very difficult to find in the country.*

His wife used to run with him as well. Now they have now been going once a week to a Pilates class since it started in the last year. He had back problems before the program and has become more aware of the need to manage this better since the workshops. He felt that the workshops had given him some information about how to do this, but that in the main it had been the Pilates classes that were assisting him to keep his back well. He has reduced the fat content in his diet; otherwise it was pretty good before. He also gets medical checkups more regularly than before the program.

He has made a few safety changes as a result of the course such as a chemical storage area which was already on their list of things to do, but the workshop prompted him to complete it. The program also made him more aware of the possible transfer of animal diseases to humans. Now he uses gloves dealing with farm animals, for instance when ‘assisting a lamb’ whereas he would not have done so before.

He was unsure whether the program had impacted on the way he manages his farm, saying that it “is a continuum...it’s a bit hard to sort out the relative proportion...it’s a bit difficult for me to attribute what I would have done and what I was doing anyway.”

He did not think that the SFF program had impacted on how he works with farmers as an agricultural consultant, his work is mostly ‘in production agriculture not in the sort of social end of it’. He did think that maybe he now brings more of an awareness of mental health issues to his work.

He observed some changes in the other participants during the course of the program,

*‘One guy certainly lost a lot of weight, he did a lot more exercise and that was visible so he and his wife changed their diets quite dramatically... one other guy has a lot more checkups than he’s done in the past, they found skin cancer on him.’*

He also noted that amongst the group there is now “the awareness to talk about these sort of issues where there wasn’t before’.

## 4.4 Interviews with industry partners and facilitators

For this data six industry partners were interviewed by phone. A Roberts Evaluation staff member conducted the interviews between 4<sup>th</sup> of November and the 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2010.

Three interviewees were involved in the facilitation of workshops, putting the groups together, as well as the ongoing organisational aspects of the program. Three were involved with the co-ordination and organisational side only and did not facilitate.

While five interviewees were involved with specific locations and responded accordingly, one person had been involved with all workshops and so responded in an overall sense.

### 4.4.1.1 What worked well

*Respondents were asked what they thought had worked well in the SFF workshops they had been involved with. Facilitators were also asked what it was about their approach that made the workshop series successful:*

**Four respondents** (Swan hill, Horsham, Wee Waa/Dalby, Overall) felt the program delivery had worked well for SFF. They felt it followed along good *adult education* and *theory of planned behaviour* lines, and was pitched “at the right level”.

**Two respondents** (Benalla, Wee Waa/Dalby), commented that the groups in those locations already knew each other from other farming industry organisations. Consequently the atmosphere was “friendly”, “non- threatening”, and participants were “very comfortable” with each other.

**Two respondents** (Benalla, Hamilton) also commented on the importance of the “gender bender sessions”. Both felt that these gave spouses “a common frame of reference they wouldn’t otherwise have had.”

*“Everyone really enjoyed this. It was very successful in giving spouses/partners a greater understanding of each other’s issues, and has the potential to lead to better family relationships.”*

**Two interviewees** (Hamilton, Swan Hill) felt “The two presenters...were a key to the program’s success”. Both felt it was “a challenge for others to emulate the same style.

**Other areas**, which interviewees believed worked well, were: “Learning about supermarkets and food labels” and “the fact that it ran annually... [which] gave people an annual review. That was fantastic”

#### 4.4.1.2 Improvements

*Industry Partners were asked what improvements could be made to the implementation and delivery of SFF workshops.*

Two thought the timing and structure of the workshops could be improved:

*“More discussion of timing would be good, but it was ok in the end.” (Dalby)*

*“One of the issues was a lot of dead time, when doing the physical people were just sitting around. It wasn’t really lost – they were chatting, but considerable time was tied up in that” (Swan Hill)*

**Three people** felt the two main presenters were “a hard act to follow” (Swan Hill, Horsham, Hamilton). While this is a positive in many respects, their point was that the success of the program hinged in part on individuals and their skills:

*“You can be trained...but you have to be good at it...not everyone who is trained has a rapport with farming people or good delivery skills.”*

**One person** believed that “What we need now is to have other rural health services incorporate a SFF-type program in their annual program.”

#### 4.4.1.3 Changes observed in SFF participants

**Five respondents** (Benalla, Horsham, Hamilton, Swan Hill, Overall), noted improvements in attitudes to and awareness of health issues.

**Two of these** also commented on the importance of “regular monitoring” to maintain exercise regimes and other changes:

*“Greater awareness of health issues, people changed their diets”,*

*“Big impact at first, but didn’t see significant improvement after the first 12 months. It’s good to be reminded; they recognise the benefit of that annual follow up”*

*“Changes are that they feel more in control of their own health and wellbeing”*

Other changes observed were:

*Farmers having more time off, family holidays etc (Dalby)*

*With the “severe drought” and lack of funding at Swan Hill, “how were they dealing with depression was discussed openly, [and] that had a big effect. All improved physical health and mental wellbeing”.*

*“Better attitudes to chemicals and safety” (Hamilton).*



#### 4.4.1.4 The 2009-2010 Follow Up Workshop.

*Respondents were asked how important these workshops were and if there had been any surprises resulting from them.*

**Five respondents** felt the fourth workshop was “important” in “reinforcing the messages” and as a “reminder”. While there were some new tests, there was essentially no new information given.

*“Participants very happy to have the opportunity to reconnect.”*

*“They are delighted... [participants] come back to let them [presenters] know that ‘I got control over my health; I dealt with that issue etc...’*

**One person** was surprised and “disappointed” to find some workshop participants put their weight back on from stress.

**One respondent** said that while it was a “nice follow up”, they felt the “effectiveness” was “questionable”

*“There was nothing really ongoing or attached [for the future] to that last one... [it was an] isolated event, good to collect data, but for the farmers? There was always a sense that it was an academic exercise.”*

#### 4.4.1.5 How has the SFF program helped?

*Respondents were asked how the program had contributed to improving the health, wellbeing and safety of the farming participants.*

**Four interviewees** (Benalla, SH, Hamilton, Overall) felt that SFF’s main contribution was in providing information, which results in greater “knowledge and awareness” around health issues”.

*“People go through those tests, a number in our group (Benalla) picked up issues”*

**Two respondents** (Dalby, SH) said “peer support” and discussion had allowed the:

*“Opportunity to talk, to benchmark themselves, to discuss things they wouldn’t normally in group environment, that was the most powerful thing. With FM500, the group is already used to sharing their financial info and productivity a bit; this went to another level, a personal one.”*

#### 4.4.1.6 Other factors affecting Farmers’ health – what can SFF do?

*When asked what factors, besides this program, impact on farming families’ health:*

- Five people identified stress
- Two people identified climactic issues
- Two people identified risk of accident

- One person identified remoteness as a factor affecting health
- One also noted that with increased “pressure to expand” and then pressure over “significant debt, failed harvests” – this can result in increased accidents.

*“[Farmers] are busy now...but staff have had to be let go, so working long hours could be a problem over the next year. Could also mean inexperienced, casual workers being brought in to do the work - people who may not have done much farm work before or used equipment, could be a problem.”*

*“Mostly the pressure and uncertainty of farming – the environment and commodity prices, it’s a gamble, a high risk industry”.*

The industry partners and facilitators had some suggestions for ways that SFF could assist with regard to these factors:

- That SFF offers a space to “open up discussion” for farmers “to express pressure in [their] own situation”.
- That SFF can redress the balance of media messages about mental health. For example, the “media focus [concerning suicide] is [often] on men”. People can assume “that because men commit suicide they are the only ones with the problem, [with] others not recognised so much”. The SFF workshops could “make sure that the handling of suicide issues sits on both sides of the gender balance”.
- While one person was pleased that SFF had done more to address mental health issues, another respondent said:

*“I think a problem has been that the program tried to encompass more and more, e.g. mental health, there’s a danger it loses effectiveness if it tries to encompass too much.”*

- One person believed that while adding relevant material can be helpful...

*“The model is already a good one...the overall method of interaction has been proven effective, through hundreds of workshops with hundreds of farmers. It works”.*

#### 4.4.1.7 Concept of a ‘healthy farmer’

*Industry partners and facilitators were asked to describe their idea of a ‘Healthy Farmer’*

*The main attributes described by respondents were: Someone who...*

- Is aware of health, gets regular medical checks, and can operate without limitation. (Five comments)
- Is rational about life, with a positive, balanced state of mind. (4)
- Is able to get away from farm, time for personal development, other interests (4)
- Has a plan, knows where they are going, has a sense of vision for the business, a sense of purpose (3)
- Is able to sit back from stress, relaxed (2)

- Aware of safety (2)
- Has a good physical regime (1)
- Has healthy finances (1)
- Is well connected to their industry, buyers and organisations (1)

#### 4.4.1.8 Impacts on Industry Partners

*Industry partners were asked whether their experience in the SFF program had had any impact on their:*

- *Knowledge of health, wellbeing and safety.*
- *Knowledge and/or skills in working with groups*
- *Way they now work with farmers*

##### Knowledge of health, wellbeing and safety

All six partners interviewed said that they had learnt about health issues. Three had made changes to their diet or that of their family as a result of what they had learnt. Four felt they were now paying more attention to looking after their general health.

*"I look after the children's diet in that way a bit more now. I also took myself to a specialist as a result of SFF. So that's good."*

##### Knowledge and skills working with groups

Three felt there had been an impact on their ability to work with groups. Two of these had "greater understanding of the issues", and were "able to draw on the learnings and info provided" in their work as facilitators of farming groups. For one respondent, involvement with SFF had reinforced the effectiveness of *adult education* techniques.

Three had not experienced much or any impact

##### Changes in working with farmers

Four respondents felt there had been no change in the way they work with farmers. One person was made "more aware of medical health" and how "that overrides everything over and above the financial". One facilitator felt the program had made them more "alert for underlying issues that affect participants in the program". (And of course those participants are also people that the facilitator works with outside of the SFF program, in farming business discussion groups etc).

#### 4.4.1.8.1 Impact on Organisations

*Industry partners were asked what impacts they thought the program has had their organisation and its work with farmers.*

**Two respondents** who were affiliated with FM500 felt that their organisation had benefited:

*"[SFF] gave FM500 a lot of credibility", with some of the SFF groups being specific groups made up from FM500 members.*

*"F500 did progress with business health check indicators".*

One person said that their organisation "realised it [SFF] was a good investment" and would have "run more" but for funding cuts. It was also "good publicity" for the organisation.

#### 4.4.1.9 Further Comments

Three people commented on how "fantastic" the SFF initiative has been. In their experience, the program participants have been very enthusiastic, and many who did not attend:

*"...now wished they had come and a whole lot wished they had brought their partners."*

One person commented on the difficulty of recruiting farmers to attend:

*"...You really have to explain to people the benefits of doing this [SFF program], because it is hard. Really have to explain it well - why they should give up two days of their time!"*

Another discussed the way that SFF had fitted in with what they were trying to do, and expressed a desire for a way for this to continue:

*"I'd been...looking for somewhere to go with setting up health benchmarks...An ongoing program would greatly assist in 'prevention' at the expense of 'cure' and have wide economic & social ramifications."*

## 4.5 Data collection instruments

### 4.5.1 Questionnaire for farmer interviews

*Hello, my name is x, I am from Roberts Evaluation. We have been contracted by the National Centre for Farmer Health/Western District Health Service to review their Sustainable Farm Families Future Directions program. I understand that you were involved in the first workshops for this program in 2004, 2005 and that you attended a further workshop in the past 12 months as part of the review.*

*We are interested to speak to you about your experiences in the program. Your comments will be confidential; we will not identify you individually in our reports. It should take about 15 – 20 minutes over the phone. If now is not a good time, we can arrange a time that suits you better. I can also email or fax you a copy of the questions if you would like to read over them beforehand.*

- 
1. Gender: Female ☐ Male ☐
  2. Age: 18 – 24      25-34      35-44      45-54      55-64      65+
  3. Type of farming enterprise you run: \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Nearest town to where you live \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Do you and your partner both work on the farm fulltime or do you have some off-farm work as well?
  6. Location of SFF workshop: \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Can you tell me how many and which Sustainable Farm Families workshops you attended?  
 Workshop 1<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup>      Workshop 2<sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup>      Workshop 3<sup>a</sup>      Workshop 4<sup>ab</sup>
  8. If you missed any of the workshops, what was the reason for this?

#### **About the workshops**

9. Thinking about the first workshop
  - a. What do you remember about that workshop?
  - b. What did you learn from the workshop?
  - c. How did you feel after the workshop?
10. Can you describe your experience of the recent follow-up assessment and workshop?
  - a. What did you learn from this workshop?
  - b. How did you feel after the workshop?
11. What did you like about the workshops?
12. Would you suggest any improvements?

**The following are questions about any changes you may have made**

13. Did you make an action plan after the first and/or second workshop? Was this useful?
14. What changes did you make in your lifestyle after the workshop?
15. How did you go with these?
16. What results did you see in yourself physically and mentally as a result of making these changes?
17. What effects have any changes had to your safety practices?
18. Can you see that these changes (all the ones you mentioned) will be maintained into the future?
19. Why/why not?

**Wider impacts of changes**

20. How did your family respond when you made these changes? (*Partner, children, extended family, farm colleagues*)
21. Did these changes (both lifestyle and safety) have any impact on the way you manage your farm?
22. Did these changes have any impact on the success of your farm business? If yes, could you explain how? If no, why not?
23. Has the program impacted in how you deal with change?

**Climate Change**

24. In what ways has climate change affected your farm or the way you farm?
25. How has the situation around climate change affected your health?

**Capacity to manage personal health**

26. Have you had any contact with your GP or local health provider since or during your involvement with the SFF workshops? How did that go?

I would like to run through a short series of statements, and I'd like to ask you to say whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement, and you can feel free to comment as we go as well. So;

27. Has your involvement in the Sustainable Farm Families program (strongly disagree – disagree – agree – strongly agree):
  - a. Increased your knowledge of relevant health issues?
  - b. Provided you with tools to help you make changes in your lifestyle?
  - c. Helped you change or address any farm safety issues?
  - d. Increased your confidence in your ability to look after your own health and wellbeing?
  - e. Helped connect you to relevant health service providers?
  - f. Created more discussion about health, wellbeing and safety in your family?
28. Do you have any other comments to make about the workshops or the SFF program?

*Thank you very much for your time, your comments will help the National Centre for Farmer Health to improve the program.*

### 4.5.2 Questionnaire for facilitators

*Roberts Evaluation has been contracted by the National Centre for Farmer Health to evaluate the Sustainable Farm Families Program. We are talking to a range of people involved in the program about whether it is creating any change in the health and wellbeing of farming families.*

*We understand that you have been involved in facilitating Sustainable Farm Families workshops and would like to ask you some questions over the phone about your experience and opinions of the program and any impacts it is having on the health of farming families.*

*Any answers you give will remain confidential and you will not be personally identified.*

- 
1. How many workshops have you been involved with, and in which locations?
  2. What has worked well in the SFF workshops that you have been involved with?
    - a. What was it about your approach that made this workshop series successful?
  3. What could be improved in the implementation and delivery of the SFF workshops?
  4. What changes have you seen in the participants over the years that they have been coming to the workshops?
  5. How important was this last follow-up in 2009-2010?
  6. Were there any surprises?
  7. *How* do you think the program has contributed to improving the health, wellbeing and safety of the farming participants?
  8. What other factors, besides this program, impact on farming families' health?
  9. Could the SFF program address some of these factors? If so, how?
  10. Can you describe your idea of what a healthy farmer would be like?
  11. Has your experience in the SFF program had any impact on your knowledge of health, wellbeing and safety?
  12. Has your experience in the SFF program had any impact on your knowledge and/or skills in working with groups?
  13. Has your involvement in this program created any change in the way that you work with farmers?
  14. What about your organisation more broadly; what impacts do you think this program has had upon FM500 / CRDC and its work with farmers?
  15. Any further comments.

*Thank you very much for your time, your comments will help the National Centre for Farmer Health to improve the program.*