

Farmers' biggest fears

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DROUGHT, floods, economics, climate change; farmers are constantly at war in their bid to maintain and protect our food-bowl.

Often at the mercy of a higher power, they must be prepared for anything.

A panel of the nation's leading agricultural identities will be tested on how they would respond to one of farmers' biggest fears at this year's National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) conference in Hamilton: what if a disease, with the potential to spread to humans, breaks out in the national flock?

National Farmers Federation president, Jack Laurie, will join National Institute for Rural and Regional Australia director, Doctor Anthony Hogan, and four others in dissecting the hypothetical scenario, hosted by lawyer and farmer, Jamie Fisher.

"When a scourge confronts humankind, where will you be?" Mr Fisher said.

"Are you an Australian who can stare oblivion in the eye and fight, or stare it in the eye and crumple?"

It might not be real, but NCFH director, Sue Brumby said farmers needed to be aware of the potential; diseases that spread from animals account for 70 per cent of new infectious diseases globally.

"Panellists will be responding by drawing on their extensive industry knowledge and expertise," Ms Brumby said.

"They will also take into account social, environmental, financial and political factors facing the general community.

"Bio-security is fast becoming the major issue for the agricultural industry as our long-held quarantine barriers are freed up, despite the objections, and increasing international travel continues to grow."

Panellist Esther Price is a rural communications and events consultant and predicts 'Sliding Doors' moments, as the audience is shown that quick decisions can have momentous, life changing, results.

"Farmers are classic optimists and too often we don't let ourselves think of the potential consequences of an industry disaster," Ms Price said.

"I expect this hypothetical discussion will highlight some serious gaps in our armoury, but also show what opportunities there are for strong leadership to make a positive difference during times of crisis."

The NCFH 'Sowing the seeds of Farmer Health' conference will run from September 17-19, engaging health and agri-professionals, policy makers and academics in issues relating to health, wellbeing and safety of farmers and their families.