

The Mental Health and Wellbeing of People on NSW Farms.

[Last up-dated 16-11-05]

The following document provides an overview of a range of resources and programs focussing on the mental health and wellbeing of farmers, farming families and people in farming communities. This document is regularly up-dated - please forward suggestions to Anne Tonna at the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (anne.tonna@gwahs.health.nsw.gov.au).

Farmers and their families don't necessarily come into routine contact with health services, particularly mental health services, for a variety of reasons including

- * May not be used to asking for help and admitting they are not coping
- * Specialist services may be a long distance away
- * Local workers may be well known to them and they feel uncomfortable seeking their assistance
- * May have practical issues restricting ability to leave the farm including feeding livestock and animals
- * May not have time to leave farm

A number of pressures - including financial, weather and regulatory pressures - impact on the farming community and these pressures can occur alongside personal social and emotional concerns. The range of these pressures impact on the farm business, farm family and on farmers personally and the position of the home also being the workplace presents a difficulty in separation of the impact of these pressures.

There are groups of agricultural support agencies and workers - Drought Support Workers, Rural Financial Counsellors, Rural Lands Protection Boards, NSW Farmers Association, Country Women's Association and other agencies and services – who interact with farmers on a regular basis. Networks that link these workers and agencies with mental health services (both government and non-government) are seen as important to addressing the mental health and well-being of people on NSW farms.

This page summarises some of the work being done in this important area, and provides links to the various agencies and services available.

- Rural Mental Health Support Line
- Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health
- Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety
- Agricultural Support Agencies and Services
- NSW Farmers Association
- Health Services

• Rural Mental Health Support Line - 1800 201 123

This 24 hour 7 day a week rural mental health support line has been established to provide farmers and rural communities with on the spot help in an immediate crisis or help with referral to local specialist services. It is designed for individuals to talk to someone about the pressures they are experiencing, or for rural agricultural and support agencies or family members to call about a family member, friend or client they are worried about. For more information, please contact Anne Tonna (anne.tonna@gwahs.health.nsw.gov.au) or see the *resources* section of *Mulgaret*.

• Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health

The Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health has been leading a number of projects aimed at linking mental health services and agricultural support agencies. These projects include:

- **Mental Health First Aid for agricultural support agencies.** Mental Health First Aid is a course which will teach you to identify and help people with **mental health problems**. CRRMH in collaboration with the Hunter Institute of Mental Health has delivered five training programmes in rural New South Wales in 2005, with more planned for 2006. For a schedule of training dates and locations go to the *events* page of *Mulganet*. To learn more about Mental Health First Aid visit www.mhfa.com.au.
- **Working with Farmers and Other People in Rural Communities Affected by Drought or Other Rural Pressures.** These seminars are presented by the CRRMH and the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety in collaboration with local Area Mental Health Services. The seminar provides an opportunity for health workers and other agencies involved in supporting the mental health and well-being of farmers and farming communities to develop an improved understanding of key pressures on farmers and other people in rural communities, and to develop cross agency collaboration to support the mental health and well-being of farmers. To learn more about these seminars, their locations and dates go to *events* page of *Mulganet*.
- **Wisdom from the Drought.** The results of a consultative conference held in December 2003 which brought together various agencies providing mental health services to people and communities affected by drought to identify the strategies that were working well, what needed to be in place for the next drought, and what could be done between droughts to support the mental health and well-being of rural communities can be found in a report on the CRRMH website. Go to *resources* page of *Mulganet*.

Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety

The Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety have been conducting research and development programs throughout Australia into the pressures facing farmers. To read more about this research go to www.aghealth.org.au or contact the Centre on the contact details listed below.

As a result of this work with farmers and farmer support services, a practical guide for farmers: “*Managing the Pressures of Farming*” has been developed to assist farmers to manage the pressures of work and life on farms. The resource allows farm family businesses to identify the most difficult pressures on their farm business, farm family and on themselves personally and shows them practical steps they can take to manage them and where to seek professional help. To order a copy contact the Centre on Ph (02) 67 528217 Fax (02) 67 526639 or email amandah@health.usyd.edu.au

This resource is also now available in the form of an interactive cd and web site. Click www.aghealth.org.au/pressures to use the resource online. You can also order the Cd online or contact the Centre on the above numbers to order a copy.

- **Agricultural Support Agencies and Services**

- **NSW Farmers Association**

NSW Farmers Association have brought together agencies who contribute to ensuring the health and wellbeing of the farming sector in NSW, in order to understand and recognise each agency's work and where possible address duplication of effort or resources. Together this NSW Farmers Mental Health Network have developed "*A NSW Farmers Blueprint for Maintaining the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the People on NSW Farms*". For more information contact Anne Tonna at the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (anne.tonna@gwahs.health.nsw.gov.au).

- **Department of Primary Industries – Drought Support Workers** have been appointed to provide immediate personal support, basic information and referral to other appropriate services. To find your local Drought Support Worker go to <http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/rural-drought-support/drought-support-workers.htm>

- **Association of Rural Financial Counselling Groups.** Rural Financial Counsellors are a group of Independent Financial Counsellors who provide free, independent financial advice for farming families and small rural businesses faced with difficult decisions. They are trained to help farmers and their families identify and assess the various options available. To find your local rural financial counselling service go to: <http://www.ruralcounselling.org.au/index.html>

- **Rural Lands Protection Boards** play a key role in protecting rural lands in New South Wales. They deliver essential services to ratepayers and others in each district as the frontline in the management of animal health, pest animal and insect control, travelling stock reserves, stock movement, stock identification, and natural disaster relief. To find your local RLPB contact the RLPB State Council on 02 63913242 or go to www.rlpbnsw.org.au

- The **NSW Farmers' Association** is a dynamic, innovative and voluntary industry body representative of the whole farming community in NSW. Through its commercial, policy and lobbying activities it provides a powerful and positive link between farmers and the public. To find your local NSW Farmers Association representatives contact 02 8251 1700 or go to www.nswfarmers.org.au

- The **Country Women's Association of New South Wales**, a not-for-profit association formed in 1922, is part of the largest voluntary women's organisation in Australia. Members work for the welfare of all women and their families - city and country - through representation at all levels of government, fundraising events and the teaching of life skills. The CWA is allocated funds through the Federal Drought Assistance Package to provide assistance to farming communities experiencing financial difficulties during times of drought. To find your local CWA representatives contact 02 9358 2923 or go to www.cwaofnsw.org.au

• **Other helpful resources**

*** Tough Times**

Depression, suicide and isolation are just some of the realities facing men in rural Australia, according to recent research conducted by the University of Southern Queensland's Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health (CRRAH).

“Our research clearly shows that there is no doubt that conditions in rural Australia have had an impact on men’s mental health, none more so than the current drought,” said researcher Dr Cath Rogers-Clark.

The research was conducted by the CRRAH as part of an investigation into understanding men’s emotional well-being in rural communities. The research involved personal interviews with men in rural Australia and each gave an honest account of their experiences. The men’s stories show that their anxiety and stress is often compounded by the fact that they feel unable to talk about their problems.

Ten of the personal accounts have been published in a book, ‘Tough Times’, released with the sponsorship of CRT and is available through selected CRT stores nationally.

“Tough Times offers inspiration and hope to the many men in rural Australia who will identify with the stories told. It offers encouragement for success and hope for the future,” said Susanne Pearce who edited the book with Cath Rogers-Clark.

‘Tough Times’ is published by the Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health (CRRAH), University of Southern Queensland and is available for \$5.00 from selected CRT stores throughout Australia or the CRRAH Ph. 07 4631 2456. For CRT stockists contact Sofia Katrib on 02 9688 8541.

Source: www.usq.edu.au/newsevents/news/tough+times.htm Accessed 13/9/05

*** Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family**

Written by John Ashfield “Taking Care of Yourself & Your Family” is a unique collection of self help resources for some of the most common difficulties that people on the land struggle with. It is simply written and arranged in a way to make topics of interest easy to find and read. Topics covered include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Disturbing Thoughts
- Insomnia
- Conflict
- Anger
- Stress
- Relationship Violence
- Alcohol
- Substances and Mental Health
- Grief

*** Key Services & Resources**

The book is also an excellent resource for health & human service professionals to use for working with patients and clients from rural areas. A companion CD of this publication is available for practitioners to make printing out of sections for patients and clients easier.

The book costs \$14.95 - plus postage (lower cost per unit of \$6.95 for larger orders) and is available from Peacock Publications Ph. 08 8362 9303, Fax 08 8363 1200 or email info@peacockpublications.com.au

The resource was produced by the Regional Health Services Program in the Booleroo region of South Australia, with assistance from the South Australian Farmers Federation and the Primary Industries and Resources Department of South Australia.

*** “Keeping Heart – Stories of Hope in Hard Times”**

Centacare has supported the production of this video and DVD resource which features people living and working in rural Australia who have experienced times of hardship and their personal reflections on some of the helpful coping strategies they have used to get through experiences of drought, floods, fluctuating industries and other tough times in the bush. For further information contact Bergen O’Brien Ph. 0437 171 647 or Claudia Rowe Ph. 0408 572 425.

*** Depression in Farmers and Farming Families**

Professor Fiona Judd from the Centre for Rural Mental Health in Bendigo has been funded by beyondblue: the national depression initiative to undertake a project looking at depression in farmers. Her research shows that farmers, an important rural subgroup, do not use the term 'depression' or report symptoms of depression, but they do discuss issues in terms of 'stress', such as drought and relationships. This has important implications for those who deal with depression and related issues in the rural and remote population. For further information go to www.beyondblue.org, select 'Rural', then 'Information for Health Professionals'. The 2005 Project Report can be accessed from this site.

*** ‘Depression is more than just being blue...’**

To assist in increasing mental health literacy among farming communities about depression, New England Area Health Service, NSW (now Hunter New England Area Health Service), in partnership with The Australian Centre for Agricultural Health & Safety, Lions Club of Tamworth Peel Valley and Wesfarmers Landmark (now Landmark) developed and distributed a set a poster and fridge magnet resources featuring the slogan ‘Depression is more than just being blue...’. The resources provide information about common signs and symptoms of depression and where to seek professional help. The resources are able to reproduced with minor changes (eg. local contact details) by other interested services and groups. For further information contact the Mental Health Promotion & Prevention Service, Hunter New England Area Health Service Ph. 02 6767 8622 or email: amanda.shaw@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au (JPEG image of poster attached).