Health and Economic Outcomes from the Sustainable Farm Families Project

Abstract:
The general health of rural people is, by urban standards, very poor with rural and farming populations having above average rates of premature morbidity and mortality through heart disease, cancer and suicide. The Sustainable Farm Families project (www.sustainablefarmfamilies.org.au) has conducted four years of workshops and research with farmers in Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland to improve health outcomes for farmers. The program features the application of evidence-based approaches and engages with farm families in an educative and proactive manner. The programs have produced sustained improvements in clinical indicators over 2 years.

As part of the economic evaluation of SFF, projected changes in morbidity and mortality have been calculated using research evidence linking these with clinical indicators. While the evaluation design did not have a control group or comparison group, other strategies were used to strengthen the confidence with which the observed outcomes could be attributed to the intervention. The paper makes recommendations supporting early intervention for rural health, including a proactive response from agricultural industry groups, rural health services and government to assist family-based farms to make decisions about their future in farming which includes information on the health, well being and safety of the family members working the farm.