

Slip, slop, slap failing for farmers

XANA BITTAR

FARMERS have been encouraged to rethink their sun protection routine following the findings of a local research project.

Dr Christel Smit-Kroner, from Barham, conducted her own research — in collaboration with the National Centre for Farmer Health — earlier this year into local farmers' awareness on skin protection.

She said there were a lot of farmers using sunscreen, however some found it uncomfortable to wear, and

also weren't reapplying it in the recommended two hours.

"Generally, I think sunscreen for farmers is impractical. If they put it on in the morning before they leave, they don't reapply when they need to. It's not that they are unwilling, it's not in the nature of the daily activities," she said.

Rather than moving away from using sunscreen, she said it was something farmers could "add on".

"My advice would be to focus on the clothing — the right shirt is far more important," she said.



DR CHRISTEL SMIT-KRONER

"Find a SPF rated shirt. Something that is breathable and absorbs sweat and will

protect you from the sun."

While many did wear a hat, Dr Smit said a lot of farmers found it more comfortable to wear a baseball hat as it didn't fly off as easily.

"These hats don't protect your ears or the back of your neck," she said.

Wide-brim hats provided more protection.

"People are aware of methods, but it is just about actually doing it," she said.

"One of my biggest findings was that [farmers] became really good with protecting their skin after they had some

skin cancer remover.

"It's a bit of learning the hard way — something happens to them, then they get good at it."

As a general practitioner, Dr Smit-Kroner said she was finding a lot of skin cancers on farmers' skin.

"This triggered me to think why aren't they using the correct and appropriate skin cancer prevention," she said.

She held several open discussion meetings with farmers to hear about their routines and understanding of skin protection.

TOP TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR SKIN

- Find a good quality SPF rated shirt
- Wear UV protective sunglasses
- Wear a wide-brim hat
- Apply sunscreen

Biosecurity 'megatrends'

AUSTRALIAN farmers face an increasing threat of new diseases, according to a report into the nation's biosecurity published by CSIRO last week.

The report, called Australia's Biosecurity Future, outlined the most significant biological threats Australians might face over the next 20 to 30 years.

Among those were a series of five global "megatrends" with the potential to create so-called "megashocks" — significant, relatively sudden and potentially high-impact events, the timing of which was very hard to predict.

Dr Gary Fitt, Science Director at the CSIRO Biosecurity Flagship, identified three of these megatrends that could have a direct impact on Australian farmers: the ever-growing demand for food; biodiversity loss; and increased movement of goods and people across different countries.

"Understanding the biosecurity megatrends identified in the report will help Australia prepare for, and deal with the pests and diseases that threaten our farming sector, environment and people," he said.

Dr Fitt used the possible decline in European honey bee populations as an example of how one of these megatrends (biodiversity loss), if left unchecked, could trigger a shock event to the agricultural sector and national economy on the whole.

"If there was a significant decline in European honey bee populations across Australia in the future, this would impact our economy with losses of around \$4-6 billion," Dr Fitt said.

"Losing this free pollination service would severely impact production of several fruit and vegetables including avocados and almonds."



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