The Organisation
Corobinna is a dairy farm which is share-farmed by Andrew and Kay Cavill. It’s located near Bool Lagoon, a natural wetland near Naracoorte in the Limestone Coast of South Australia. Andrew oversees a staff of five, sharing the milking shifts and management of the property.

The Healthy Farm Philosophy:
Over many years, the Cavill’s have prioritised staff health and wellbeing, using a flexible, teamwork approach to the running of the workplace and clever investment in health activities.
Shifts of work are organised so that staff doing morning and afternoon milking sessions can still drop-off and collect children from school.
Staff are paid at above-award industry rates and health and wellbeing is a regular topic of discussion amongst staff.

Communication between staff is supported with a daily pre-milking chat and a “Discussion book” where staff can write down safety or other issues when they don’t feel comfortable openly discussing with all.
The business also “puts its money where its mouth is” by allocating $1000 per employee each year to support health and wellbeing activities eg paying for a gym membership for staff.
The farm has a comprehensive WHS policy which is reviewed regularly.

The Approach: What has this dairy farm been doing to support worker health and wellbeing?

Smoking: In 2015, Andrew identified that all staff were smokers. Many staff smoked whilst in the dairy, creating potential for passive smoking and an environment which supported illness, not health.
After quitting smoking in 2014, Andrew decided to tackle smoking inside the dairy by instigating “Designated smoking” areas outside of the dairy (which makes smoking uncomfortable for smokers) and banning it in vehicles. Whilst it has not resulted in staff yet reducing or quitting, Andrew will persist with making the worksite a healthier environment. He is aware of lost productivity time through smokers stopping for breaks and regularly reminds staff of this fact- much to their annoyance!
Whilst staff are not contemplating quitting smoking yet, Andrew has decided that this is as far as he can push this at present. However, staff know he is supportive, and a role model himself, if they do wish to take steps to stop smoking.

Nutrition: All staff voluntarily participated in a weight loss challenge (“Biggest Loser” challenge) over Autumn 2015. Each staff chose a target weight they wanted to achieve (but not shared with the group). Staff made simple behavioral changes such as eating smaller portions, avoiding take-away foods and reducing snacking. All reported reaching their personal target weights at the end of the challenge.
Physical activity: Beyond the farm itself, Andrew has initiated a local community “Fat Farmer” exercise group of five farmers. The group gets together for walks, which provides an opportunity to de-brief about issues on the farms they run. This links well with Andrew’s passion for positive mental health and wellbeing amongst men.

Alcohol: The farm’s WHS policy addresses procedures for staff who come to work affected by drugs and/or alcohol. Furthermore, Andrew does not encourage excessive alcohol at work functions/celebrations and both he and Kay role model safe drinking practices at work functions.

Wellbeing: Andrew is a proactive advocate for the Menswatch program in his community. This program provides an opportunity for men to learn about how to support positive mental health and wellbeing amongst their friends.

Achievements and benefits: “Corobinna” has an immensely stable group of staff, with very low turnover. This is unusual in the dairy industry, where high turnover is the norm.

Furthermore, staff sick leave is very low, with NO days lost to sick leave amongst staff for the past two and a half years! However, management of staff coming to work unwell is an ongoing task.

Nonetheless, absenteeism is rare and Andrew can rely upon his staff, who generally demonstrate high morale and job satisfaction. The low turnover and absenteeism save his business considerable costs of recruiting, training new staff and employing casual relief staff when staff are ill.

Reflections
Following the “Biggest Loser” weight loss challenge, Andrew felt that, whilst well supported by staff, perhaps a weight related focus was not as useful as looking at positive lifestyle changes and waist circumference reduction. Weight can be notorious for rebounding when a dieting approach is used, so encouraging staff to focus on the process of change (e.g., achieving a goal of walking three times/week) and minimising relapses/duration of relapses through mutual support may be even more beneficial than a competitive approach.

There is strong evidence that waist measurement is a more useful predictor of health risks than weight alone, so Andrew may focus on changing this activity in the future.

The Future: What does 2016 bring?
Andrew has plans to focus on wellbeing in the future to help his staff manage stress in their lives. He has invited a local Community Mental health Nurse to the farm to talk with staff about how staff can recognise signs of distress and find ways to manage this effectively.

Addressing this effectively may assist staff to then take steps to further address physical health issues such as smoking at a later date.

This case study was prepared and submitted by Andrew Cavill, Corobinna in collaboration with Sally Fisher, Primary Producers SA under the Healthy Workers Healthy Futures Initiative.