Farmers’ Skin Cancer Prevention and Detection Practices

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Here is a summary of the findings and recommendations from Camilla Trenerry’s Honours Psychology project (The University of Adelaide) which was supervised by Prof Carlene Wilson and Dr Kate Fennell (nee Gunn) (Cancer Council SA, Flinders University). Thank you for taking the time to assist us with this research.

Aims of the research

- To better understand the current skin cancer prevention and detection practices of South Australian farmers
- To test the effectiveness of two different types of flyers at enhancing farmers’ intentions to prevent and detect skin cancer (using a randomised control trial design)
- To determine the extent to which farmers’ attitudes and beliefs predict their intentions to prevent skin cancer and their actual skin cancer prevention practices

Who participated?

501 South Australian farmers completed the written survey and a randomly selected subsample of 110 farmers also participated in a follow up telephone-administered survey (which had some of the same questions as the written survey to enable us to evaluate the effect of the different flyers). The majority of participants were male (83.0%), operated a grain, sheep or cattle farm or a sheep or cattle property (86.0%), and lived in the South East (29.2%), Adelaide Hills or Fleurieu Peninsula (22.1%), the Lower/Mid North (17.8%), Eyre Peninsula (11.8%), Murray Mallee (7.1%), Yorke Peninsula (4.9%), Far North (3.9%) and Kangaroo Island (2.6%). (Note: due to rounding, percentages do not add up to exactly 100%).

What did we find out?

1) Only 6.3% of the South Australian farmers who participated reported always wearing sunscreen
2) 37.7% of farmers reported always wearing a hat
3) 51.7% of farmers report checking their own skin at least twice a year
4) 60% of farmers report having seen their doctor for a skin check in the past 3 years
5) We did not find any evidence that providing farmers with a farmer-targeted brochure made them any more likely to protect their skin than providing them with a generic Cancer Council SA brochure (see diagrams on last page)
6) However, there was some promising evidence that the farmer-targeted brochure may be more persuasive in encouraging farmers to check their skin and see the doctor in response to changes to their skin, than the generic Cancer Council SA brochure
7) Preliminary findings indicate that attitudes, self-efficacy beliefs and to a lesser extent, subjective norms are significant predictors of intentions to prevent skin cancer among farmers, but control beliefs are not.
Implications of the research

- Identifies what behaviours farmers are doing well and what behaviours should be addressed by health researchers and organisations like Cancer Council SA (i.e. farmers need to be more strongly encouraged to use sunscreen and wear protective clothing)
- Suggests that farmer-targeted flyers/educational materials could be used to enhance intentions to detect skin cancer, but alternate intervention strategies should also be considered for enhancing farmers’ skin cancer prevention practices
- Identifies that future interventions should aim to enhance attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs (and not control beliefs) to bring about changes in skin cancer prevention and detection intentions and behaviours

For further information

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Cancer Council SA generic flyers (left) and the farmer-targeted flyers (right) tested in this research

The SunSmart Checklist

- Take particular care and protect your skin in the sun when the UV Index is 6 and above. This is when ultraviolet radiation is strong enough to damage the skin.
- Wear clothing made from closely woven material that covers your skin as much as possible. Long-sleeved, collared shirts and long pants are best.
- Wear a hat that provides plenty of shade to the face, neck and ears. Broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire styles are best.
- Liberally apply SPF 30+ broad spectrum sunscreen. Reapply every two hours, more often if swimming or perspiring.
- Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside to give time to be absorbed.
- Wear wraparound style sunglasses to protect the eyes. Look for an EPF of 10 and a category 3 or 4 lens for good protection.
- Even if it’s cool or cloudy, you’re still at risk of skin damage from ultraviolet radiation.
- Be particularly careful if you are involved in any water activity because water reflects UV radiation.
- Skin damaged by UV radiation is damaged for life. The damage builds up year after year and is irreversible.
- Check your skin regularly and see your doctor if you notice any new spots or existing spots that have changed colour, size or shape.

Are you a SunSmart Farmer?

As a farmer you’re at a greater risk of developing skin cancer as you are often outdoors. It’s not picked up early. Some forms of skin cancer can take you away from your family, friends and farm work. Don’t let this happen to you.

You can control the ultraviolet (UV) radiation levels but you can take control and be a SunSmart farmer. And now to reduce your risk of skin cancer by protecting your skin every day of the year, using the SunSmart Tools.

SunSmart Tools

- Slip on clothes that cover as much skin as possible. Loose-fitting, natural fabrics will provide protection and keep you cool.
- Slap on broad spectrum, water resistant SPF 30+ (or higher), sunscreen. Remember to reapply every two hours when you are out and about on the farm.
- Slap on a broad-brimmed hat or one that covers your head, neck and ears. Remember caps don’t provide adequate protection.
- Seek shade when possible. If you can, work in the shade, shed or house during the middle of the day, when UV is highest.
- Slide on close-fitting sunglasses.

Keep this checklist handy as a reminder on how to take control and be a SunSmart farmer.

Use the SunSmart Tools wherever you are working outside, as UV radiation can be strong enough to damage your skin all year round.
- Wear clothing made from closely woven material that covers your skin as much as possible. Long-sleeved, collared shirts and long pants are best.
- Wear a hat that provides plenty of shade to the face, neck and ears. Broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire styles are best.
- Liberally apply SPF 30+ (or higher) broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen. Reapply every two hours, or more often if sweating. Why not try to choose sunscreen that has been designed for outdoor users.
- Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside to give it time to be absorbed.
- Use a combination of SunSmart Tools to keep you safe from UV radiation – never rely on just one.
Participants who received one of the flyers above also received this generic Cancer Council SA resource.

Please note that some participants did not receive any materials (they received the survey only), which is why we wanted to provide everyone with this information now.