Background: Around 60% of farmers have a hearing loss, compared to 22–27% of the general public. The impact of hearing loss is further exacerbated for farmers by lack of access to hearing specialities. Practising rural health professionals identify that hearing education and awareness is a gap in their skills. It is also noted that people with hearing loss often have three or more medical diagnoses and that the hearing loss exacerbates social confidence. The Shhh hearing project extended the outcomes from the successful Australian Sustainable Farm Families™ (SFF) program and the Canadian Montreal Hearing Help Program (MHHP). The SFF is successful in engaging with farming families and achieving behavioural changes, whilst the MHHP has been demonstrated as an effective intervention, assisting workers with hearing loss to overcome problems of reluctance and stigmatisation thereby improving their hearing and listening skills. The MHHP has not previously been used with farming populations, though with high levels of hearing loss, farmers are an obvious candidate group.

Aim: The Shhh hearing project tested the hypothesis that participation in early intervention hearing services would (a) contribute to significant reduction in the impact of hearing loss on farmers and (b) educate and empower farmers on their capacity to reduce their noise.

Method: Farmers from a variety of enterprises, including dairy, cropping and grazing, were invited to attend a workshop modelled on the MHHP and the SFF program. The subject cohort was a convenience sample drawn from the SFF™ program who had previously identified a hearing loss. The Shhh hearing workshop includes hearing screening, a physical health assessment and attending an educative and experiential session on hearing loss.

Results: This paper discusses the qualitative responses of fifty farmers and their partners on their attitudes to hearing and their level of acceptance and ability to cope with their hearing difficulties. Discussion will include coping and stigmatisation in their rural community. Pre-and post-analysis demonstrates changes to their practices to noise exposure on the farm, including the prevention of further hearing loss and changes to their daily social interactions.

Discussion: This is the first time the MHHP has been transferred into a farming population and provides an insight into combining the successful Australian SFF program and Canadian MHHP. Further, this project brings a multidisciplinary and rural/metropolitan team working together in farming communities.