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NEW DEALS

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OUR COVER

A shedded dairy system has unlocked significant productivity gains and subsequently industry-leading profits for an Argentinian farming family. Read the full report on page 56.



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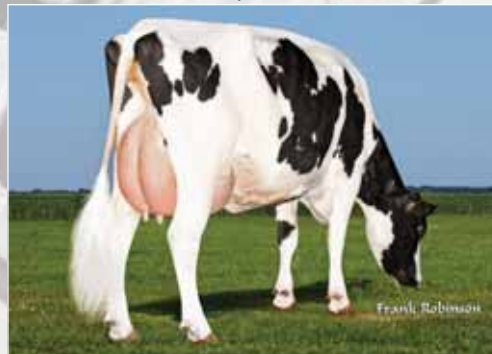
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What a difference a year makes

THIS time last year when I sat down to write this column, the cat-and-mouse game between processors was creating frustration for many dairy farmers.

Opening price announcements were delayed to just before the start of the season, pricing systems were becoming more complicated and some closing price forecasts were so broad they were meaningless.

I warned in that column that this behaviour would cut farmer confidence. And I also warned that without confidence, farmers would not produce more milk and the industry would have trouble attracting new entrants.

At that time, I don't think anyone could have forecast the enormous number of changes that have beset the industry in the past 12 months.

Milk production has plummeted to its lowest level in 25 years — in part on the back of difficult seasonal conditions in eastern states that have led to a huge spike in feed and water costs that have hit farm profitability. The *Situation and Outlook* report released in late June revealed farmers confidence has also fallen — another factor in the production fall.

The fallout from this loss of production is hurting across the supply chain. Farm exits are increasing, while both Bega and Fonterra have closed factories in the past six months.

The *Situation and Outlook* report also revealed that when confidence is low, more farmers change processors. There has been unprecedented movement of farmers between processors in the past couple of years.

We are also seeing the emergence of a very different looking industry.

The federal government has become involved in the relationship between farmers and processors, deciding to adopt the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's key recommendation from its dairy inquiry of a mandatory code of conduct.

The ACCC has already taken action to have contracts between farmers and processors amended to take out what it saw as unfair clauses. It says the mandatory code is essential to prevent processors from reinstating unfair terms into their contracts.

We have also seen new players


emerging in the industry, seeing the opportunity to manage the process between the sellers and buyers of milk. The instigator of the industry-loathed \$1-a-litre milk, Coles, is now planning to source its milk directly from farmers and pay for it to be processed.

Some processors have also listened to industry group calls and simplified their pricing structure.

We have also seen a new online milk price comparison website launched. This allows farmers to input their production data to receive within minutes indicative income statements from the different processors operating in their region.

And this year the processors desperate to retain supply have acted very differently from last year.

Record opening milk prices have been announced, most more than a month before the start of the season. Some companies announced step ups before the season even began.

Hopefully, once all the dust settles, we will see a new power balance in the industry — one where processors treat their farm suppliers with the respect they deserve and see that a mutually beneficial relationship is the only way to ensure they have the milk supply to make their businesses thrive. 



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The *Australian Dairyfarmer* is published on the 15th of every second month, in July, September, November, January, March and May, for the Australian Dairy Farmers, Level 2, Swan House, 22 William Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000.

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PRODUCTION

Fairfax Media Australian Community

Media production hub

Circulation: The *Australian Dairyfarmer* is supplied free to all registered dairyfarmers in Australia.

For a change of address, contact

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Editorial contributions: Editorial contributions are welcome, but no responsibility can be taken for their loss. Copy is preferred by email. Deadline is two months before publication.

Printed by: Rural Press Printing.
Published by: Fairfax Agricultural Media (Agricultural Publishers Pty Ltd)
ABN 55 000 560 430.

ISSN: 0814-4494

CAB Audit Figure: 9392 (March 2018)



EU uses names to cut trade access

Key points

- ✓ EU moves to register Havarti as protected geographical indication name
- ✓ Would restrict exporter access to Europe
- ✓ Ignores international Codex standard for cheese

THE Australian dairy industry has taken aim at the European Union over moves to register Havarti cheese as a protected geographical indication (GI).

In a blistering letter to EU officials, the Australian Dairy Industry Council condemned “the latest example of the EU’s effort to restrict and monopolise a generic term”.

The approval will give Danish producers the exclusive right to the name Havarti in the EU in an extraordinary move, which would have ramifications for Australian dairy manufacturers who use the name as a generic term.

The ADIC letter accused Brussels of misusing the GI trademark system for domestic political purposes: “Such an approval lays bare the fact that all too often the EU GI system is used not for legitimate intellectual property protection, but instead for barely concealed protectionism and economic gain.”

The Codex Alimentarius, a collection of internationally agreed-to food standard and guidelines, currently has a listing for Havarti that does not grant exclusive use of the name to Denmark.

ADIC president Terry Richardson said the registration of Havarti as a GI made a mockery of the Codex standard.

“The EU’s approval of a GI for Havarti directly undermines the Codex standard despite the EU’s earlier approval, and calls into question the EU’s commitment to the international standard-setting process,” Mr Richardson said.

US-based Consortium for Common Food Names (CCFN) executive director Jaime Castaneda called the approval a terrible precedent.



Australian-made Havarti cheese — such as this being made at a factory in NSW — is under threat from a new European Union directive.

“The name ‘Havarti’ is not only widely used in many European and non-European countries, but there is also an international product standard for Havarti that is recognised globally by Europe and others,” he said.

This is not the first time the EU has chosen to erode the trade opportunity available via its negotiated World Trade Organisation (WTO) most-favoured nation quotas through the registration of a common cheese name as a GI. Tariff-rate quota access was also diminished by Brussels’s registration of Gruyere as a GI.

‘This is not the first time the EU has chosen to erode the trade opportunity available via its negotiated WTO most-favoured nation quotas.’

WTO members, including Australia, have repeatedly challenged the EU to explain its disregard for Codex cheese standards. The response by the EU that it doesn’t consider the standards relevant to GIs has alarmed WTO members.

The approval is an ominous sign for the impending free trade deal between Australia and the EU, with

Brussels demanding full acceptance of the GI system.

If the Australian government caves to the EU over this demand, dairy could be the big loser.

The ADIC has warned that locally produced cheese varieties with a value of production worth \$180 million and export sales averaging \$55 million each year would face extinction.

Added to this, attempts by the EU to extend the scope of labelling restrictions to include colours, flags, and even symbols that might evoke regions in EU countries would hit a further 45,000 tonnes of Australian cheese production, averaging \$300 million in domestic and export sales per year.

Mr Richardson said the federal government needed to take stronger action during trade talks to ensure the local dairy industry would not suffer under a new trade agreement.

“The future of the Australian dairy industry depends on the federal government’s courage to stay firm in trade negotiations and push back against the EU’s demand to enforce GI restrictions,” he said.

“These trade negotiations should allow both Australia and the EU to capitalise on an improved commercial relationship.

“But we need to ensure this deal frees up the trade relationship rather than creates technical barriers such as GIs.”

A plan to find a path for the future

- Key points**
- ✓ Complex problems facing the industry
 - ✓ Australian Dairy Plan aims to involve everyone in discussion
 - ✓ Vital to find a way to co-operate, share knowledge and support each other

On May 10, Australian Dairy Farmers President (ADF) Terry Richardson addressed farmers at the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria (UDV) annual conference. The following is an extract from his speech on the importance of undertaking an industry-wide Australian Dairy Plan:

WE all know that the dairy industry is in a difficult position. I'm not here to tell you what you already know.

I will tell you that I am as heavily invested in the dairy industry as anyone in the room today. I have been a dairy farmer for 50 years, and I cannot recall a more stressful or tense atmosphere than the one we are experiencing now.

I have family who are worried about their future in dairying, and I am worried about them. The next few years are critical to our survival and that's why we must give real thought to a strategy to secure the long-term sustainability of the dairy industry.

That is the purpose of the Australian Dairy Plan — to chart a course for the future. We need an ambitious goal. The aim is to build on an industry that is more profitable, more confident, and more united.

I've heard all the criticism.

I've heard that we know what the problems are and we should just fix it. The truth is, most of you have different priorities. People want simple answers to complex problems, but if there was always a simple answer, we wouldn't have complex problems.

I've heard people say that this is just another plan that will sit on the shelf. Here I want to be very clear: This is not just another plan. We are determined not to let this plan gather dust on a shelf. What sets this plan apart from everything that has come before is that we will set measurable targets to mark our own progress.

What we are doing differently is involving everyone in the conversation right across the dairy supply chain:



ADF president Terry Richardson addresses the UDV conference in May.

'We are determined not to let this plan gather dust on a shelf.'

farmers, processors, retailers, service providers like vets.

We all have skin in the game and we should all be invested at some level in the outcome of this Dairy Plan.

The most vital element of the Dairy Plan is the extensive consultation process that will involve all of you.

The fact that we are investing so heavily in consultation should show that we are committed to ensuring all of you have an opportunity to have your views heard, so that you can take ownership of this plan.

We understand that we cannot map a plan for our long-term future without recognising the need for a plan that deals with the immediate issues affecting some parts of the industry. We cannot ask our farmers to join with us in a conversation about the next five years when each day brings uncertainty.

All of us in the room today play a different role in contributing to the ongoing development and success of the industry. You carry the legacy of decisions made to cope with times like these. And your contributions will

add to that success when the fortunes of the industry inevitably turn again.

We must demonstrate that together we will take responsibility as an industry to navigate our way through this.


Cynicism leaves us closed to new ideas. There is always room for differences to be expressed. That is what the Dairy Plan should achieve.

It is vital that we find a way to co-operate, share knowledge and support each other — bring together our considerable capacity for optimism and resources to face the future. Only through sharing our experiences can we truly understand and regain trust in our industry.

We need to show our unity of purpose, shared belief and passion for the dairy industry. None of us by ourselves has an answer to what may be sought, but unity brings an open, honest, and shared discussion about the challenges faced by our friends, neighbours, or the broader industry.

At the end of the process, we should have a document that can guide the strategies of all of our organisations, as well as provide a blueprint for our industry.

We are laying everything on the table. We want to hear from you on what the dairy industry must do differently.

I am asking you to navigate the divide between the realism of today, and the confidence of the future. 

Coalition's multi-million dollar pledge

Key points

- ✓ Coalition pledges \$22 million to dairy in lead up to election
- ✓ Includes funds for new trading platform and payment system
- ✓ Plans to extend the ACCC ag unit

PEAK dairy farmer group Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) will deliver \$1 million in projects as part of a \$22 million agriculture package negotiated with the federal government in the weeks leading up to the May federal election.

As part of the commitment, ADF will receive:

- \$560,000 to facilitate the development of a new dairy industry trading platform.
- \$300,000 to develop a real time dairy payment system and supply chain information sharing capacity using blockchain technology.
- \$150,000 to develop with processors a simple standard form contract that incorporates requirements of the industry's mandatory code of conduct.

Other projects that the Coalition committed to include:

- \$10 million to support dairy farmers investing in more energy-efficient equipment to reduce energy costs.
- \$8.1 million to extend the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) agriculture unit, a significant boost to the \$2.7 million outlined in the 2020 budget.
- \$3 million in grants to assist farmer groups to establish farm co-operatives and other collaborative business models.
- \$500,000 to services body Dairy Australia to continue its financial and legal advice service to farmers, and to improve legal and financial literacy for contract negotiations with processors.
- A dairy industry specialist position within the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) agriculture unit.

ADF president Terry Richardson said the organisation supported the windfall of initiatives for the dairy industry, particularly the commitment to ensure continued funding of the competition watchdog's agriculture unit.

"This is a timely and welcome announcement that will ensure the mandatory code of conduct is appropriate



Scott Morrison's re-election was good news for the dairy with the Coalition having made a raft of promises for the industry before the election.

'It is fantastic to see a real plan for the dairy industry and delivers on a number of key imperatives that we know will assist the industry.'

ately resourced, and the decision to appoint a dedicated dairy industry specialist within that unit is an important step in the process," he said.

"It is fantastic to see a real plan for the dairy industry and delivers on a number of key imperatives that we know will assist the industry.

"The government has clearly listened to the concerns of the industry and we look forward to delivering on these projects with the Coalition returned to government."

The Coalition's funding commitment aligns with the election platform released by the Australian Dairy Industry Council.

ADF and its state members worked closely with the government in the lead up to the election.

Mr Richardson said the group remained firmly committed to working with the government on securing positive

outcomes for dairy farmers.

"Dairy farmers are looking for and expect leadership from industry representatives as well as government," he said.


"ADF stands ready and welcomes the opportunity to work with the government on delivering these projects and we are confident that there will be positive benefits for the dairy farmers as well as the wider industry."

Mr Richardson and ADF CEO David Inall met with new agriculture minister Bridget McKenzie shortly after the election.

Mr Inall said the meeting was constructive and set a positive tone for the relationship between the dairy sector and the returned Coalition government.

"This was only an introductory meeting to understand the Minister's vision for agriculture and to give an overview of ADF's advocacy priorities," Mr Inall said.

"We discussed a number of key issues affecting farmers, such as profitability, the government's dairy industry code of conduct, and the Australian Dairy Plan. The Minister is also talking directly to some farmers and we are encouraged by her enthusiasm for our industry."

ADF will continue to engage government as part of the organisation's busy advocacy agenda. 

Sensible approach to climate

Key points

- ✓ Election offered stark choice on climate change policies
- ✓ Coalition policies less costly for Australian economy
- ✓ Australia can't be expected to do more than other countries

By Terry Richardson,
ADF president

MAY'S federal election played out in the regions as a referendum on climate policy.

Both major parties offered radically different plans aimed at tackling climate change. But it was up to Australians to assess who had the more responsible approach.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has maintained his government's policy of reducing carbon emissions by 26-28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

He intends to get there through a \$3.5 billion climate solutions package, which includes a \$2 billion Climate Solutions Fund, investment in energy efficiency adoption and building the Snowy 2.0 Hydro Electricity Project.

The Coalition's emissions reduction target is in line with Australia's obligation under the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Australia is responsible for 1.45pc of global emissions, and this target is comparable to the ones set by most countries with a similar polluting profile, including Japan (2.82pc), Canada (1.96pc), Indonesia (1.49pc) and Mexico (1.27pc), all of which have targets around 25pc.

Labor, in an effort to prove how seriously it views the threat of climate change, offered an ambitious plan to almost double the Coalition's target and reduce emissions to 45pc below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero pollution by 2050.

This would have positioned Australia as having one of the highest targets in world, with a 50pc renewable energy adoption target by 2030.

But at what cost to the national economy? Consulting firm BA Economics ran the numbers, comparing the costs of both the current target and Labor's aspirational goal. The difference is stark.

BAE estimates that under the Coalition government's existing policy, electricity prices would rise by \$93 per megawatt hour, real average wag-



The Prime Minister is promising a \$3.5 billion climate solutions package, which includes building the Snowy 2.0 Hydro Electricity Project.

'Climate change is a global problem requiring a global solution that is fair and equitable.'

es would decrease by \$2000 a year and there would be 78,000 job losses.

This is not ideal, but under Labor's plan the picture becomes even bleaker.

Electricity prices would soar to \$128 per megawatt hour, while real average wages would plummet by \$9000 per year and industry would suffer 336,000 full-time job losses.

BAE estimates that Labor's climate policy would signal a cumulative \$472 billion loss to Australia's gross domestic product (GDP), compared to \$62 billion under the Coalition's target.

For livestock industries like dairy, BAE predicts significant indirect costs, depending on the scenario, with an expected decline of between 0.7 and 2.6pc in output despite agriculture not being included as part of Labor's 45pc target.

Yes, any emissions reduction target will have a real cost attached, but Australians made a decision at the ballot

box as to which plan would cause the least damage to our economy and their own bottom line.

New Labor leader Anthony Albanese is now calling for an end to the climate wars. In his first press conference as leader, Mr Albanese said he wanted to work with the government on an emissions reduction plan that benefited both the environment and economy.

The real concern, from our perspective, isn't that Australia should be doing more to combat climate change. It's the commitment of other nations to achieve lower emissions.

Under the Paris Agreement, China is allowed to increase pollution to 2030, while India has an emissions intensity target significantly lower target than other G-20 countries. Added to that, many smaller countries are not signatories to the agreement and are not bound to contribute.

Assuming all countries maintain the same emissions, any increase to Australia's emissions reduction target would have a negligible impact on fighting climate change. And if other countries go so far as to increase emissions, then Australia would be in deficit both in terms of environmental and economic impact.

Climate change is a global problem requiring a global solution that is fair and equitable.





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Rebuilding confidence a priority



By **David Nation**
Managing director
Dairy Australia

Key points

- ✓ Dry conditions and industry challenges have knocked confidence
- ✓ Great involvement from farmers in Dairy Plan workshops
- ✓ Challenge to build contributions into a plan

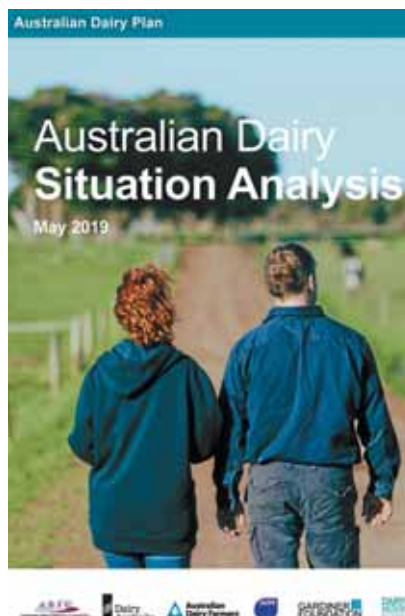
THE outlook for dairy remains challenging in many parts of the world, but I strongly believe that Australia continues to be a great country to pursue a dairy farming business.

The challenges and the good prospects are set out in our *Situation and Outlook* report published last month, along with a forecast that national milk production is likely to decline a further 3-5 per cent this season. This decline is a carry-over from the dry conditions that affected the whole industry last year.

It is to be expected that these conditions continue to weigh on the confidence of dairy farmers, as is reflected in the results of our National Dairy Farmer Survey. Rebuilding this confidence is a priority of all dairy industry organisations and a key objective of the Australian Dairy Plan.

I attended a number of Dairy Plan consultation workshops and the engagement of farmers was excellent. The challenge now is for us to take these contributions and build them into a plan, that is also informed by sessions we're holding with processors and retailers.

One element of the plan is that it needs to be well-grounded, and plans made based on a real and considered analysis of the dairy industry as it now stands. There has been a team of



The Australian Dairy Situation Analysis identified three key areas that need to be addressed to get the industry back on track.

'I firmly believe that industry working together to address these challenges through the Australian Dairy Plan will lead to longer term gains.'

people working on this aspect and it has been published as the *Australian Dairy Situation Analysis* report. I urge you to read it if you have not done so already. The link appears at the bottom of this page.

The report focuses on three key areas.

Firstly, the market has evolved faster than the industry. This has occurred not only in world markets, but in the structure and ownership of our supply chain, as well as changing con-

sumer trends. Thankfully dairy consumption in Australia is robust and global demand continues to grow.

Secondly, on-farm profitability has become more difficult as well as volatile. Farming systems and structures have become more complex in response to market, pricing and climate variability. Input costs like water, feed, energy and labour have increased faster than milk prices. We are also increasingly subject to strong import competition.

Lastly, our people and organisations need to adapt to succeed. The skill-base of being a great dairy farmer keeps getting broader. There are genuine concerns about a shortage of skilled labour at all levels in the dairy industry. Keeping skills in the industry and encouraging farm succession are critical challenges, as is attracting newcomers to the industry.

I firmly believe that industry working together to address these challenges through the Australian Dairy Plan will lead to longer term gains. We are fortunate to have John Brumby's involvement as Independent Chair. His external perspective and experience will help us to build consensus on key priorities and the changes required to achieve better outcomes for all parts of the industry.

Despite all the negativity of what has been an intense and difficult year for many parts of the dairy industry, I believe positive settings are building. Opening farmgate prices are providing further increases on the gains of last season, underpinned by relatively stable international markets and competition for milk supply. Recent good rainfall in most areas has also helped.

I look forward to communicating further with you over coming months about Dairy Australia's activities in support of farmers, as we work with our Australian Dairy Plan partners to create a roadmap to a more prosperous and confident future for dairy. **D**

To read the **Australian Dairy Situation Analysis** go to <https://www.dairyplan.com.au/situation-analysis>.

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Battle for milk supply boosts prices

Key points

- ✓ Record opening prices offered in southern Australia
- ✓ Milk production to hit 25-year low
- ✓ Global market and lower dollar support higher prices

By Carlene Dowie

THE battle for milk supply, in the wake of a big fall in production and an improved global outlook, has prompted dairy processors in southern Australia to offer record opening prices.

Processors also announced prices earlier this year in attempt to lock in supply, but the intensity of the battle to hold suppliers saw some processors announcing step ups even before the season had started.

Dairy Australia's *Situation and Outlook* report, released in late June, forecast national milk production for 2018-19 to fall 7-9 per cent to between 8.45 and 8.65 billion litres — the lowest level in 25 years. The fall reflected a significant reduction in the national herd and farmers reducing herd sizes due to drought and increased costs.

The report revealed another factor behind the aggressive opening price strategies. A record 25 per cent of farmers had changed processor in the past 12 months, although one-fifth of this was the result of corporate changes. More farmers changed processors as confidence declined.

Confidence is falling. The report revealed the results of the National Dairy Farmer Survey, conducted in February. It showed only 34pc of farmers felt positive about the future of the dairy industry, compared with 47pc last year and 53pc the year before.

Positive signs

Dairy Australia senior industry analyst John Droppert said positive signs were emerging for prices. "Positive domestic market trends, stronger global markets and a weaker Australian dollar have supported higher farmgate pricing this season and look set to deliver further increases over the next 12 months," he said.

"Surging input costs have however, outweighed improved farmgate pricing, and milk production will likely remain under pressure. Higher pricing will provide opportunities if enough rain falls at the right time and pushes grain, hay

and irrigation water prices down."

Some companies are moving to simpler pricing systems to try to entice suppliers. The United Dairyfarmers of Victoria has campaigned for the past two years for price simplification. It said complex price systems forced farmers to operate inefficiently by chasing incentives and converting to off-season milk production.

Saputo, Australian Consolidated Milk and Bega all announced simpler systems, featuring two prices — one for peak and the other for off-peak months.

Higher prices

In early June, Saputo announced a \$6.80 a kilogram milk solids price, 18.3 per cent higher than its opening price last year of \$5.75/kg MS. The company also announced a step up for season 2018-19, taking the closing price to \$6.15/kg MS.

In a letter to suppliers, Saputo president and chief operating officer Kai Bockmann said with market conditions continuing to improve in recent months, the opening price reflected its current assessment of expected market conditions for the upcoming year.

'Positive domestic market trends, stronger global markets and a weaker Australian dollar have supported higher farmgate pricing this season.'

"The global market supply and demand fundamentals remain positive with milk production growth easing across key regions and demand remaining firm," he said. "However, we anticipate continued volatility in the global dairy markets."

Fonterra announced an opening price of \$6.60/kg MS in late May, matching Bega's opening price announced the week before that. Both Fonterra's and Bega's price was 12.8 per cent higher than last year and it was the first time Fonterra opened at above \$6/kg MS.

But Fonterra refused to budge on

the 2018-19 price saying that reduced supply meant it could not provide a step up from \$6.05/kg MS at this stage.

Fonterra Australia managing director René Dedoncker said it had announced the season's average opening farmgate milk price in May to help decisions to be made on farm.

"As our industry and business evolve to deal with a smaller milk pool, we have a stronger focus on servicing local demand which brings greater opportunity for certainty on pricing," he said. "The broader global supply and demand picture is positive, with demand expected to remain strong across key trading partners and a favourable exchange rate."

Burra Foods announced a record opening farmgate milk price range of \$6.40-\$6.70/kg MS at the start of May. In a letter to suppliers, Burra Foods chief executive Grant Crothers said the price was 14.5 per cent up on last year's opening price. It was released on May 1, significantly earlier than before, and in response to farmer requests for earlier next season price signals, he said.

Smaller processors

Some of the smaller processors were more aggressive in their pricing.

Australian Consolidated Milk threw down the challenge to other processors, announcing a record \$7/kg MS price, after the major processors had announced. The company said the price was a guaranteed minimum for the season, and replaced the guaranteed minimum price of \$6.50 for 2019/20 it announced in February.

"Since then the dairy market has improved and the Australian dollar has weakened," ACM general manager commercial Peter Jones said.

Bulla Dairy Foods, which initially announced a \$7/kg MS price, increased that to \$7.20/kg MS in early June. This season is the second in which Bulla has sourced milk directly.

Bulla chief executive officer Allan Hood said the price revision followed a review of market conditions for the next season alongside its plans for growth. "We continue to be competitive in the market and have therefore increased our initial milk pricing based on projected supply and demand for the year ahead," he said.

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1 From Nussio et al., 2002. Scientia Agricola, 59, 3: 421 | 2 The effect of ionophores on feed intake by feedlot cattle, 1995, Gary Vogel, Lilly Research Laboratories, Canyon Texas
3 Stromberg et al 1982 Am J Vet Res. 43:583 | 4 Watkins et al, 1986 AgriPractice. 7:18-20

Online milk pricing tool launched

A NEW pricing tool for dairy farmers was launched at the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria annual conference in May. The online tool aims to bring transparency to the Australian milk market.

The free calculator provides farmers with an independent, transparent and credible source of farmgate milk prices and payment information.

It has been developed by independent milk services company Milk2Market. "We've combined industry experience, published price announcements and publicly available data to produce the best milk pricing tool available," general manager, commercial development, Richard Lange said.

UDV president Paul Mumford told the conference that although the UDV did not directly endorse commercial products, it had been really keen to see something like this developed.

Mr Lange told the conference the relationship between farmers and buyers had changed. "The milk supply chain has changed and the milk market has changed," he said.

The calculator had been years in the making. It would enable farmers to compare the payments they would receive from different processors and encouraged them to engage with dairy companies.

It would also enable farmers planning a change to their farm to calculate the impact of that change on the payments they would receive.

Mr Lange said there was an annual auc-



Richard Lange: The milk supply chain has changed and the milk market has changed.

tion for each farmer's milk and the calculator would enable each individual farmer to identify the payment system that best suited their production system.

To use the tool, farmers download an Excel spreadsheet and enter in details about their farm and production per month. They then emailed the spreadsheet and six minutes later received an email back showing the pricing from different companies collecting milk in their region.

Farmers can compare payment structures and pricing based on their individual farm system.

"Members across the supply chain as well as government and regulators have been calling for greater price transparency in the dairy industry," Mr Lange said. "Our goal is to make buying and selling milk better for everyone."

"This easy-to-use online tool is free and

gives farmers a customised gross annual income estimate based on an assessment of processor prices in their region."

The Milk Price Calculator is a pre-cursor to the launch of Milk2Market's Milk Exchange later this year.

The Milk Exchange will enable registered users to buy and sell milk directly via an online platform. "We expect the calculator tool will help buyers and sellers gain a better picture of the market ahead of trading on the new milk exchange," Mr Lange said.

The Milk Price Calculator compares milk payments of major selected companies in Victoria and NSW. Milk2Market plans to extend the service to all states (South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania).

For more information and to access the Calculator visit <<https://milk2market.com.au/milk-calculator/>>.

◀ Australia, looked to shore up supply in northern Victoria by offering farmers there a choice of contracts.

In a letter to suppliers, its national milk supply manager said the company was offering its Victorian and Tasmanian suppliers an overall weighted average opening price of \$6.85/kg MS,

including a sign-on incentive. The supermarket drought payments would be on top of this price.

Mr Morrow also announced a new option for northern Victorian farmers, which it said reflected the fact its northern Victorian milk now helped supply the daily fresh milk markets in

both NSW and Queensland. The new pricing structure is flatter, delivering a substantial increase in cashflow for July to December.

It will be benchmarked against the higher prices offered by the company to its NSW and Queensland suppliers. D

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Dennington always in the firing line

- Key points**
- ✓ Fonterra closes south-west Victorian factory
 - ✓ Blames reduced supply due to drought
 - ✓ Loss of contract and suppliers also a factor

By Marian Macdonald

THE fate of Fonterra's factory at Dennington in south-west Victoria was almost certainly already sealed long before drought and dwindling milk supplies left it running dry.

Fonterra announced in May it would close the factory by the end of November, with the loss of about 100 jobs. The company blamed the closure on falling Australian milk production, which it said had led to excess processing capacity across the industry.

But the 110-year-old factory was showing its age when, in January last year, Fonterra announced it would invest \$8.6 million in a new packing line.

The money, Fonterra Australia announced, was part of "...a capacity expansion program worth around \$165m across seven of Fonterra Australia's sites, all of which are at peak capacity".

Fonterra was riding high on the back of an aggressive recruitment drive offering farmers a bonus of 40 cents a kilogram of milk solids or around \$50,000 over the year for average-sized farms. The bonus came without strings attached for farmers who were new to Fonterra and was sorely needed by existing suppliers. Many were still locked into supplying Fonterra as they repaid loans taken by 40 per cent of suppliers in the wake of the May 2016 "clawback".

Fonterra grew its milk supply by around 400 million litres that season but almost as quickly as milk had flood-

ed into Fonterra, it flowed out again. The company released figures in May showing an 18pc decline in milk intake for the nine months to March 31, 2019, nearly triple the 6.4pc fall in national production reported by Dairy Australia.

In a March 29 email sent to Australian suppliers, Fonterra's Matt Watt wrote: "...drought conditions and heightened competition for milk have led to lower milk volumes which is impacting our business performance. Lower volumes mean we have had limited ability to capture additional value to pass through to farmers."

Those two sentences rang alarm bells for prominent Colac, Vic, dairy farmer Mark Billing. "It reminded me of what happened to Murray Goulburn and made me worry about Fonterra's ability to pay a competitive price," Mr Billing said.

"With national production shrinking to 8 billion litres, one of the processor's got to go — they can't all operate at 60pc capacity. With Fonterra's reputation the worst in the industry, it's likely to lose even more supply."

A member of the Bonlac Supply Company (BSC) when the 2016 dairy crisis erupted, Mr Billing understands Fonterra's position better than most.

"This season is going to be a turning point for Fonterra in Australia," he said. "It's lost more milk than any other processor that can't be accounted for just in terms of drought, and I'm sure more suppliers are getting ready to go."

Fonterra's decision to follow Murray Goulburn's milk price cut bothered the former Bonlac board member. "The BSC benchmark was used as an excuse," he said. "Fonterra was given several opportunities to vary the milk price earlier in the season but didn't



Norm McCosker, Illowa, Vic, with a wagonette identical to the cart used by his parents to transport milk in cans to the Dennington factory. Photo by Rachael Houlihan.

because they were afraid of losing supply.

"We've seen the impact of those decisions at farm level losing staff, cutting costs and decreasing production and now that's starting to flow onto other parts of the supply chain."

It was bad timing for Dennington, which recently lost a contract with Nestlé, held since the factory changed hands in 2005.

An industry veteran described the Dennington plant as "a very old, inefficient and labour-intensive plant that's incredibly expensive to run".

"The Nestlé contract was really all that kept it viable," the source, who wished to remain anonymous, said. "While it's very sad news, the loss of the Nestlé contract made Dennington's closure inevitable."

Still, the announcement came as a shock for farmer-supplier Norm McCosker. "It's one of the best factories going, they've just spent millions on it over the past year," Mr McCosker said.

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Coles to buy milk directly from farmers

Key points

- ✓ Coles to buy milk directly from farmers
- ✓ Saputo to process milk for Coles
- ✓ Offering longer-term contracts

By Andrew Marshall and Marian Macdonald

COLES is set to unwind its house brand milk contract arrangements with dairy processors, instead locking in direct purchase deals with individual southern farmers. Saputo Australia will continue to pack the milk for the supermarket chain's discount lines, which have sold for \$1.10 a litre since March.

The retailer confirmed it would start sourcing milk directly from farmers in Victoria and southern and central NSW from July.

Coles was also "looking for opportunities" to expand its direct buying footprint to other milk-producing regions.

It is even weighing up direct purchases for milk destined for other dairy products it sells, which would replicate a contentious buying model adopted by British supermarkets.

The supermarket chain believed its new offer would deliver more value to farmers and improved price certainty into the future.

The direct sourcing deal would provide longer-term contracts of one to three years. The contracts would lock in guaranteed prices to farmers for two years and a floor price in the third year with flexible supply options.

Coles previously relied on dairy processors, notably Saputo and Norco in eastern Australia, to divert a portion of their total milk pool into its private label milk supply contracts, leaving the dairy companies to set the farmgate price with producers.

Saputo took over a 10-year contract established by Murray Goulburn when the co-operative opened two new milk processing plants in Sydney and Melbourne in 2014.

Back to the drawing board

A farmer, who attended meetings with Coles and its representative The Milk Department but who wished to remain anonymous, told *Stock & Land* in June that The Milk Department had approached a number of farms with milking herds of at least 500 cows.

Coles and its representative The

Milk Department held two rounds of closed meetings with dairy farmers just days apart.

The supermarket giant hopes to attract 110 million litres directly from Victorian farms, favouring those in south-west Victoria and parts of Gippsland close to Melbourne.

The farmer said Coles appeared willing to go "back to the drawing board" after farmers at the meeting called the offer inadequate. They said Coles was offering Victorian farmers a price "in the high sixes" per kilogram of milk solids for the four months from September to December and "the mid-sevens" for the remaining eight months.

A supermarket spokesperson told *Stock & Land* that "Coles will seek a flatter supply curve to enable it to provide milk for the fresh milk market".

Asked whether Coles agreements would be for fixed volumes of a farmer's milk and, if so, what degree of flexibility would be allowed, the spokesperson answered simply "yes".

'The final price for year three would be set at the end of the contract's first year taking into account the then current market conditions.'

In the first round of meetings, The Milk Department told farmers there would be a greater weighting on fat than protein but the difference was not quantified.

In a bid to deliver greater certainty for farmers, Coles is offering farmers a fixed price for up to two years, with a guaranteed minimum price for a third year.

"The final price for year three would be set at the end of the contract's first year taking into account the then current market conditions," the Coles spokesperson said.

Farmers at the meeting reportedly demanded Coles provide guaranteed pricing in the third year of the contract.

"The supermarket must know what it can sell the milk for, so they should be able to say what they can pay for it," the farmer said. "Farmers at the meeting considered that to be a deal

breaker, and I don't think Coles had anticipated that response, so they said they would go and reconsider."

It is understood there will be a different pricing structure for farms in New South Wales. While Coles made no mention of productivity and growth incentives or volume charges, they said a \$75 stop charge would apply.

Milk quality would include a limit of 200,000 cells/millilitre and farmers at the meetings were left with the impression that The Milk Department plans to offer field support.

Social licence requirements

Asked what obligations Coles would place on farmers in terms of animal welfare and social licence reporting, it reportedly told farmers it did not plan to "become an authority in this area" but declined to discuss the issue with the *Stock & Land*.

Following the first meeting with The Milk Department, the farmer said he suspected Coles would need to woo farmers in order to reach its supply target.

"I think they've underestimated how much farmers dislike Coles," he said. "The feeling I got at the meeting was that farmers associate Coles with the 'Down, down' campaign that did so much damage to the industry and they've neither forgiven nor forgotten that. They will need to pay quite a premium to attract milk and I don't think they're there yet."

The farmer told *Stock & Land* that the number of farmers attending the second meeting with Coles had shrunk considerably. "Two-thirds of the people who came to the first meeting with The Milk Department weren't there for the meeting with Coles," they said.

On the other hand, the farmer was pleasantly surprised by the willingness of Coles staff members present at the second round of meetings to hear farmer concerns.

"I was blown away by their approach," the farmer said. "I expected a big corporate mentality where you just take what you're given."

"The person in charge said that at this point, Coles does not have a relationship with any dairy primary producers and they didn't really have a feeling for what's been going on at farm level. They could be just very good at doing a spin job but I was very impressed."



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Residency pathway for overseas workers

- Key points**
- ✓ Farm fills gaps in workforce with overseas labour
 - ✓ Permanent residency pathway offers opportunity to retain skilled workers
 - ✓ Helps strengthen local community

DAIRY farmers now have more opportunities to attract and retain staff, after skilled overseas workers employed under a Dairy Industry Labour Agreement were made eligible for permanent residency.

The changes were successfully progressed by the Australian Dairy Farmers, working closely with Dairy Australia, making the Australian dairy industry more attractive to skilled international labour.

The pathway gives dairy farmer Kristen Clark, from Finley, NSW, the opportunity to retain her skilled overseas worker who has developed a strong understanding of her farming system.

The fifth-generation dairy farmer milks 900 cows in the Riverina region alongside her mother, Helen and sister, Donna, producing more than eight million litres per year.

Kristen employs four family members on the farm, as well as five long-term local staff.

With farm workers increasingly hard to find in her local area, Kristen has employed a farm hand from Guatemala for the past five years under a temporary visa through a Dairy Industry Labour Agreement.

"We have always struggled to build our workforce and fill positions by getting locals on the farm," Ms Clark said.

"We fill the gap with overseas workers, but the issue is that is they're only able to be here for a limited time and they're generally unskilled.

"The person we've employed has a built her skill base working for us — when she finishes up, we have to start from scratch with someone else."

For each new farm worker Kristen employs, she estimates the cost to her farm business to be about \$2000 in recruitment and training.

As well as reducing the cost of hiring new farm workers, the permanent



Dairy farmer Kristen Clark with farm hand Janeth Ventura on their farm in Finley, NSW.

'We have always struggled to build our workforce and fill positions by getting locals on the farm.'

residency pathway gives Kristen the opportunity to give her staff more training, building their capacity to learn new skills as her mum takes a step back from hands-on tasks.

Kristen also sees permanent residency as an opportunity for her overseas workers to get more involved in the local community.

"We want to employ people who live in our community, so we can give back to our community, but there will always be gaps to fill," she said.

"People with permanent residency can fill that gap, because they get involved in the community as well."

Farm hand Janeth Ventura is excited by the opportunities a permanent residency pathway will bring for her family and her dairy career.

The 36-year-old has raised her two children, aged 3 and 6, in Australia and hopes a permanent residency pathway will allow her to continue living in rural Australia, creating more stability for her family and her role on-farm.

"My father had a small dairy farm in my home country, so I'm in my element with this job and I love working with Australian dairy cows," Ms Ventura said.

"I think working in Australia has improved my skills — I've learned new abilities because the farming system is so different."

Through a permanent residency pathway, Ms Ventura hopes to upskill and pursue further training.

To vary existing labour agreements or apply for a new labour agreement to enable a pathway to permanent residency for their valued staff, farmers should email: <labour.agreement.section@homeaffairs.gov.au>.

More information on the Labour Agreement can be found at the People in Dairy website at <www.thepeopleindairy.org.au/visa>.

DairyPath develops next generation

- Key points**
- ✓ New Dairy Australia pilot program gives young farmers pathway to success
 - ✓ Eleven young people between 18 and 35 took part
 - ✓ All participants have now mapped out their careers and personal development in dairy

A NEW Dairy Australia extension program is guiding the next generation of dairy leaders to forge long-term careers in the Australian dairy industry.

Eleven young dairy enthusiasts from throughout Australia, aged between 18 and 35, have been taking part in Dairy Australia's 18-month DairyPath pilot program.

The program aims to turn ambition into knowledge by providing early career farmers with a tangible career progression framework.

Dairy Australia's Sarah Thompson



DairyPath pilot program participants: (back row) Clare Slater, Jessie Weaver, Bryana McNamara, Pieter van Jaarsveld, Kristen Davis, Sally Downie, Ashleigh Road, (front row) Jeremy Miller, Tim Bradley, Owen Daley and Taylor Hamilton.

said the pilot program had already delivered positive outcomes for the industry by giving young farmers a pathway to success.

"These are passionate young peo-

ple who have bright futures ahead of them, and we want to ensure they have meaningful, long-term careers in the Australian dairy industry," Ms Thompson said.

**"It was a regular day.
I'd had ambulance duty the night before.
I knew the terrain but it was dark,
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David Elder
Bethanga farmer



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◀ Development program

Participants are equipped with the tools they need to map out their career and personal development, and connect with programs, workshops, conferences and events at both a national and regional level.

All participants are currently working in roles on-farm, ranging from farm hands, to herd managers, to lessees, while one participant works in the herd improvement industry.

Each participant was required to submit an application demonstrating their enthusiasm for the industry, their passion for personal development, their desire to give back to the industry, and their leadership abilities.

The program started in May 2018 with participants creating a learning and development plan, before coming together every six months for face-to-face workshops in Melbourne run by an experienced facilitator.

Between workshops, the group is supported remotely through Facebook chats, regular email conversations and webinars.

At the conclusion of the program, participants will present to the Australian Dairy Farmers National Council in November on the highlights of their DairyPath journey, and the outcomes of their involvement.

As well as attending major dairy events and connecting with Young Dairy Networks in their regions, the group has had the opportunity to visit farms in other dairy regions and be exposed to a range of farming sizes and systems.

"When this program wraps up, participants will have a clear picture of where they are heading in the dairy industry and how to get there," Ms Thompson said.

"While this was a pilot program, its early success means we are excited to see what the future holds for the program."

Dairy Australia will continue to update farmers on opportunities to apply for the program in the future, after a review of the pilot has been completed. **D**

Young dairy farmers can find out more about Dairy Australia's education and careers programs by visiting dairyaustralia.com.au/farm/people/dairy-education-and-careers.

Bega dairy lessee strengthens involvement



Ashleigh Rood with husband Michael on their share farm at Bega, NSW.

BEGA, NSW, lessee Ashleigh Rood found the confidence to become a leader in her local dairy community through Dairy Australia's DairyPath program.

The 29-year-old started her dairy journey in 2011, when she met her husband Michael, then a herd manager for a 2000-cow dairy farm in central-west New South Wales.

The couple soon set their sights on owning their own farm.

"I started to ask how we could do this ourselves — how do we as young people come into the industry and forge our way forward?" Mrs Rood said.

It wasn't long until she would have the opportunity to begin her own farming operation, as she and her husband entered into a lease agreement in 2012 and began to milk their own cows.

After getting familiar with the practical realities of running her own farm, Mrs Rood began seeking opportunities to move forward and plan for her future in the dairy industry.

"I love what I do and the industry is challenging — you always need to be seeking opportunities moving forward," she said.

Mrs Rood applied to participate in DairyPath for the chance to strengthen her involvement in the industry.

"I want to be successful in this industry and I want this to remain a profitable industry," she said.

Through the program, she became chair of her local dairy development group and was recently asked to speak at a dairy symposium in her hometown of Bega.

"DairyPath has been the catalyst in it all," she said.

"I do sincerely hope this program continues in the future because it is so, so important for young, aspiring dairy leaders."

New opportunities for Murray farmer



Jessie Weaver hard at work on an Undera, Victoria, dairy farm.

NORTHERN Victorian dairy farmer Jessie Weaver said the DairyPath program changed her life by connecting her with a range of new opportunities in the wider dairy industry.

The 25-year-old farm hand took on a role milking cows part-time at a 250-cow farm in NSW during her university studies.

As her passion for dairy grew through her work on-farm, Ms Weaver took a break from her studies to focus on farming full-time, eventually moving to Undera, Victoria, to work on a 1200-cow farm.

While she was sure about her love for dairy farming, she felt less certain about how to turn ambition into reality.

"I had no plan for the future before DairyPath," she said. "I had no idea what the opportunities were in the industry beyond milking cows."

DairyPath provided Ms Weaver with an opportunity to build her skills and better understand the range of opportunities and career pathways available to her in the dairy industry.

By participating in the program, she was able to create a five-year plan, setting her sights on either starting share farming or starting an agribusiness degree by 2021.

"Through DairyPath, I am so much more confident and so much more enthusiastic about getting out of the bed in the morning," Ms Weaver said.

"I now have goals, I know where I'm going and I have the motivation and drive to get there."



Jeremy Miller on a northern NSW dairy farm.

Lismore farmer gains invaluable insight

NORTHERN NSW up-and-coming dairy farmer Jeremy Miller used Dairy Australia's DairyPath program to take the next step in his journey to owning his own farm.

With a strong focus on personal development, the 24-year-old saw the program as an opportunity to plan for the future and build his skills.

"I think any young person coming through dairy and wanting to pursue it as a career should have the opportunity to go through DairyPath," Mr Miller said.

"It challenges you and shows you where you want to go by exposing you to different people and teaching you life lessons — professionally and personally.

"You get to know other young people through the program, who for me have become friends for life."

Driven by his desire for a fast-paced, hands-on work environment, Mr Miller began working on a dairy farm during his university studies.

His passion for herd management and

love of milking saw him eventually pursue a full-time farm hand role.

"I'm a person who loves to be on the go all the time, and I always need something to do," he said.

"Dairy farming always gives you something to do, and there's never been a dull moment."

Through DairyPath, Mr Miller was able to plan his next steps in the industry, including pursuing a lease or share farm arrangement within the next five years and eventually owning his own farm.

The program honed his knowledge of the industry and broadened his contact base, while also teaching him the value of work-life balance.

"The main thing I've gotten out of it is teaching myself to be who I am, not change myself for others, and that life's not all about work," he said.

"Dairy farming is always intense and if I want to be in the industry long-term, I need to learn the value of time management and work-life balance."

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Setting a meat standard for dairy beef

Key points

- ✓ Meat Standards Australia looking to establish index for Holstein and Jersey carcasses
- ✓ Holsteins largest breed in US beef feedlots
- ✓ Standards may help establish better markets for product

By Marian Macdonald

AUSTRALIANS may see Holstein burgers or Jersey steaks on the menu in the next few years thanks to new research.

A Meat Standards Australia (MSA) index for the two big dairy breeds is on the cards, which would allow dairy steers to measure up against traditional beef breeds such as Angus.

The MSA is Australia's benchmark for meat quality and predicts the tenderness, juiciness, flavour and overall liking of each carcass across 39 different cuts of meat.

MSA grading for Holsteins and Jerseys is well overdue, according to Dairy Beef Project leader Adjunct Professor Ian Lean.

"Holsteins are the largest breed in beef feedlots in the USA," Professor Lean said.

"Despite that, there hasn't been an MSA for dairy cattle, which has discounted their value in Australia."

MSA pathways committee chairman Rod Polkinghorne is a former producer, feedlotter and butcher shop owner who said the discounting of dairy beef was something of a vicious circle.

"Meat processors generally believe that dairy beef doesn't yield and that's driven by the carcasses they've come into contact with," Mr Polkinghorne said.



Meat Standards Australia Pathways Committee chairman Rod Polkinghorne says the discounting of dairy beef is something of a vicious circle.

'It pains me to admit it but science says they (Holsteins) are highly efficient feed converters and can even eat better than traditional beef.'

"The dairy farmer's top priority is the milking herd, next come replacement heifers and the steers are a distant third.

"They tend to get left down the back of the property and are sold as two-year-olds that are six feet tall and one foot wide.

"When that's the image in the mind of a processor, what price will he offer? About the same as a chopper cow.

"Feeding that steer like you'd feed an Angus doesn't stack up, so you can't blame a busy dairy farmer for doing anything differently.

"And that's how you end up with the vicious cycle."

But, Mr Polkinghorne said things could indeed be different.

"It pains me to admit it but science says they are highly efficient feed converters and can even eat better than traditional beef," he said.

"Twelve to 14-month-old, well-fed dairy steers should be among the highest grading cattle in the country.

"I hope this trial provides processors with some confidence that not all dairy steers are of low quality."

The Dairy Beef Project is owned by Charles Sturt University, Meat & Livestock Australia, Teys Australia, Northern Cooperative Meat Co, Dairy Australia and Manildra with Dr Michael



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Campbell in the lead.

Its first trial involves 770 dairy cattle, including around 300 vealers, 300 cattle finished in feedlots and 30 head on pastures.

Trial sites are located in Gippsland, south-west Victoria and the Riverina.

Different feeding regimes will be tested for their viability and meat quality outcomes.

The first, which aims to reflect widespread current practice, will leave the steers on pasture and aim to achieve growth of 0.7-0.8 kilograms of body-weight gain a day.

The second approach integrates supplementary feed if needed in order to fuel 1.2-1.3kg/day growth.

The most intensive regime, mirroring practices in countries such as Spain and Portugal, will see the steers reach 550kg liveweight or 300kg carcase weight by 12 months.

A total of 4500kg of cuts from vealers with liveweights of about 280kg have already been cooked and served to consumer panel members.

The results are expected next year but Professor Lean said the project team had already learned from the process.

"We expect them to be a bit variable in quality but we have discovered more about the optimal treatment of dairy veal," he said.

"Achieving fat standards was difficult and they were generally lighter.

"We also know a bit more about the way the temperature should be taken down for freezing."

Prices were disappointing but to be expected given the flood of cattle on the market caused by drought conditions.

"In the long run, it will be important to establish targeted supply chain relationships," he said.

Dairy veal does not need to be milk fed and Professor Lean believes the welfare challenges associated with international veal production can be overcome.

"It seems illogical in a world screaming out for protein that we don't have a good way of managing dairy bull calves," he said.

"Dairy beef could provide a better life than disappearing from the system at a few days old. They could represent another 600,000 animals providing high quality beef."

He said Jerseys had the potential to be a "smaller animal that marbles for a really boutique market" but that quality would be highly dependent on the way the beef was grown.



Dairy steers in a feedlot.

Mr Polkinghorne said the ultimate aim of the Dairy Beef Project was to provide both producers and processors with guidelines.

"We'll be answering questions about how much they eat, how much they grow, and what they're like to eat if you rear them in different ways," he said. "Sure, the needle on the econom-

ics will move every day depending on the cost of feed and the prices being fetched at market but you will be able to do your budgets and decide which approach suits your system.

"The Dairy Beef Project aims to address welfare and economic needs for the dairy industry. We want to make sure there's a quid in it, too." D

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UDV president slams failure to help

Key points

- ✓ UDV president questions commitment of processors, retailers, government and industry organisations
- ✓ Calls for groups to step up and work with farmers
- ✓ Dairy Plan vital part of finding pathway for future

By Carlene Dowie

UNITED Dairyfarmers of Victoria president Paul Mumford has slammed processors, retailers, government and industry organisations for not doing enough to help dairy farmers.

In a hard-hitting address to the organisation's annual general meeting in Melbourne in May, Mr Mumford challenged all sectors to do more to alleviate the pressure on farmers.

He later told the *Australian Dairy-farmer* farmers were exhausted to a point where they were unable to continue in the future. "We've got to change that," he said.



Paul Mumford: The roles that processors play here in Victoria must be addressed.

He pointed in particular at processors and retailers for not sharing enough of their profits with farmers.

"Essentially they are protecting their own nest," he said. "They are part of the food chain from paddock to plate and they haven't realised the value of the supply chain."

"They are looking after their own little piece of their own little investment; we've got to start looking at the whole system."

He questioned why milk processors, who were giving signals of strong pricing for next season as they chased milk in the face of falling on-farm pro-

Police chief says vegan activism is being taken seriously

VICTORIA'S top farm crime police officer has told the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria annual conference that force command took a serious view on animal activism, trespass and protests.

Victoria Police livestock theft and farm crime head of practice Superintendent Peter Greaney told the conference vegan activism, such as what occurred in April, was not going to go away.

In April, activists blocked streets in Melbourne and protested outside Victorian abattoirs.

"In regards to those overt activities, police can get there, en masse, and deal with them," Superintendent Greaney said.

"It's the covert acts that I worry about, and that's where I need your help, to help us police those particular acts."

He said Victoria Police's Deputy Commissioner Shane Patton was passionate about combating farm crime and animal activism.

"He is being briefed on what we are doing at the moment, what we can do in the future to change legislation, in regards to protecting you, your families, your employees and livelihoods," he said.



Victoria Police livestock theft and farm crime head of practice Superintendent Peter Greaney says vegan activism is being taken seriously.

"There is a whole suite of laws we can use and we will use."

He said in the first instance, farmers should always contact the police. While some stations were not staffed 24 hours a day, farmers could always call triple zero.

"If you see someone on the property that shouldn't be there, call the police and tell them there are people on your

property that don't have the authority to be there and ask officers to come out," he said.

Farmers were also in their rights to ask people, who had not been invited onto the property, to leave.

UDV president Paul Mumford said the dairy industry must respond to the threat of farm invasions, with a strong, co-ordinated strategy.

"Animal activists disrupt legal businesses, risk animal health by breaching biosecurity, and use force and intimidation in pursuit of their personal beliefs," Mr Mumford said.

"The dairy industry must respond to the threat of farm invasions with a strong, co-ordinated strategy."

UDV members voted unanimously for the organisation to 'lobby to ensure that harsher penalties are put in place to deter animal activists from partaking in activities that ... put stock and farming families at risk'.

Mr Mumford said he would ensure the UDV was closely consulted, during the Victorian Parliamentary inquiry into animal activists.

—Andrew Miller

duction, had not lifted current season prices.

"The roles that processors play here in Victoria must be addressed," he said. "A good industry is one built on trust, transparency and a 'fair go' for all."

"Since 2016 our relationship has been fractured and the wounds have not healed. We are looking for a show of goodwill; recognition from you of the importance of having a strong relationship with your farmers."

"Will you step up and make a genuine commitment to work hand-in-hand with us to take our industry forward?"

Mr Mumford also slammed retailers and said the recent rise in \$1 a litre milk was not enough to help farmers.

"We've got to look at whole dairy cabinet," he said. "It is just not the 10 cents a litre (rise)."

"That is misinforming the consumer ... allowing them to think that 10 cents is the saviour to the dairy industry. That is not right; we have to look at the \$6 cheese, the cream, the butter."

Mr Mumford said irrigators in northern Victoria, who had shown extreme efficiencies, appeared to be continually asked to deliver more to

'A good industry is one built on trust, transparency and a fair go for all.'

the Murray Darling Basin Plan when other states did not show the same technological improvements or commitment to efficiency.

"I am disappointed to say that our farmers and their communities in the north have been let down by industry, processors and governments," he said.

Mr Mumford asked governments if they would commit to engaging directly with farmers.

"Where are you?" he said. "Will you commit to ... getting out to the farms in the regions to see first-hand what impact these conditions are having on family farm businesses and their communities and work with us to deliver solutions?"

He also criticised Dairy Australia for not taking greater action to prepare farmers for this situation.

"What happened to our industry preparedness?" he asked. "Why were our levy investments not better targeted to deliver the preparedness required?"

Mr Mumford also questioned Australian Dairy Farmers' approach to long-term advocacy challenges, such as those posed by animal activists.

"Are you a best practice advocacy organisation well placed to deliver for members?" he asked.

Mr Mumford said the new Dairy Plan must provide more than a website and a nice brochure. The plan must deliver on its promise.

It was vital every dairy farmer across the state was engaged in the Dairy Plan. "I highly recommend everyone have their say in the Dairy Plan," he said.

"If the Dairy Plan says the UDV has to have its head chopped off and a new structure formed, then that's what has to happen."

"We've got to look at what the benefit for the dairy industry is and not just my role or ADF role or Dairy Australia role."

"We've got to look at the big picture and then enact it." D

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Same price issues, different country

Key points

- ✓ Smaller farmers being squeezed out in US
- ✓ Milk price key issue
- ✓ Consumers not interested in paddock-to-plate concept

By **Samantha Townsend**

In the Netherlands, dairy herds are kept in barns most of the year. In the United States dairy herd sizes are from one extreme to the other with small farms of 40 to those that milk thousands.

In Canada the dairy industry has phosphate regulations. And in Australia it has a diverse dairy industry from pasture-based to total mixed rations, from seasonal calves to year-round calving while dealing with adverse weather conditions.

But all countries have one thing in common — they face the challenge of prices at the farm gate.

In the US, small dairy farmers such as Ed Gibson from Edmar Dairy in Kentucky, are facing the fact they might be the last generation in the



Ed Gibson from Edmar Dairy in Kentucky.
Photo: Samantha Townsend

family to milk. It's a dilemma being faced by many small dairy farmers in the US who are being pushed out by

large companies because they can't compete with cheaper operation costs. While they try to find efficiencies, they say it's getting harder as returns remain low.

Mr Gibson, who milks about 50 cows, introduced a robotic milker in 2014 to "make life easier", but even that hadn't helped bring better returns.

"Milk prices have been hard in the last five years sitting at \$17 per 100 pounds of milk," he said.

"At the end of the day bigger farms can make milk cheaper than smaller farmers, so long term there is no optimism."

In the short term, he has diversified into cheese products made from his milk to value add. He was able to do this through a government grant of US\$90,000, of which half has to be paid back.

But even that has been hard as US consumers were not committed to the paddock-to-plate concept. "I'm fourth generation, but I might be the last and I'm not alone," he said.

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US coffee milk with downunder twist

WHAT happens when you can't find a coffee fix? You make it yourself. That's what former Queensland dairy farmer Dave Temple did when he created Australian-style Thunder Coffee Milk.

Mr Temple, who is now based in Florida, could not find decent coffee milk in America that could match what he had tasted back home. "Coffee milk is so popular in Australia but it's unavailable in the US and you couldn't get anything with the same taste, so that's why we came up with the idea," Mr Temple said. "We came up with the name Thunder from Down Under because Americans love Australia."

Mr Temple teamed up with Ed Henderson, a multi-generation dairy farmer who sells milk directly to consumers in Ohio. He said the original plan was to value add their own milk but processing capacity,

logistics and costs steered them in the direction of simply purchasing their milk requirements.

"It's good quality, a good story (progressive animal welfare audit system in place) and it is low cost," he said.

Mr Temple is a second-generation dairy farmer who grew up in Queensland and while at university had the opportunity to spend six months on a dairy farm in Florida. Due to changes in the dairy industry in Australia, he moved to Florida to dairy in 2003 where he, his wife Gina and two daughters Emma and Sarah now milk 1500 cows.

When asked how different dairying in the US compared with Australia, Mr Temple said it was "more intensive, more price volatility but more opportunity".

"We see the world changing around us,



Former Queensland dairy farmer Dave Temple teamed up with Ed Henderson to create coffee milk with an Australian twist in the US. Photo by Samantha Townsend.

more and more food being bought online," Mr Temple said. "This trend along with the increased ease of inventory management and customer convenience meant it fit our project very well and hopefully also the market."

—Samantha Townsend

Fourth-generation farmer Haley Fisher sold the last of family's dairy herd in February as the dairy was "bleeding their family".

She is now an instructor at a mobile dairy that teaches children about where their milk comes from.

But while prices are low at the farm-gate, international figures show de-

mand for milk globally is on the rise in many countries.

At the Alltech One19 conference at Lexington, Kentucky, Torsten Hemme from IFCN, a global dairy related research network, said global milk demand growth had risen 2.3 per cent (19 million tonnes).

Dr Hemme said the driver for this

demand growth was more people, one billion since 2007 and more milk consumed per person each year (16 kilograms).

Samantha Townsend attended the Alltech ONE19 conference in Lexington after being awarded runner-up for the Alltech inaugural leadership in journalism award.

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From dairy to doorstep in eight hours

IMAGINE being a city consumer and having fresh milk on the doorstep within eight hours of milking. That's the case for Parag Milk Foods, the largest dairy in India, which is capitalising on the milk evolution in the country.

With cow's milk production growing rapidly in India and demand for dairy rising at the same pace, Parag Milk Foods has developed a premium farm-to-home brand 'Pride of Cows' from its own Bhagyalakshmi dairy farm. The premium milk is sold with the message: "we love our cows you will love their milk".

Every morning the cows start off the day with music and a morning prayer. The cows are checked three times a day, they have rubber mats and a nutritionist planned diet.

Parag is the first family farm in India to adopt natural practices on their livestock with homeopathic remedies. "They are the most pampered cows in the country," Parag Milk Foods senior vice-president strategy Akshali Shah told the Alltech One19 conference in Lexington, Kentucky. Even though India is the world's largest producer of dairy, Ms Shah said the yield per cow was one of the lowest at 1500 litres per lactation.

Parag Milk Foods strived to improve this situation using the Happy Cow treatment with zero human intervention to their herd of more than 3000 Holstein and Friesian cows. "Happy cows produce better milk," she said.

But Parag's Pride of Cows brand is not accessible to everyone. The premium milk is accessed through a subscription model where customers have to be referred. In eight years since its inception, the Pride of Cows fresh farm milk has been delivered to 45,000 customers from influential socialites to celebrities like Bollywood stars.

The process was entirely mechanised



Parag Milk Foods strategy sales and marketing vice-president Akshali Shah has the most pampered dairy herd in India. Photo: Parag Milk Foods

and milk was instantly pasteurised before it was delivered through cold storage, tracked and monitored via GPS to the company depot for local delivery in cold insulated bags.

The company now has a global footprint in Singapore and Dubai where the milk is airlifted every day. "It's worth three times the value of normal milk in India," she said.

While 20 per cent of the world's milk production comes from India, Ms Shah said Indian farmers treated it as a secondary income behind vegetables, wheat and rice.

"Unlike rest of the world where 90 per cent of milk is cows' milk, in India 45 per cent is cow and 55 per cent is buffalo milk," Ms Shah said. "But that trend is changing now. In the last five years now people see that it is better to keep cows as consumers are demanding cows' milk.

"What is driving that change is globalisation and scientific knowledge given to farmers."

She added there was a change in perception as people wanted convenience. But she said 85 per cent of the dairy industry was still unorganised, something that was also changing each year with eight per cent moving from unorganised dairy operations to organised.

An average farmer has two cows. Most farmers milk their cows in the backyard keeping 50 per cent for themselves and the remainder to companies. The price is usually set by the government and varies depending on the region.

Parag Milk Foods, which was founded in 1992, also manufactures products like ghee (butter oil), which is exports to more than 31 countries including Australia (exports are three per cent of Parag's business revenue).

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Uniting industry for a better future



**By John Brumby,
Independent Chair
of Australian Dairy Plan**

Key points

- ✓ Dairy industry facing major challenges
- ✓ Plan is about listening, gathering, analysing and synthesising ideas
- ✓ Workshops well attended and identified range of solutions



There have been huge increases in costs, which have made many farms unprofitable.

DAIRY is one of the great Australian success stories. As the country's third biggest rural industry, dairy is a significant contributor to our national and state economies. It is also fundamental to our regional economies, a major driver of jobs and regional prosperity.

But this is clearly an industry experiencing big challenges.

A situation analysis report produced by partner organisations of the Australian Dairy Plan to support discussion at recent consultation workshops, lays bare the impact of several tough years on the industry.

Market volatility, challenging conditions on farm and structural changes in the supply chain are some of the issues that have taken a toll on where the industry stood a decade ago.

The report also flags many positive factors that point toward a promising future if we can successfully address these current difficulties. It is vital that all sides now pull together to agree on a roadmap of priorities and actions, in order to reset the direction and confidence of the industry.

We not only need to be honest about these issues, but open to making difficult decisions and supporting real change if required.

The simple fact is that too many farmers are struggling to make a profit. There have been huge increases in costs, which have made many farms

unprofitable. The pressure on many farmers cannot be overestimated and this is driving the urgency of our work. Unfortunately, there is no short-term magic wand to fix these things and no one person has all the answers.

That's why we need to hear from everyone. There is a wealth of ideas and experience out there, and the Australian Dairy Plan is about listening, gathering, analysing and synthesising those ideas. Together with input from farmers, processors, retailers and other key stakeholders we are creating a roadmap towards a dairy industry that can be more profitable, more confident and more united.

I am delighted to be playing a role in the development of this plan.

The dairy industry has been a regular presence in my life and career — right through from my days on the family farm at Coleraine when dairy farms and butter factories were a feature of the agricultural landscape — to my time in federal and then state parliament.

As Minister for State and Regional Development in the Victorian Government, I helped support projects including cattle underpasses, irrigation upgrades, new investments in processing facilities and major additions to our research and development effort, like AgriBio at La Trobe University.

My role as Independent Chair of the plan is to bring the partner organisations together, get their thinking lined up into the longer term and to

meld this together with the views of farmers and service providers gathered at Australian Dairy Plan regional workshops. The four key dairy industry organisations — Dairy Australia, Australian Dairy Farmers, Australian Dairy Products Federation and the Gardiner Dairy Foundation — see an immense opportunity for a new single dairy industry strategic plan.

The workshops have been well attended and stimulated constructive debate, as well as a range of proposed solutions.

Challenges to profitability and industry structure are some of the common themes at these meetings.

Changing consumer expectations and product competition has been another consistent topic, along with difficulties in attracting people to the industry and the complexity of farming.

Views from broader industry beyond the farmgate will continue to be gathered over the coming weeks, with further discussion around how to respond to these challenges at a national workshop.

The Australian Dairy Plan report is due to be released later this year and it will inform the strategic plans of the four partner organisations. It is still possible to submit your views online and we encourage anyone who has yet to contribute to do so via dairyplan.com.au.

The Australian Dairy Situation Analysis is available to read at <https://www.dairyplan.com.au/situation-analysis>.

Experience life-changing for farmer

- Key points**
- ✓ Farmer takes part in Australian Rural Leadership Program
 - ✓ Great opportunity to develop skills and networks
 - ✓ Gardiner support helps develop leaders

GIPPSLAND dairy farmer Lauren Finger was told that if she was going to apply for one leadership program, Australian Rural Leadership Program should be it.

As she nears completion of the 15-month program, that advice has proven to be spot on. "I was told the program would be a life-changing experience and it has lived up to expectations," she said.

The Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) has taken Mrs Finger across Australia and beyond and has inspired her to continue forging a path as an emerging dairy industry leader.

She was supported by the Gardiner Dairy Foundation, which sponsors a Victorian dairy applicant each year.

Mrs Finger, her husband, Simon, and their eight staff run two farms while raising their children Matthew, 10, Claire, 9 and Rachael, 7.

From starting out share-farming 12 years ago with 200 cows, they currently milk 950 Friesian and crossbred cows on their home farm at Yannathan and a second leased farm at Labertouche.

Mrs Finger's mother grew up on a beef farm and even though she lived in the city, Mrs Finger always harboured visions of becoming a farmer.

She has fully embraced the dairy industry and as deputy chair of Gipps-Dairy is keen to further contribute to a positive future for the industry.

The ARLP brings together a group of about 30 people each year and aims to develop stronger leadership within the communities and industries of rural, regional and remote Australia. It takes place over five sessions across Australia and Asia.

Mrs Finger said the program was inspiring, with many great presenters, but much of its success came from learning with and from other participants.



Lauren Finger has embraced the opportunities offered by the Australian Rural Leadership Program.

'It is an amazing opportunity. There are very few scholarships of this magnitude and depth.'

"It's an interesting program; very much about learning by doing," she said. "You're with a group of 30 leaders from a range of industries all connected to rural, regional and remote Australia and you're put you through a diverse range of experiences. You learn from each other and from the situations you experience together."

Mrs Finger found many experiences had parallels with her own situation and could be taken home to apply to family, business, workplace and industry.

She has attended sessions in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, Toowoomba, Qld, Tasmania, and a two-week overseas program to Indonesia to learn about leadership in another country. The final session is in Canberra.

Participants are given challenges to

work on in a range of contexts and explore opportunities to become an intuitive leader, able to influence others and build positive relationships.

Mrs Finger said the program gave time for self-reflection. "It brings a much greater level of self-awareness of how your actions and behaviours are perceived and the impact you have on others," she said.

"By observing and working with different leaders, you can use techniques and tips from all of them and similarly you can observe things that might not be so useful. It helped me to be more aware of myself and others; how to get a better understanding of the motivations of others and how I can work with them."

The 15-month program is a big commitment, but Mrs Finger encourages other farmers to apply.

"It is an amazing opportunity. There are very few scholarships of this magnitude and depth," she said.

"I was very fortunate that the Gardiner Dairy Foundation continues to support the program. There is no doubt it is increasing the capabilities of leaders in the dairy industry."

Mrs Finger said dairy farmers could be challenged by the time commit-

ment but she urged them to find a way to make it happen.

"It's a huge program; it ends up about 60 days over 15 months but it's a life-changing opportunity; it's worth the effort," she said.

"You'll be amazed at how people step up to keep the farm running and the benefits are well worth it. It certainly makes me want to give back to the industry that has supported me."

Gardiner Dairy Foundation chief executive Dr Clive Noble said Gardiner's


sponsorship of Mrs Finger provided a pathway to develop her natural leadership skills.

"Supporting dairy farmers like Lauren has always been a high focus area for the Gardiner Dairy Foundation," Dr Noble said.

"Lauren has shown strength and determination through all her endeavours and truly embodies the makings of a fantastic leader and asset to the dairy industry.

"We know that with her training

through the ARLP, she will continue to make a positive contribution to the industry."

Applications for the 2020 ARLP scholarship are now open and will close in early August. Victorian dairy farmers interested in applying can visit <https://rural-leaders.org.au/our-programs/arl原因p/> to submit their application. 

Contact: Richard Meredith at the Gardiner Dairy Foundation, mobile 0438 553 052, email richard.meredith@gardinerfoundation.com.au.

Fresh insights for young dairy professionals

A FEW years ago, Peter Brennan's experience of country Victoria started and ended with a visit to Ballarat's Sovereign Hill.

As for the dairy industry, he knew it involved cows and milk but that's about all.

Today, the Monash University graduate who had spent most of his life in Melbourne's eastern suburbs is living happily in Korumburra, Vic, and making his mark on long-term planning for the dairy industry.

Mr Brennan's metamorphosis follows his three-month placement at Burra Foods as part of the Monash Industry Team Initiative (MITI) in partnership with the Gardiner Dairy Foundation.

"That was my first dairy experience," he admits. "I spent most of my life in Melbourne and didn't know anything about the dairy industry."

Mr Brennan was completing his Masters of Applied Econometrics when he successfully applied for the MITI program, which is supported by the Gardiner Dairy Foundation to build the capacity and capability of the Victorian dairy industry's people resources.

"My main focus is business forecasting, statistics and economic modelling and my undergraduate degree was chemical engineering, which is a large focus of the dairy industry," Mr Brennan said.

He initially applied for a job in San Francisco but when that didn't eventuate, Mr Brennan took up the MITI placement at Korumburra, helping Burra Foods to implement a human resource management program over the summer of 2016-17.

After the three-month placement, Mr Brennan was asked to stay on to finish implementing the program. He then successfully applied for a job as a supply planning analyst, a perfect fit with his training and a role that ensures Burra



Burra Foods supply planning analyst Peter Brennan is enjoying country hospitality and professional development opportunities.

Foods can meet long-term customer demands.

Mr Brennan admits moving from the city to the small Gippsland town was initially difficult. "It was a bit hard at the start and I was still driving back to Melbourne most weekends, but it meant I focused on work during the week, which was really good for my career," he said.

He's now spending more time in Korumburra, has joined a social barefoot lawn bowls competition with a co-worker and is enjoying the country hospitality and professional development opportunities.

"I've gained so much experience working at Burra; I've always been given lots of responsibility," he said.

"I've still got a lot to learn about the dairy industry but I know a lot more now than three or four years ago."

Mr Brennan has also discovered the benefits of country living and has no plans to leave Korumburra.

"I'm about to move house and I've had six people from work volunteer to help me move, and someone has called someone who's lending us a truck for the weekend free of charge," he said.

"That's what has made it really easy. I didn't know anyone at the start but everyone is so friendly."

The MITI program was expanded to include the dairy industry by the Gardiner Dairy Foundation and Monash University after manufacturers identified that they faced challenges in attracting highly skilled young employees to work in regionally based facilities. Engineers were particularly sought after.

Now in its fifth year the MITI program adds value to the Victorian dairy industry by exposing some of the best and brightest students to the sophistication of the Victorian dairy industry as a potential career prospect and helping to attract high-calibre individuals to work in sophisticated jobs in a thriving industry based in regional Victoria.

One woman's fight to make SW Vic safe

By Andrew Thomson

ON St Patrick's Day last year, a half-rotten, termite-infested wooden power pole snapped in the shrieking wind and fell over on Jack Kenna's dairy farm at The Sisters in south-west Victoria about 9pm.

It sparked a bushfire which screamed south in the night of March 17, resulting in the destruction of 18 homes and 45 sheds. There were no fatalities or serious injuries.

Jill Porter and her husband Brad live next door to Jack and Betty Kenna. Better people than that quartet you cannot find.

On that night in 2018, the fire jumped the road and headed through the Porter farm, burning 400 hectares and destroying 300 stud Jersey cows.

But, for Jill Porter the fight to recover from the fire has turned to anger. Anger that she and her neighbours, her community were burnt out due to energy giant Powercor's shamefully inadequate electricity infrastructure maintenance program. Anger that the



Jill Porter with the Jersey stud herd at The Sisters dairy farm she runs with her husband Brad.

state government's body to oversee the energy industry is a toothless tiger. And beyond all else, anger that a rotten pole was allowed to remain in place that then caused such a devastating bushfire, despite being checked

and cleared by Powercor only a couple of months before the blaze.

Mrs Porter has led a David v. Goliath battle against corporate giants, impervious government agencies, political machines, class action lawyers and insurance companies. While she reluctantly admits to being 50 years old this year, she says as a birthday present she never wants to see or hear from Powercor again.

But, she points out for that to happen the energy behemoth needs to start being responsible for its distribution network — and she adds they clearly are not. "I want them to be a decent corporate company. To own their mess, fix it and ensure that everyone in the south-west is safe," she said.

"Every day when I got to the dairy yard and see it's half empty, I see the impact of that fire. I know there's a better way to look at it, that the yard is half full, but it's tough.

"That yard is my husband's life passion, my marriage, I can't articulate that impact. Physically there's recovery, farm fences, but in terms of breeding we're still at the starting line.

"It takes a long time to build, it takes a long time to rebuild."

Mrs Porter said the fire caused a rethink after 23 years of dairy farming.

"You are forced to stop, step back and objectively assess what you want and don't want," she said.

After the fire it took months for Mrs Porter to turn her mind to what was next — that involved seeking compensation for losses caused by a failing



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'It takes a long time to build, it takes a long time to rebuild.'

Powercor asset. "We were being forced to beg for compensation, having to pay to obtain damages caused by no fault of our own," Mrs Porter said.

"I spent time reading, contacting and seeing people about the best choices for my family. I had some direct discussions with Powercor chief executive Tim Rourke and general manager of network Steven Neave.

"Initially I went along with it, but I soon realised we were not being treated decently. At that point I got angry."

Mrs Porter had discussions with lawyers and brokered the first-ever no-costs insurance payout deal, bypassing what has previously been the heavily litigated class-action industry that makes lawyers millions of dollars.

"Most of the anger has dissipated," she said.

"It's now frustration and disappointment that a community is being treated like this by a network distribution businesses (Powercor) and the state government," she said.

Draft report acknowledges need for change

POWER pole inspection changes, enacted in the wake of significant community criticism, were essential to ensuring quickly degrading, older infrastructure was adequately dealt with, a new report has found.

Energy Safe Victoria released a draft report in May into the state of wooden power poles in the south-west and its assessment of Powercor's approach to their inspection and maintenance.

Energy Safety director Paul Fearon said the report into the condition of the region's power poles was warranted given

the damage caused to the community by the fires.

"The community deserves assurance that action has been taken to mitigate the risk of pole failure that caused one of the major fires," Mr Fearon said.

"Community concerns around other poles in the region also had to be addressed.

"Powercor has made the required changes to their inspection and maintenance processes to adequately deal with those poles that are degrading at a faster rate."

"We have been let down by the independent safety regulator (Energy Safe Victoria). Why are they not advocating for me?

"Powercor is being allowed to continue its propaganda that everything is being done that needs to be done and done well. Naively, I believed there would be base requirements. That perspective has changed."

After finding a see-through power pole, Mrs Porter contracted an independent firm in November to conduct checks on her Sparrow Spur line power poles.

The results were stunning. The poles were "degraded".

"It was not surprising. Visually they looked poor. The report categorically tells you the state of those poles," she said.

"The Powercor response on the Monday was to assure us about the integrity of the poles and saying they were coming for a visit. By Wednesday they were not coming and on the Sunday eight poles were replaced.

"There was a lack of respect in that short process."

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Campaign wins hearts and minds

Key points

- ✓ New campaign aims to lift consumer trust
- ✓ Features farmers talking about how they care about environment and animals
- ✓ Consumers able to ask questions via website

LAUNCHED earlier this year, the new Dairy Australia proactive approach to communications, called Dairy Matters, has achieved widespread media coverage, shining a light on dairy, demonstrating it's a responsible industry that understands consumers' concerns.

Designed to drive consumer trust in the industry and dairy products, the campaign is being delivered through ads featuring dairy farmers running across television, cinema and the web, as well as interactive online and community engagement activities.

Dairy Australia's communications strategy manager Glenys Zucco said farmers might have already noticed the ads, which often ran in prime time on television, highlighting the importance of dairy to the Australia community.

"The ads show how the dairy industry is focused on sharing our industry values and standards, by letting dairy farmers do the talking about how they

Support the campaign by:

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- Liking and sharing Dairy Matters Facebook posts.
- Picking up a communications resource kit from a local Regional Development Program.

care about for the environment, their animals and the products they produce," Ms Zucco said.

Along with television, the campaign has placed farmers and product stories in high-profile online media publications such as *The Guardian* and *Mamamia*.

Ms Zucco said while it was still important to promote dairy's nutritional value, the new approach was necessary to keep pace with the changing expectations of society around issues such as animal welfare, climate change and the industry's long-term sustainability.

Along with the new website dairymatters.com.au, which has been developed to provide a central source of credible information about dairy, a feature of the campaign is the You Ask, We Answer functionality, using the latest research and industry



Farmers can get all the information they need to help with the latest campaign promoting the industry through an information kit available from local Regional Development Programs.

experts to answer questions asked by consumers.

Results from the campaign so far, have revealed health and nutrition is the number one issue concerning consumers interacting on the You Ask We

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Celebrating World Milk Day

ON June 1, communities around the world celebrated World Milk Day, to highlight the importance of dairy to the global economy, farmer's livelihoods and people's health.

To support the celebrations, Dairy Australia led a local #CheersToMilk campaign, encouraging Australians to share their best milk moments with a picture or video for a chance to win a year's supply of milk from their local area.

Celebrities, food influencers, and everyday Australians shared their milk moments in a video that was shared on social media.

Celebrity chef, restaurateur and farmer Matt Moran, who was featured in the



Celebrity chef, restaurateur, and farmer Matt Moran was featured in a video celebrating World Milk Day.

video, was keen to support the campaign

in celebration of Australian dairy farmers. "World Milk Day is a great way to do something healthy for yourself and celebrate the natural goodness of 'real' milk, while at the same time supporting Australia's dairy farmers," he said.

"With the dry conditions and high costs of feed and water being experienced by many dairy farmers, it's now more important than ever for consumers to get behind dairy."

The video was viewed 26,000 times and social posts seen by 739,000 people.

World Milk Day activities were covered by media outlets including the *Herald Sun* and a segment on Channel 7's *Sunrise* program.

Answer webpage, accounting for 30 per cent of inquiries.

Ms Zucco said while consumers were asking a lot of questions about nutrition it was closely followed by animal welfare accounting for 15pc, while 10pc of questions were around how dairy was processed.

Other issues covered included questions around the environment and the support available for farmers.

"Building trust with consumers is key to ensuring we have sustainability for the industry, for the long-term and the community needs to be assured that we are committed to responding responsibly," Ms Zucco said.

"Consumers are being hit with a huge range of information sources,

'The ads show how the dairy industry is focused on sharing our industry values and standards, by letting dairy farmers do the talking...'

not all credible, and we have to make sure the real story of dairy is cutting through with consumers, despite the misinformation that often surrounds food and nutrition.

"Through the Dairy Matters campaign and You Ask, We Answer, con-

sumers can see we are transparent and accountable and are an industry willing and able to adapt to a changing global and domestic environment."

The Dairy Matters communications campaign and website are running alongside a comprehensive engagement program, which has included a farm visit with key influencers including dietitians, veterinarians and environmental experts.

"This approach ensures those having a large impact on consumers' opinions, are armed with the very latest consumer research," Ms Zucco said.

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Brushing up on dairy in the classroom

- Key points**
- ✓ Picasso Cows program reintroduced after two-year hiatus
 - ✓ Aim to get into 250 schools each year
 - ✓ Connect schools with farmers and other industry experts

THE popular education program Picasso Cows has been given a new look and a revamped digital platform, allowing it to reach more schools, as it educates students about the \$13 billion Australian dairy industry and how milk goes from the farm to the fridge.

Launched in term two, more than 70 schools across Australia are channeling their inner Picasso and immersing themselves in learning about the dairy industry.

Dairy Australia's schools program manager Vanessa Forrest said the response to the relaunch of the program had been positive, with schools jump-



The arrival of a life-size fibreglass cow into schools generates excitement as children get to learn about the nutritional benefits of dairy foods.

ing on board after a two-year program hiatus.

"The fact that the program has been taken up so enthusiastically by schools for over 10 years is a testament to the benefits of the program and how much both students and teachers get out of it," she said.

"The arrival of a life-size fibreglass cow into schools always generates so much excitement, and this year's

group of participating schools have planned a full term of dairy discovery activities including farm visits, skype calls with farmers and factory tours.

"These are just a few ways the program connects students directly with farmers and other industry experts to learn more about the farm to plate process and dairy's health benefit."

Since it was launched in 2007, Picasso Cows has reached more than 1000 Australian primary schools and Dairy Australia is aiming to roll out the program to an extra 170 schools a year.

The redeveloped program is being introduced into 250 schools annually, in consultation with teachers and education consultants, and includes on-line tools and resources that are part of the curriculum units, Farm to Plate and Health and Nutrition.

Ms Forrest said the program was booked out every year, so it was good to be able to meet the demand, with a redeveloped program that delivered cost savings, allowing more schools to join the program.

The program has already generated media interest, securing mainstream television coverage on Channel Ten Melbourne's First at Five News weather cross, with students from Knox Gardens Primary School in Wantirna South, Vic, a podcast on national education news website Education News, as well as local news publications.

According to Dairy Australia dietitian Glenys Zucco, Picasso Cows provided an opportunity for students to learn the health benefits of dairy at a young age, to help ensure they eat a nutritionally balanced diet — essential for growing bodies.

"With many children increasingly growing up in urban areas, they often don't know where their food comes from, and Picasso Cows is a great opportunity to educate the next generation," Ms Zucco said.

Registrations are now welcome from schools interested in participating in Term 3. **D**

Teachers can register to join thousands of schools who have enjoyed the Picasso Cows program by visiting the online hub <www.dairy.edu.au/discoverdairy> at Dairy Australia's Discover Dairy website.

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Good season critical for recovery



By John Droppert
Senior industry analyst
Dairy Australia

Key points

- ✓ Farmer confidence blasted by difficult season, high input costs
- ✓ Positive signs appearing
- ✓ Intense competition for smaller national pool of milk

AS the 2018/19 draws to a close, most farmers will look back to this season as one to forget. Grain and hay prices have been universally high, straining profitability for most farmers. While some regions experienced a favourable spring, others endured a long stretch of dry weather, exacerbating farmers' exposure to purchased feed markets. For irrigators, limited water availability and record high prices have further limited options, draining finances and confidence.

Dairy Australia conducted the National Dairy Farmer Survey (NDFS) in February, quantifying the impact that the succession of difficult seasons has had on farmer confidence. The survey, of 800 farmers, showed that 34 per cent feel positive about the future of the dairy industry. This marks the sixth consecutive year of declining sentiment nationally.

Historical analysis indicates that lower sentiment is correlated with slower industry growth and is strongly associated with changes in milk processors.

The 2019 survey suggested a record 25 per cent of farmers had changed processor in the past 12 months. Since February, the outlook for farm-gate prices, the domestic market, and weather conditions in some regions improved.

A supplementary survey, conducted in April, suggests some farmers are responding positively to these improvements, with flow-on effect on farmer sentiment.

While 2018/19 has been an exceptionally challenging season, Dairy Australia's recently released *Situation*

and Outlook report, shows that some things are going right.

Global commodity markets have recovered and remain well balanced.

At the same time, milk production in the northern hemisphere has slowed.

Despite some disruption on the radar, brought on by trade disputes, political instability and the African Swine Flu, demand for dairy remains resilient and continues to support commodity prices.

In the domestic market, the removal of the \$1/litre price point for private label fresh white milk has contributed to further optimism.

Following the example set by Woolworths, competitors Coles and Aldi added 10 cents a litre to their two and three litre private label lines, promising distribution of the additional funds to supplying dairy farmers.

While the change in private label milk pricing has captured attention, unit value growth in the dairy spreads and yoghurt categories has delivered additional money to the dairy supply chain.

Cheese sales continue to grow in both volume and value terms, while a shift in consumer purchasing behaviour towards (more expensive) deli cheese has boosted average cheese prices.

A timely autumn break has provided a kick start for south-west Victoria, South Australia and parts of Gippsland, somewhat buffering the impact of high purchased feed costs. However, cash flow remains an issue

for many farmers and culling rates remain elevated.

Australian milk production has continued to decline in year-on-year terms over the course of the season. Dairy Australia's 2018/19 forecast for a decrease of between 7pc and 9pc relative to 2017/18 is unchanged, implying a total of between 8.45 and 8.65 billion litres.

Despite positive developments in recent weeks, a significantly smaller national herd, reduced farmer confidence, and ongoing cost pressures will continue to weigh on production in the short term.

Hence, Dairy Australia's initial forecast for 2019/20 anticipates a further drop of between 3pc and 5pc, to a total of 8.1 to 8.3 billion litres.

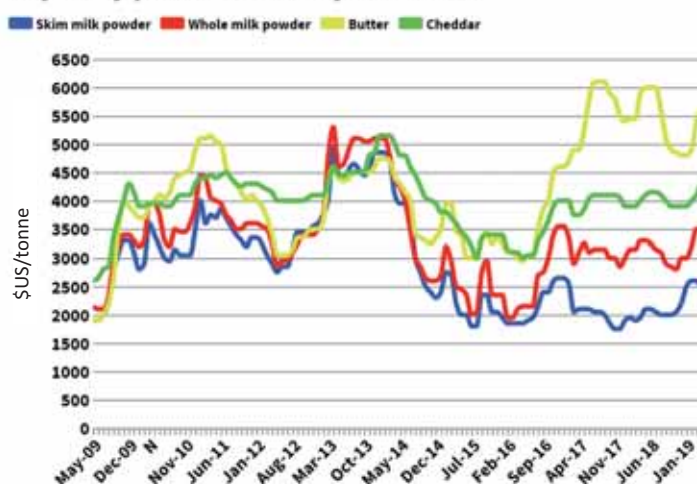
The upcoming season is likely to be characterised by intense competition for a substantially smaller national pool of milk, with implications for the whole supply chain.

For farmers, higher pricing will provide an opportunity to recover lost ground, on the condition that a sufficient timely rainfall drives lower grain, hay and irrigation water prices.

Among processors, the lag associated with a production recovery, under even the most favourable conditions, will heighten competition in the short term.

While improved global commodity prices provide an opportunity, landing a good set of weather conditions and relief on the cost front will prove crucial to Australian dairy's ability to capitalise.

Key dairy price commodity indicators





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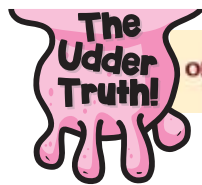
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- Mick Malthouse

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- Eddie Macguire

A snippet from Dane:

"I probably will retire at 30 as I don't want footy to get in the way of my social life..."

"The Swan family motto is constant and faithful..."

"I got my refusal to take any crap from my dad..."

Reference: Dane Swan's biography - My Story

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Paddock-to-plate success story

Key points

- ✓ Cheese factory adds value to farm milk
- ✓ Owner employs farm manager and concentrates on cheese production
- ✓ Pasture creates vital flavour factor

\$

By Jeanette Severs

MAFFRA Cheese Co, in the heart of lush dairying country in Gippsland in Victoria, is a paddock-to-plate success story for hard-working pharmaceutical chemist, dairy farmer and cheese maker Ferial Zekiman OAM.

Before moving to the Maffra district, Ms Zekiman operated two pharmacies in Melbourne and a farm at St Arnaud, where she raised lambs for export.

Her commitment to building a value-added dairy agribusiness at Tinamba, Vic, employing up to 22 people throughout the year, was rewarded by the local community, who nominated her some years ago for an OAM.

She aims to keep the award-winning cheeses identifiable by province — Dargo walnuts are used in the cheddar that goes by the same name.

After building an initial following through farmers' markets, ongoing sales are built through word of mouth.

Maffra Cheese products are used in the food service sector for events catering, served by Qantas, sold through supermarkets, specialty retailers and providores and are exported to Malaysia.

The farm

The self-replacing split-calving 300 milkers run on 100 hectares of prime



Ferial Zekiman, founder and cheesemaker at Maffra Cheese Co.



A selection of cheese from Maffra Cheese Co.

irrigated dairy country at Tinamba, adjacent to the cheese factory. The herd is mainly Holstein-Friesian cows, with infusions of Aussie Red and Normande genetics. This is the third season with Normande infusions, in an ongoing bid to ensure the year-round

fat content of the milk is suitable for cheese making.

Pastures are predominantly clover and ryegrass. Irrigation is through the Macalister Irrigation District (MID) fed by Glenmaggie Weir and is supplemented by re-use dams to extend the irrigation season.

Any fodder fed to the milking herd is bought-in; as are concentrated pellets, fed at a rate of 6.2 kilograms/cow daily. The production system relies heavily on grazing to make milk, with an average intake of 16-18kg dry matter pasture daily per cow, in the paddock.

"We cut silage but we don't feed it to the milking herd, we feed it to replacement heifers and dry cows," Ms Zekiman said.

"There are clostridia spores in our silage and we don't want to risk it in the milk and cheese.

"The milk goes through a pasteuriser, but clostridia spores are heat

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'Because I'm better at making cheese than running the dairy, I needed someone who knew what they were doing. Sometimes you've got to say, this is as much as I can do and I can't do any more.'

resistant. They really spoil the cheese — it takes until about nine months after you've processed it, then there's a build up of gas and the cheese goes off."

Ms Zekiman completed a dairy farm management course but, recognising her expertise and interest was more in the cheese-making side of the business, sought a full-time farm manager for the dairy. She said completing the course enabled her to know what needed to be done on the farm and informed her strategic planning.

"The course, because it was based on running a dairy farm in the MID, gave me an understanding so I know what needs to be done. But I can't milk cows, I can't drive a tractor," Ms Zekiman said.

"Because I'm better at making cheese than running the dairy, I needed someone who knew what they were doing. Sometimes you've got to say, this is as much as I can do and I can't do any more."

She said the farm manager is paid bonuses for production. On top of a wage and allowance for a labour unit, the farm manager was paid a tractor allowance and three incentive bonuses per month.

"He needs to keep the somatic cell count below 250," she said.

"He's got to keep the dairy plant clean, keep the bacto scan less than 44,000 MFUs (Modified Fishman Units) and the thermotolerant bacteria levels less than 2000 MFUs.

The herd has a fertility of 65 per cent conception rate. There are two AI joinings, then Angus bulls are used to mop up.

"With that conception rate — which the vet said was quite normal for the district — we need to have a lot of replacements coming through. We sell all bull calves and keep the heifers as replacements," Ms Zekiman said.



Vicki Binding and Ferial Zekiman, cheese makers. Ms Binding has been working with Ms Zekiman since the company started operation.

Farm to factory

The herd produces two million litres annually, all of which is used in the cheese company.

"I only use milk from cows off my farm," Ms Zekiman said. "It's easier to manage supply and quality by restricting it to one farm."

Cheese is handmade at least four

days in the week. There is 10pc yield of cheese on the volume of milk processed.

"We need to put two days of milk through the tanks to make cheddar," Ms Zekiman said.

Ms Zekiman's Cyprian grandmother made haloumi and she, herself, understood the science of it.

"My farm consultant worked out

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that I was earning \$0.03/litre for the milk; so I had to do this [make cheese] — there was no other option,” she said.

“I’d studied biochemistry and pharmaceutical chemistry, to it wasn’t a big leap to food chemistry.”

Ms Zekiman undertook the Gilbert Chandler Institute’s cheese course and built a processing factory; initially with second-hand equipment from a closed factory at Trafalgar. She made her first cheddar in 1997 — which needed storing for nine-12 months before it was ready for sale. The turnaround time from processing to sale of soft cheeses is closer to an immediate cash turnaround.

“Then we made the English territorial, like Wensleydale, red Leicester, Cheshire; a sage Derby; then we did a peppercorn cheddar; and a red Leicester with walnuts — just to get a variation in the range,” Ms Zekiman said.

“Obviously the milk composition and quality are important. The Holstein-Friesian cow doesn’t produce a lot of fat, which is terrific for cheddar because it doesn’t require a lot of fat.

“The fat:protein ratio is ideally 1.18 per cent, which is quite good for us. When the fat level goes up, the protein level goes up as well, so it maintains that ratio for us.”

Seasonal variations occur during lactation, but as the fat level increases, so does the protein. Flavours differ depending on the herbage the cows are grazing.

“The herbage is very important. We have a lot of clover and ryegrass here, because it’s cool climate — the climate is good for the cows and for producing milk,” Ms Zekiman said.

“It’s a regional taste. You can use the same recipe up in the northern irrigation district and you’ll probably get a different taste altogether. It’ll still be a nice cheese, but it won’t be the taste from here because the herbage is different.

“The soft cheeses could do with a bit more fat, but we don’t add anything, we just use our normal milk.”

She buys in an Australian-produced fermented non-animal rennet to add to the cheese-making process.

“A lot of people don’t want animal products, so our cheeses are considered to be a vegetarian recipe,” Ms Zekiman said.

Efficiency and waste

Co-operating locally has been part of the Maffra Cheese Co business ethos from the start. As she set up and es-



Jenny, Bee and Lena work in the packaging area of the factory.



There is minimal waste. This cheese is sold to the food service industry, to be included in recipes like souffles.

established the factory, Ms Zekiman was mentored initially by a local retired cheesemaker.

Many of the staff are long-term employees — Vicki Binding, the factory manager, has been working alongside Ms Zekiman since she started, first in cheese making and delivery. Many of the remaining 22 staff have worked with the company for 10-12 years.

“Everyone working here has been trained here and are British Retail Consortium certified,” Ms Zekiman said.

Ms Binding is also a qualified cheese maker. The only waste product out of the cheese making process is whey, which is sold to a pig farmer at nearby Woodside. In the past, whey has also been used to feed calves.

Salted whey is collected by Maffra Waste Co.


“But if I could use reverse osmosis to process the whey, I could probably use it to make more cheese,” Ms Zekiman said. “But we haven’t got the volume to make the investment worthwhile.”

She has invested in renewable energy. There are solar panels on the factory roof, with a diesel generator as backup.

At the dairy platform, solar panels heat hot water, with another generator as power backup.

“I’m also looking at battery storage at the factory, to reduce the power bill. The cool rooms run all day, every day, year round, as they need to,” Ms Zekiman said.

“With the solar panels, it’s still costing \$5000/month in winter and \$3500/month in summer.”

As well as the dams the catch irrigation water for re-use, the dairy and factory water is captured in a constructed billabong and re-used to irrigate paddocks. 

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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Driving profit through better reproduction

Key points

- ✓ Tightened calving period to match pasture growth
- ✓ Moved to once a day milking
- ✓ Lifted in-calf rates, despite feeding less grain



By **Ruairi McDonnell**
GippsDairy
Regional extension officer

GOOD herd reproductive performance is a key driver of profit on pasture-based dairy farms, and Poowong, Vic, farmer Brian Corr has reaped the rewards of focusing on improvement in herd fertility in the past few seasons.

Mr Corr runs what would be considered a low-input system of milk production, with minimal use of supplementary concentrate (he is on target to feed 300 kilograms grain/cow to the herd across the current lactation, with the herd 100 per cent spring calving).

It is worth noting that this has not had any negative effect on reproductive performance, with recent pregnancy testing indicating a six week in-calf rate of 69pc, a herd empty rate of just 5.9pc and a six-week calving rate last spring of greater than 80pc.

The farm has demonstrated a dramatic improvement in reproductive performance compared with three years ago when Mr Corr first arrived and the herd empty rate was about 30pc.

So how has such a dramatic improvement been made in the last few seasons?

"We decided to switch to a spring-calving only system to better match pasture growth rates to peak herd feed demand," he said. "In addition, calving start date is now July 18, a few weeks earlier than it used to be. While this can leave us with a feed deficit very early in the lactation, it has benefits from late August onwards when the majority of cows are calved and pasture growth rates in the area tend to rapidly increase".

The average calving date on the farm last year was August 1 (heifers calved from July 11). The joining period lasted 14 weeks this year, but the aim is to get it down to 10 weeks from next season. Another benefit of the earlier calving date was the fact that joining now starts in mid-October, leaving them less likely to experience extreme heatwaves during the breeding season.

Mr Corr has previously found significantly poorer conception rates when cows have been served in November during spells of very hot days, something which has also been anecdotally reported on other farms in Gippsland.

The farm used to be twice-a-day milking, with all cows milked once-a-day for the first three weeks of lactation. This season, they decided to stick with OAD milking throughout the entire lactation. The decision has been something with which they are happy.



The herd has an empty rate of just 5.9 per cent.

"We have lower yield per cow this year, which will probably be in the order of 50-60 kilograms milk solids/cow across the lactation. However, last year we fed approximately 900kg grain/cow and this year we will only fed 300, so the lower yield per cow this season is not just associated with the switch to OAD. We feel that the OAD milking has helped maintain body condition scores in the period around mating and helped conception rates."

The key aim is to have as many cows as possible calving early in the calving period. This maximises the days in milk of each cow in the seasonal calving system before dry off, while also giving cows enough time post-calving to cycle again before the mating start date of October 15.

The aim is to have 90pc of the cows calve within six weeks of the calving start date of July 18, and they are almost there with over 80pc achieving this target last spring. Heifers start being mated one week before the main herd.

Mr Corr's organisation and adherence to a strict plan around mating has also been a factor in the fertility of the herd. Pre-breeding heat detection starts five weeks prior to main herd mating start date. Cows not cycling within two weeks of mating start date are metri-checked for endometriosis and any dirty cows treated with Metricure.

Synchronisation tools such as prostaglandin and Controlled Internal Drug Releases (CIDRs) are used to bring as many cows as possible forward to the start of the mating period.

This method resulted in a 95pc herd submission rate for AI in the first two weeks of joining last spring. When initially dealing with a spread out range of calving dates in the herd in the past couple of years, Mr Corr used a limited amount of induction to bring cows calving dates forward to the start of the calving period and culled/sold any cows, which were well outside the desired calving period in spring, replacing them with crossbred heifers



Brian Corr has dramatically improved the reproductive performance on the farm he manages in Gippsland.

ers on the point of calving in July/August. "It's crucial to do whatever you can to tighten up the calving pattern first, before focusing on other aspects of breeding and repro, if you want to solve a fertility problem on the farm quickly," he said.

What is the farms approach to genetics and bull selection? "We import Holstein Friesian semen from Ireland and Jersey from New Zealand to use on heifers and cows submitted early in the joining period," he said. "Replacements are bred with a focus on daughter fertility, increased milk solids and low maintenance. We also only use A2 bulls with an eye on potentially transition the herd in that direction in the future".

Article courtesy of How Now Gippy Cow

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Courses set up farmers for future

Key points

- ✓ SA farmers complete farm business management courses
- ✓ Help provide skills and build confidence
- ✓ Expands networks with other farmers

\$

WHETHER just starting out and wanting to understand dairy farm finances, or wanting to ‘health check’ a farms’ performance and business drivers, DairySA has a farm business course to suit.

And according to a recent participant of two of those courses, the benefits have been two fold — both increasing her business confidence and having the chance to share insights with other participants.

Last year, Emily Mueller from near Murray Bridge, SA, completed both the Farm Business Fundamentals and Farm Business Analysis courses along with her husband Trent.

“We gained valuable information through the courses, and picked up many handy tools that we now use in our daily business,” Emily said.

“We also benefited from networking with other farmers, allowing us to share similar challenges and experiences.”

Along with her mother-in-law Julie, Emily also completed DairySA’s ‘Get Office Ready’ workshop, which highlighted some office organisational areas they were keen to improve, which is an ongoing process.

“Most importantly, we’ve gained knowledge and confidence in dealing with bank managers and financiers, now understanding what information is required,” she said.

“Julie also attends regular DairySA People in Dairy ESKI (Dairy Australia’s Employment Starter Kit) meetings, which help her keep up to date with all the new information around employing people on farm and the changing regulations.

The tools and programs have allowed the Muellers to track their usage and spending to help them better manage farm decisions with the changing conditions going forward.

“We would highly recommend the FBM workshops to other dairy farmers as it gets everyone on the same page when it comes to embracing technology and new business management systems — and it also helps



Emily Mueller completed both the Farm Business Fundamentals and Farm Business Analysis courses last year. Photographer: Catherine Forge, Source: Invisible Farmer Project, Museums Victoria

Which course is for me?

Farm Business Fundamentals (2 x 4-hour sessions)

I want to:

- Start with DairyBase
- Learn about budgets and cashflows
- Begin with financial reports
- Get bank ready

Farm Business Analysis (3 x 4-hour sessions)

I want to:

- Interpret my financial data
- Use DairyBase as a business management tool
- Measuring my farm’s performance
- Benchmark and compare data

(This course assumes foundational knowledge)

to be off farm and talk through different issues in a neutral space,” she said.

“We now feel like we can call on DairySA people and other dairy farmers if we are having issues or just need to talk something through.”

According to DairySA’s Beck Burgess, the Farm Business Fundamentals and the Farm Business Analysis courses each catered for a specific level of financial and business knowledge and confidence.

‘Most importantly, we’ve gained knowledge and confidence in dealing with bank managers and financiers...’

“We recognise that there are different entry points for farmers when it comes to financial acumen,” Ms Burgess said. “By completing a simple checklist, it’s easy to see which course is the best match for you. Of course, we are more than happy to take farmers through the details of each course to help them if needed.”

Using industry tools such as DairyBase, Standard Chart of Accounts and the Cashflow Tool, farmers will benefit from reduced financial stress by knowing their business better, get a better understanding of where the dollars are going and how they are working, and increase their confidence in being ‘Bank Ready’.

“These courses are the ideal opportunity to increase confidence or consolidate understanding of your farm business,” Ms Burgess said.

For more details, and to register interest in a Farm Business Management course, contact Beck Burgess at email <beckburgess@dairysa.com.au>.

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Dairy-beef adds business confidence

Key points

- ✓ Dairy-beef part of a diversification strategy
- ✓ Good calf-rearing facilities cater for large numbers
- ✓ Looks to range of markets

\$

By Marian Macdonald

“I really enjoy rearing calves,” Lachlan McLeod said, standing among a mob of groggy calves, their bellies swollen with fresh milk. Just as well.

The Calrossie, Vic, dairy farmer has up to 250 in the shed at once during spring and another 50 in autumn.

Rearing and selling dairy-beef is part of a diversification strategy that pays off most years and which, Mr McLeod says, had “saved us a few times”.

The decision to diversify came after Mr McLeod and his wife, Vicki, began breeding a three-way Montbéliarde, Holstein and Swedish red crossbreeding program for their herd of 340 milkers about 15 years ago.

The McLeods’ breeding regime involves a synchronisation program with five weeks of artificial insemination that is mopped up with natural black Angus bulls.

Crossbreeding has slowly improved their empty rate from 18 per cent to 10-12pc, which Mr McLeod puts down partly to greater body condition — something which also brings benefits at the saleyards.

Mr McLeod rears all the dairy steers and Angus crossbreeds alongside his replacement dairy heifers on milk and grain before weaning at about seven weeks.

Feeding the young calves might sound labour-intensive but Mr McLeod has developed a well-oiled routine to keep it as simple as possible. “Yes, you need good calf-rearing facilities but I can rear them all on my own,” he said.

“I have a 50-teat feeder on the telehandler and put that down in front of a group of 40 at a time. When they’re finished, I just move it on to the next group, so there are no buckets to fill or anything like that.”

Weaners are reared on leased land, generally until they are sold as 18-month-olds weighing about 300 kilograms, although they are sold younger in tough seasonal conditions.



Calrossie’s Lachlan McLeod rears hundreds of calves each year using a simple system that makes the job not only efficient but enjoyable.

‘It increases our ability to get through the ups and downs of dairy and flatten our cashflow.’

“We were lucky that the opportunity to lease country came up at about the same time as we began crossbreeding,” Mr McLeod said.

“It’s a way to value-add without outlaying extra money.”

The first few years, beef prices were pretty ordinary but, three years ago, prices doubled overnight.

“Our best results have been \$1200 for an 18-month-old Monty but they’ve been as low as \$700. It just depends on the market.”

Asked whether he had ever regretted the decision to rear dairy-beef cattle, Mr McLeod chuckled.

“I’m regretting this year,” he said. “We’ve had to buy in hay, they’re in poorer condition and it’s a poor market.”

“We’ve sold the big ones already and kept about 200 calves.

“I’m just optimistic that once the drought breaks they will be worth a lot more.

“Yes, there have been a couple of tough years but they would’ve been tough whatever you did.”

Mr McLeod said the dairy-beef rear-

ing element of his business brought added confidence. “It increases our ability to get through the ups and downs of dairy and flatten our cashflow,” he said. “When we need extra cash, we know we have steers to sell.”

Bringing added diversity to the McLeod business is a herd of 100 Angus-Friesian-cross cows that are joined to Wagyu, whose progeny are sold at 16 months of age, weighing about 350kg.

“The Wagyu is quite lucrative but limited in scale,” Mr McLeod said. “We don’t want too much exposure to any one market.”

Mr McLeod described rearing dairy-beef cattle as a “partial solution” to the bobby calf challenge facing the dairy industry.

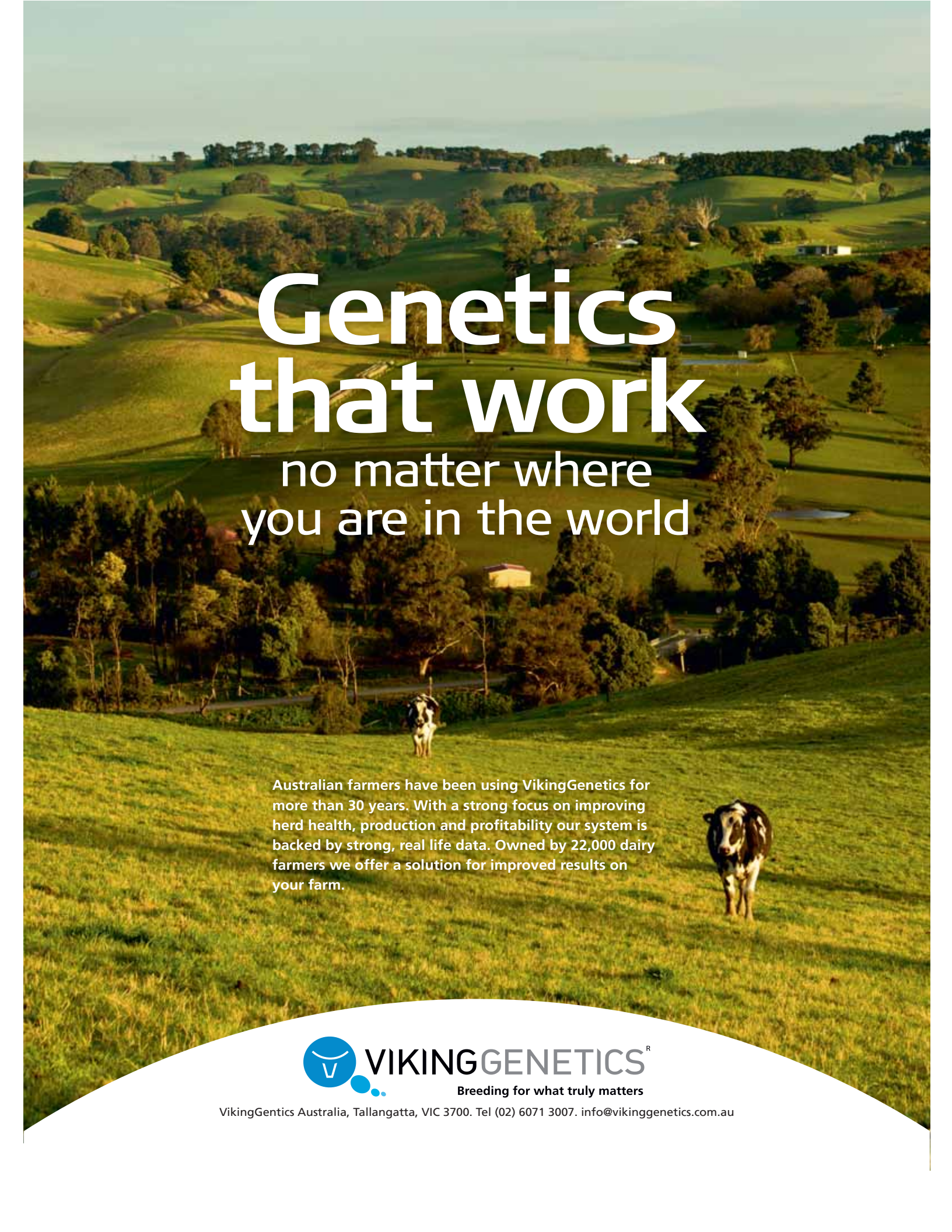
“There has to be a market for all these cattle at the other end,” he said. “People have to be prepared to raise all these calves and have the resources to do it.

“This whole thing only works because we can lease country.

“You don’t have to milk dual-purpose breeds, either — you can be successful with dairy steers but it all goes in cycles.

“I was at the market last week looking at Friesian steers selling for \$200 that would cost a lot more to rear.

“I feel sorry for producers who have hung onto them hoping it will be profitable but the cycle will turn and the dairy export job will come good again, too.”



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Looking to pass on to next generation

Key points

- ✓ Herd changed to crossbred Friesian-Jersey
- ✓ Moving effluent reuse and liquid-based fertiliser for soil fertility
- ✓ Looking to investments in energy management



By Jamie Brown

GREG McNamara is best known for his role as leader of the century-old Norco Dairy Co-operative, who speaks on a national platform when it comes to domestic issues and on an international stage when it involves sales and marketing.

At home on Quamby, Greg McNamara is just another farmer, in partnership with his wife Sue and their son Todd, whose three children are the sixth generation to grow up on the Goolmangar, NSW, property, only a few kilometres south of Nimbin near Lismore.

The McNamaras migrated as dairy farmers from Jamberoo near Kiama on the south coast in 1897, lured by opportunity on what was then the wild and opportunistic North Coast.

The family, with 11 children, cleared scrub country, planted corn by hand, used pigs to help cultivate and rendered cattle into tallow, which was, at that time, a commodity that supported many pioneering efforts in this district.

It was a tough start, with a baby and a child passing away within the first years but beyond that the hard-working Catholic family prospered, first with Illawarra cattle before moving to Holstein Friesians for maximum volume.

These days the family milks between 300 and 350 cows, Jersey/Friesian-cross, with as many as 450 in lactation at some point during the year to produce two million litres of production, at an average lactation of between 5500 and 6000 litres.

The crossbred herd, sporting genetic influence from Canada and the United States, is a departure from pure Friesians that dominated the property only a few years ago and involves more work to get the same volume, but Mr McNamara says the drive to increase butterfat and protein came from a desire to take advantage of price realities.



Greg McNamara juggles his time defending Norco's position as a leading dairy cooperative with the requirements of running a family dairy enterprise.

"Consumers are moving back to milk," he says with confidence. "We hope we have read the market signals correctly, that there is a demand for more butterfat over the next two to three years."

Already the positives with Jersey genetics include greater fertility coming through the more moderate-framed cows and a better tolerance to heat, which this summer proved beneficial.

The McNamara farm comprises six blocks, on 300 hectares with another 100ha leased next door.

The farm is pasture-based, with summer kikuyu oversown in autumn with winter rye, clovers and chicory.

This past summer, the worst in the Goolmangar district since 2002-03, tested the resilience of farm finance with the herd fully lot-fed through the heat.

Cows were given a daily ration of 6-7 kilograms of grain, 2kg molasses, which has run-out for the season, and 3-4kg lucerne and rye.

The McNamaras also fed palm kernel, which is an healthy omega-rich food which cattle love, yet self-regulate, eating only 2-3kg/day with the price for the product delivered at under \$400/tonne.

The extra cost of feed in relation to stagnant milk prices has meant the farm did not make any money this year and this on-farm situation

shared by all of Norco's members is something Mr McNamara thinks long and hard about every day.

"It has been a challenge to meet these costs, and it will be another two to three years before farms repay that debt," Mr McNamara said. "It becomes an issue of resilience. Dairy farmers need to be paid a price that allows them to absorb these bad years. They should be able to manage enough dollars in the good years to offset the bad ones."

Fortunately the Northern Rivers never misses a wet season, even if it comes late, and as the calendar turned over to March billowing cumulus clouds began to amass. A sudden fall of 40 millimetres in the wake of Cyclone Oma delivered a pasture response and more recently a deliverance of 75mm, the first real rain since October, set the creeks running. Now there is hope.

Much of that paddock response has come from innovative approach to management, including effluent reuse, and a move away from urea to more liquid-based fertiliser applied from a "tow and fert" foliar spray buggy, designed in New Zealand, into which the McNamaras pour a brew of liquid lime, molasses and liquid sulphur and potash and some seaweed-based solutions.

"We use less fertiliser but apply more often," Mr McNamara said. "We

'We hope we have read the market signals correctly, that there is a demand for more butterfat over the next two to three years.'

are not organic but we are moving towards that by feeding nutrients to soil microbes.

"The farm stays greener for longer in drought compared to our neighbours and responds more quickly after rain."

The family also finds cows graze evenly as a result of the sulphate application, which appears to sweeten the grass, and with this consistent grazing there is a reduction in the need to top pasture with mowers.

Where to from here really depends on whether the next generation of McNamaras wants to return to the farm to make a living.

"There are improvements to be made in the form of energy management," he said. "For instance we have



Greg McNamara and his grandchildren Rhyse and Brayden at home on Quamby.

looked at a solar scheme estimated to cost up to \$300,000 with a pay-back timeline of a decade, which is too long right now."

Considering most energy is consumed cooling fresh milk after morning and evening milkings, after bringing it from the old 24-aside her-

ringbone dairy, a new solar scheme won't save dollars unless feed-in tariffs improve.

"If children don't come home most properties are broken up and sold off. They become a terminal farm," said Mr McNamara. "Let's hope this doesn't happen at Quamby."

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Connecting investors to sharefarmers

Key points

- ✓ AgCap connects farm owners with sharefarmers or farm managers
- ✓ Looks to operate systems to reduce volatility
- ✓ 400-700 cow dairy farms in sweet spot

By Marian Macdonald

Corporate dairy farming is often associated with thousands of cows and high-input systems but the secret to success may be something rather more modest. In fact, AgCap's Wolfie Wagner says 400 to 700-cow pasture-based dairy farms are in the box seat to capture the interest of savvy farm owners.

Specialising in Australian dairy farm management, agCap connects farm owners with suitable sharefarmers or farm managers and takes responsibility for returns, operations and farm management. AgCap managed, until it was wound up in 2017, the Sustainable Agriculture Fund's 17 farms totalling 27,000 hectares.

The Sustainable Agriculture Fund sold the farms after poor returns in the early years of the fund were followed by significant capital growth and good income returns in the latter years, rewarding investors with \$200 million over the life of the fund. Even so, investors could not be found for a fresh offering from AgCap in 2018.

"There are a lot of war stories out there, and Australian agriculture was considered too risky," Mr Wagner said. "We've decided to get some farm assets back under management so we can show them that it is possible to manage or remove volatility."

Seasonal conditions, input costs and milk price are the three volatile factors that Mr Wagner said affected dairy businesses most. And, as far as he is concerned, that means going back to basics.

"To reduce volatility year on year, let's get our calving pattern back to match pasture growth rate curve," Mr Wagner said. "So that means we've got to be a seasonal calver and, in south-west Victoria, we don't want to be milking in February/March when growth rates are at or near zero."

"Then, we've got to be able to get our cows in calf. For us, that means using a three-way rotational cross



Wolfie Wagner says AgCap helps support farm managers and sharefarmers to ensure returns for farm owners.

breeding system that is proven to bring fertility back in our herd.

"So, if we can have a seasonal calving herd, with a calving pattern that matches historical growth patterns and a moderate stocking rate, then we can remove volatility."

"The other thing is that in feeding cows in south-west Victoria, have one tonne of dry matter fodder valued at, say, \$250 in reserve for the bad years."

"People say we can't afford to have a fodder reserve sitting on our balance sheet but, if we have \$250 worth of feed per cow in reserve and we've already got total asset values of \$10,000 per cow, that's only 2.5 per cent. It's not a big increase."

The key to reducing volatility in milk price, Mr Wagner said, was to offer processors something more than milk.

"In terms of milk price, I'm not talking 50 cents a kilogram of milk solids; it might only be 10 or 20 cents," he said. "Our objective is to be fully seasonal and be in the top quartile of all the milk prices for our region."

"Calving in April, our spring milk is going to be fairly high but flatter than a spring-calving farm."

"We need to be able to say to milk companies that we are producing milk in a sustainable manner."

"We're looking after our animals, our people and our environment."

"If they've got a customer and they want to bring them to our farm tomorrow, we can ring a sharefarmer and say, 'Freddie, the processor and their customer are turning up tomorrow' and they'll be ready."

"I used to think the animal activists were going to go away but they won't, and the pressure on farmers and processors is going to be ongoing."

Farms managed by AgCap will also respond to changing community attitudes with a long-term breeding strategy.

"Like it or not, we've got to address the bobby calf issue," Mr Wagner said.

"Learn from the Irish, who are already doing that by looking at their breeding values to make their animals just that bit stockier for beef without reducing their dairyness."

"They have this 1-1-5 philosophy, which we share. One calf per cow per annum (no carryover cows), one kilogram of milk solids per kilogram of bodyweight, more than five lactations on average per cow."

"From an animal welfare point of view, we can't underfeed our animals — not necessarily fully feeding every day but very close. We can't have skinny cows. We can't just rip it off

their backs because we're short on feed in a month.

"This is the big one: more than five lactations per cow and, in Australia, we'd be lucky to get three. To do that, we need to have the right breeding."

In terms of attracting sharefarmers, managers and investors, Mr Wagner said the secret was to keep the system simple.

"The main thing an investor looks for is fairly good buying, not a farm that's over capitalised," Mr Wagner said. "This is equally important for AgCap when offering management solutions to owners of existing dairy assets.

"People get sucked into believing that we need all these bells and whistles that don't add to the bottom line.

"Over the last decade, the industry's developed systems that increase the cost of production.

"The sweet spot for a profitable dairy farm is 400 to 700 cows with a simple, pasture-based system rather than a big herd with batch calving and lots of complexity.

"If you're milking 150 cows with the right debt level, you can have a good lifestyle and be profitable but the cake's just not big enough to bring in a third party."

Still, profitability is not the only criteria AgCap considers when matching sharefarmers or managers with farm owners or farms with investors.

"We start off by doing a dairy business assessment and a really important part of that is to find out exactly what the owners' goals are for that business," Mr Wagner said. "You re-



The AgCap system is based on matching the calving pattern to pasture growth.

'To reduce volatility year on year, let's get our calving pattern back to match pasture growth rate curve.'

ally do want people who are focused on the bottom line.

"Their goal should also be to create a sustainable farming system — you've got to look after the animals — and also that the people who are actually doing the work on the farm are adequately remunerated.

"It's very easy in a downturn to say: 'let's just tighten our belts in terms of the amount that we pay people or employ less labour', so the maintenance doesn't get done and it all spirals downhill."

Mr Wagner said he believed it was critical sharefarming agreements were clear, realistic and fair.

"Our sharefarmers have opportunities for moderate wealth creation. They're not going to get rich overnight," he said.

Sharefarmers are engaged by AgCap, which has a contract with the farm owner and delivers monthly farm and financial reports.

"With four or five farms in a region, we create a cluster and put in an aggregation manager dedicated to those farms that offers a higher level of mentoring and support," Mr Wagner said.

"We offer all the governance with a board, strict auditing and an Australian Financial Services Licence so we can be trustee for other people's money.

"A consultant would find it a lot harder, if not impossible, to become a trustee. We manage it end to end and pay the dividend to owners or shareholders.

"If you have a big corporate family group and need to source external capital, we can do that."

The relationships formed by corporate dairies were vital to their success, Mr Wagner said.

"Some of the most spectacular failures in Australia were caused by poor communication," he said. "It's really important that investors know what they're getting into beforehand, that they are kept informed and that both parties — farmers and investors — understand the other.

"There are some terrific opportunities for young people in Australian dairy farming today with the right support and sustainable management systems."



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Argentinian dairy sets the pace

Key points

- ✓ Shedded dairy system introduced on Argentinian farm
- ✓ Generating US13c/litre profit — 10c above industry average
- ✓ Higher quality milk, less feed wastage

\$

By Mark Phelps

A SHEDDED dairy system has unlocked significant productivity gains and subsequently industry-leading profits for an Argentinian farming family.

Located at Pellegrini, in the heart of the high rainfall Pampas Humedas (humid Pampas) region about 400 kilometres south west of Buenos Aires, the Chiavassa Group milks 1300 Holstein cows supplying milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream manufacturers.

On average the herd produces 45,000 litres a day containing 3.4 per cent fat and 3.3pc protein. However, milk solid levels are adjusted according to market demand, particularly in summer when ice cream makers offer up to a 20pc premium.

The key to the operation is its loafing shed system, which maximises cow comfort while minimising health challenges. The under hoof compost requires constant maintenance, turned twice a day using either a rotary hoe or scarifier.

Third-generation farmer Cristóbal Chiavassa said the 1750-hectare farm was generating US13c/litre profit (about A19c), compared with an industry average of about US3c/litre profit.

Mr Chiavassa said the farm was producing milk for US24c/litre with an average sale price of 37c. Most farms were producing milk for about 30c for a 33c sale price, he said.

“Our attitude is about producing better,” Mr Chiavassa said. “We have the benefit of generations of experience and now the technology to improve efficiency and increase productivity.”

Part of the loafing shed system is the under-hoof compost bedding (peanut shells), which manages the breakdown of manure and promotes herd health.

The compost requires constant maintenance, turned twice a day using either a rotary hoe or scarifier.



The under hoof compost requires constant maintenance, turned twice a day using either a rotary hoe or scarifier.

‘We have the benefit of generations of experience and now the technology to improve efficiency and increase productivity.’

Each of the cows is fitted with a collar to monitor rumen activity as part of a forewarning system for mastitis.

The herd’s somatic cell count is in the 250,000 to 300,000 range, compared to Argentina’s usual 400,000 to 500,000 SCC levels.

Each of the cows is fitted with a collar to monitor rumen activity as part of a forewarning system. Cows that record decreased feed intakes are often in the early stages of mastitis, enabling those cows to be treated at an earlier stage.

The Chiavassa Group grows all of its own roughages, in part thanks to a reliable 1200mm annual rainfall.



The silage component of the total mixed ration routinely includes the Alltech toxin binder Mycosorb to maximise feed conversion.

Alltech Lienert Australia nutrition adviser Toby Doak said shedded dairy systems were particularly suited to Australia’s sub-tropics, where higher temperatures and humidity were a major issue.

“We’ve already seen a number of these systems introduced into Australia because it is well understood that increased cow comfort directly increases productivity,” Mr Doak said.

“There is certainly a high capital outlay involved but bringing the feed

Mycotoxin in Silage

Mycotoxins are toxic secondary metabolites produced by fungi and they have a large impact on the animal industry in health costs and reduced performance. People often associate mycotoxins with grains.

Indeed, in a forage material that includes some grain e.g. corn silage, then the mycotoxins that are in the grain will generally remain in the silage. However, mycotoxins can be produced in other parts of the plant. These include some of the Fusarium fungi mycotoxins that are common in grain e.g. deoxynivalenol (DON, a concern for gut health and disease susceptibility), zearalenone (ZEN, a concern for reproduction) and fumonisins (FUM, a further concern for gut health).

Silage introduces a further dimension of mycotoxin risk since some additional fungi can grow in the silage material. It's important to avoid feeding out noticeably moldy areas of silage since many of the molds can cause disease within animals or humans and many of them can produce mycotoxins.



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Each of the cows is fitted with a collar to monitor rumen activity as part of a forewarning system for mastitis.



The cows are milked three times a day, producing an average of 34.7 litres a day.



Part of the calf rearing area on Chiavassa family farm.



The Chiavassa Group grows all of its own roughages, in part thanks to a reliable 1200mm annual rainfall.


◀ to the cows as part of total mixed ration system is certainly a better way to go because of the increased feed efficiencies.

“There’s virtually no feed wastage or spoilage. It’s one way producers can take much greater control of the environment.”

Alltech Argentina manager Jeronimo Larumbe said the Chiavassa Group was one of Argentina’s leading dairy operations.

“The family has combined technology and generations of experience to maximise the productivity of its dairy operation,” Mr Larumbe said.

Argentina’s highly productive Pampas region covers an amazing 750,000 square kilometres (to put that in perspective, that’s only a fraction under the size of NSW’s 809,000 sq km).

But despite the seemingly massive competitive advantage the agriculture region promises, Argentina is facing massive structural challenges. Inflation is running at shocking 34 per cent and unemployment has topped 9pc mark. 

Mark Phelps traveled to Argentina as a guest of Alltech Lienert Australia.



Team Grupo Chivavassa — Carlos and Pini Chiavassa and their four children, Cristian, Soledad, Cristóbal and Rocío.

Data plays key role in decisions

- Key points**
- ✓ HerdData app used for farm management and audits
 - ✓ Similar to systems in other businesses
 - ✓ Improves business decision making



HAVING data at their finger-tips helps Ross and Jacqui Soares make objective farm business decisions.

The Larpent, Vic, dairy farmers operate Calderbrae Holsteins, a Master Breeder herd, which peaks at 180 cows across 100 hectares.

The couple use DataGene's HerdData and Good Bulls apps and these are backed-up by dairy herd management software Mistro Farm.

"I've always thought of Mistro Farm as a client management system, but for cows," Mrs Soares said.

"All the information you need for each person or cow has to be there when you need it; and you can generate useful management reports."

Drawing on her experience working off-farm in the disability sector, Mrs Soares said the DataGene apps had a lot of similarities with other programs.

"For the last few years working, our client management system (at off-farm work) was web-based and you could access a person's information on the i-pad when you are with the person out in the field," she said.

"I see the HerdData app as the same thing; it gives you the capacity to access the information you need when you need it, on the phone."

The Soares's mainly use of HerdData to identify which cows should be dried-off and what ones need to be culled.

To determine a dry-off time, the couple looks at how many days a cow has been in-milk and when it is due to calve. Its joining, pregnancy test and treatment data gets entered via the computer, which synchs to the app. Production and cell count information gets sent to the app following herd recording.

"Like all data systems, the HerdData app and Mistro farm are garbage in-garbage out — their usefulness depends entirely on the quality and quantity of information you put into them as a farmer," Mrs Soares said.

"You really need to be prepared to

spend the time inputting the information you want to be able to access, so that you can extract value to your operation from them."

The app not only saves time, it ensures the right cows are culled.

"When we are picking cows, Wednesday night before chopper day, and a few need to go, we can always look up their cell count and how long they have been in.

"It is at your finger-tips if you need it," she said.

Mr Soares also works as a stock agent and sometimes this means they are both away from the farm. Mrs Soares said she used the downtime while travelling to look through the herd records on the app and make "to do" lists for when they get home.

"We can make more informed decisions," she said.

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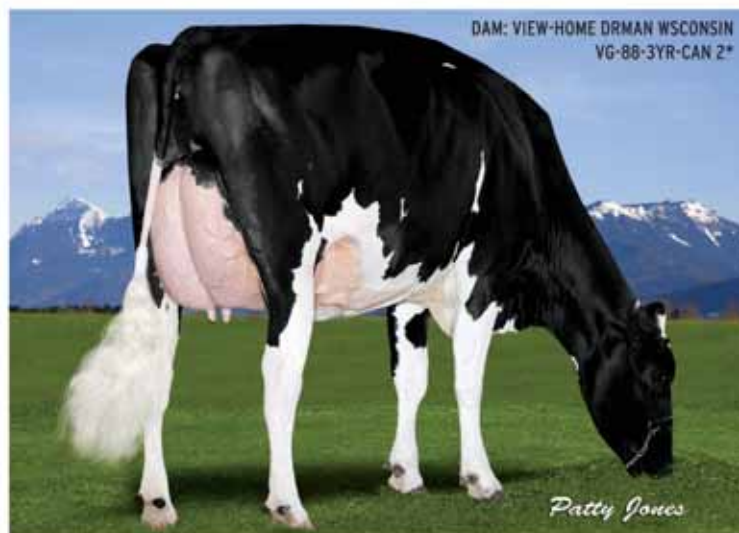
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THE SEMEX DIFFERENCE

◀ Data has always played a huge role in the Suares family farm. They herd record regularly and have done since they are started in the industry as sharefarmers.

"You can't improve on what you don't measure," Mrs Suares said.

"With some cows, how do you know if you are selling or keeping the right cow if you don't always measure? You have an idea by looking at a cow, but you have no idea about the butterfat and protein she's producing or her cell count. At the end of the day, it is milk solids which count, not milk volume."

The HerdData app is also used for general farm management and it helps with farm audits.

"We are starting to use the paddock diary to keep records of what chemicals have been sprayed on which paddock, fertiliser applications and what's planted where," she said.

"You can record who milked, cow treatments and antibiotics used so when its audit time you can generate a report, which generally provides the auditors with all the information they require. It saves time and looks a whole lot more professional."

The Suares also use the Good Bulls Guide app, primarily at joining time.

They classify their herd regularly through Holstein Australia. They use this classification summary of their herd, which highlights both the strong and weak points, to make breeding decisions.

Mrs Suares said the classification highlighted "issues they need to watch" and these were considered and used as a starting-point for their breeding selection criteria.

Calderbrae Holsteins use the Data-Gene Balanced Performance Index (BPI) list to select sires and have a specific list of traits which they would not "go below 96" with. These include, size — the Suares like to maintain a cow about 600kg to maintain a margin over feed costs — capacity, including chest and muzzle width, feet, legs and mammary system.

They have also focused on selecting bulls that only produce the A2 protein. Mr Suares said there was a premium in the market for these animals and they both believed there would be a strong future for the differentiated A2 products.

The Suares use a combination of genomic and proven sires. Mrs Suares said they liked to investigate cow families, but fundamentally objective information provided the starting point

'This takes the emotion out of it and allows us to be more objective about things. It gives us more confidence in our decision making.'

for breeding decisions. "We start with what the data says and then go from there," she said.


"It is much quicker, you could spend days and days going through bull catalogues."

The Suares also set their Good Bulls Guide app to avoid certain bloodlines to ensure — subject to availability — they can use all the bulls which are recommended to them by the app.

They do not like to use common bloodlines they have used extensively in the past. This helps them avoid issues with inbreeding.

"With the app it really is just setting your own criteria," Mrs Suares said.

"The app comes up with a list and ▶





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◀ then, from there, we will look at the catalogues and pedigrees.” The apps have helped save time on the farm and ensure the Suareses are more confident with their breeding decisions.

“Decisions have got to be better, we are using the data and information effectively,” Mrs Suares said.

“This takes the emotion out of it and allows us to be more objective about things. It gives us more confidence in our decision making.”

The Suareses never set-out to farm registered cattle.

In the early 1990s they went to a dispersal sale in Gippsland. At the time the region was in severe drought and they bought a line of registered yearling heifers from the Quantock stud.

What was an “accident” turned out to be a good business decision as the cow families that came from those 15 heifers remain in the herd today, including a cow classified excellent 3E.

Calderbrae heifers calving this autumn were joined to calving ease and short gestation bull Russian. Other sires used across the herd in recent years include MVP, Balisto.

Overtime, Dean Cox, Atley and, for the Red Holsteins, Apple Pie have been used.

Each year about 25 per cent of the herd is replaced and it's with these — the youngest animals — that the couple gauges breeding success.

“As long as we see an improvement in our heifers every year, we are happy,” Mr Suares said. **D**



Larpent, Vic, Holstein breeders Jacqui and Ross Suares say the HerdData and Good Bulls Guide App both ensure data is at their finger-tips and this means better decision making on farm.

Keeping track of most important asset

MOST dairy farmers will say there's nothing more important to their business than their cows. But for Brodie and Kevin Game, their herd of up to 350 is their biggest asset.

It's the cornerstone of their business, their stake in the dairy industry and may one day hold the key to farm ownership.

“In a leasing system, cows are our biggest asset,” Mrs Game said.

“Crossbred cows might suit some farming operations, but when it comes to the crunch and we want to buy a farm, a fully-registered, good producing herd is worth more,” she said. “Thanks to our Genetic Management System (GMS) we can demonstrate that and show how much we have improved.”

The couple lease 445 hectares at Bemboka, NSW, and started using ABS Australia's Genetic Management System about a year ago.

“It is good for us to be able to track where we are going, and show we are achieving things,” Mrs Game said. “We are at a point of our business where there isn't a lot of cash, but we are improving the farm and cows, building wealth that way. It's wealth growth, rather than cash profit growth.”

The Games have focused on improving their herd's genetic merit by measuring production through monthly herd recording, keeping good records and then using this information to generate reports on their breeding progress.

Mrs Game admitted the initial attraction to the ABS Genetic Management System audit was that it was free, but with the assistance of ABS representative Kim Sultana they've used it across their business.



Brodie and Kevin Game are focused on improving their herd to build wealth for their family including son Roy, 2.

To start with, sire selection has been simplified.

“It saves time. Sure, we look at a cow, but she might not be doing the production or there's something in her genetics we can't see,” Mrs Game said.

“All information from ABS's GMS is good to get any issue fixed, if you have a problem with a line of cows it will suggest a bull to help fix it.

“The ABS system it points us in the right direction from the get-go and that gives us an advantage.

“I guess, I also don't come from a dairy family or background, everything has been learning as I go. We use classification as a tool and visual assessment of

the cows, but this, the Genetic Management System, is a free service that will help fast track the genetic gain of our herd. There's no commitment to use the bulls they recommend. For me, it is just another opinion I can draw on.”

Mrs Game said their breeding philosophy had changed since they first established Blackjack Holsteins six years ago. Now they sought out bulls which best suit a grass-based production system and characteristics they believed determined the most profitable cow, such as a medium frame and a cow that delivered a margin over feed costs.

These breeding objectives are factored into the Genetic Management System. The Games used some of the bulls recommended by the system and with calves starting to drop now, they are impressed.

“They are lot more vigorous and the mortality rate in herd has improved,” Mrs Game said. “They just want to thrive, they are happy, healthy calves.”

The couple use the Easy Dairy software farm management software. Keeping this information up to date has been crucial and its easily passed to ABS to generate the GMS audit, via a USB stick.

Looking ahead, the Games want to investigate genomic testing as Mrs Game said the reports generated by the ABS Genetic Management System could also include genomically tested cows. “Measuring our genetic progress to improve profitability is very important to us and that's what we have found the GMS audit provides us right now,” she said.

Supplied by ABS Australia, phone 4800 227 285, website <www.absglobal.com/au>.

Silage key part of managing drought

Key points

- East Gippsland farmers managing drought
- Able to access pit silage from 2012
- Silage important part of managing annual fodder requirements



By Jeanette Severs

THIS is the third consecutive year of drought for East Gippsland, Vic, dairy farmers Veronica and Neil Joiner. The experience has caused the seasoned farmers to make hard decisions in order to keep milking.

They opened a silage pit laid down six years earlier, as the availability and price of fodder became harder to manage.

Mrs Joiner is responsible for herd health and milking on their Newmerella, Vic, farm, while Mr Joiner focuses on growing grass and harvesting fodder.

The couple own 205 hectares of mostly dryland, undulating country —



Neil and Veronica Joiner aim to maximise home-grown feed.

20ha is irrigated hill country, watered by a boom irrigator and used to run young stock. They also lease a 50ha irrigated block — country surrounding the local sewerage farm, connected to fixed sprinklers — where they grow

cereal crops and pasture, harvest hay and silage and grow out heifers.

Soils are flood plain river flats of heavy sandy loam, rising to a narrow depth of sandy loam over clay on the hill country.

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◀ “Soil fertility is high. We use lime every seven-to-10 years and we sow with fertiliser,” Mr Joiner said.

“All our bought-in feed (during the drought) means we haven’t mined the soil’s fertility. When the cows grazed fresh pasture, they were only allowed in for two-hour blocks. So we won’t be putting fertiliser down this year in the sacrifice paddocks, where the manure load is higher.”

Mr Joiner regularly oversows with perennial and annual ryegrass varieties.

His pastures compete with weeds that include shepherds purse, marsh-mallow and capeweed.

“You spend a lot of money on seed, so it needs to be worth it,” he said.

‘When you’re doing a pit, you need multiple paddocks out of rotation to have that surplus. So you have to get your pasture management right.’

“So you need to prepare your paddocks. I plan against prairie grass, which is well known for being invasive around here.”

He has been oversowing kikuyu with a rape and an annual ryegrass, to come up as frost knocks the kikuyu down. But in the past couple of years, late frosts have extended the grazing value of kikuyu.

“Normally late March would frost the kikuyu, but that hasn’t been happening. It might end up being part of the normal growing system,” Mr Joiner said.

He has also used irrigation in Au-



The silage from the pit needed to be fed out manually as it was in square bales.



The Joiners bought in 161 tonnes of oat and vetch hay in the past year.

gust to push pasture growth into an early spring.

“I focus on growing grass because green grass gives you easy protein for the cows,” he said. “I manipulate the system where I can to get a value product.”

There are more than 50 paddocks in the rotation, with 44 part of the effective milking area. Higher ridges and other sections of the farm are fenced off as part of their environmental stewardship.

“At our peak, rotation is 18 days. In winter, that can extend out to 60 days,

to get leaf growing,” Mr Joiner said.

Mrs Joiner said in a normal year, they bought in a truckload of oats for cows to calve down with, while everything else was home-grown.

The milking herd is normally 250-260 cows, annually producing 540 kilograms of milk solids each. The herd of spring calvers is bred in a three-way cross from Holstein, Jersey and Red cattle.

“They’re not too big and they produce quite well,” Mrs Joiner said.

In the past couple of years, herd size has reduced to 180 cows.

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The pit silage being covered.

"We started reducing the herd in September 2016," Mrs Joiner said. "We usually carry over cows, but we sold 30 head."

In May 2017, they sold empty cows.

In late 2017, Mr and Mrs Joiner participated in Taking Stock before asking for an on-farm meeting with a business consultant to discuss their options to reduce overheads and afford to buy fodder and feed.

"Talking about it in July was really hard, but we had no winter rain so we had to take pressure off the paddocks, to make as much silage as we can to keep milking," Mrs Joiner said.

They expected to calve down 260 cows, but sold late-calving cows to take pressure off themselves and the business. Mrs Joiner said the consultant helped them work out a feed budget for 200 cows.

Growing enough fodder for a normal year takes good management; producing it in a long-term drought challenges exceptional management.

Mr Joiner said a lot of the decisions around making fodder were about managing grass growth in the paddock rotation.

He usually expects to harvest 1200 bales of silage and 300 bales of hay — the majority of it a ryegrass-based

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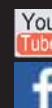
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◀ pasture with “a little bit” of lucerne.

“In an extraordinary year, we’ll fill the silage pit,” Mr Joiner said.

Using pit silage

In the 2017-2018 season, milking an average 240 cows, they bought in 100 tonnes of oats and 300t of vetch as hay, as well as 1500t of pellets for each cow.

As pressure on feed supplies grew across the country, they paid more than \$500/t for pellets. They harvested 900 rounds of pasture silage off the farm.

They also opened the silage pit, laid down in 2012, and fed out 240 square bales from it.

Feed tests before they fed it out showed values of 10 megajoules of metabolisable energy per kilogram of dry matter and 14 per cent protein.

“We grew a lot of grass that year. We had rain at the right time,” Mr Joiner said.

“It was cut in spring when it was going to seed. It was drier and had a bit of fibre. That shows in the protein test.”

In preparing the pit, they hired an excavator to shape the sides, which were lined with plastic. Plastic was laid over the top of the 240 stacked bales, then dirt overlaid.

A big part of long-term management was keeping the cows off the surface of the pit.

When it came time to take the silage out, they hired an excavator again. The cost was balanced against the difficulty of finding quality hay — coupled with the cost to purchase and transport it.

Mrs Joiner said sometimes they ordered fodder and it simply was not there when the truck driver turned up to collect it.

The excavator was hired as required, to remove the layer of half-a-metre of dirt from the top to allow access to the bales.

One of their management challenges was feeding out the large square bales taken from the silage pit, when their feed cart is best suited for round bales.

“We had to hand feed those square bales out. It was very physical,” Mrs Joiner said.

They fed the pit silage to the milking herd in April and May last year.

“The cold kicked in, we had frosts and we ran out of feed. It made sense to open up the pit,” Mr Joiner said.

“We used the silage to mix the right ration for the cows and we manipu-



An excavator was used to cover the silage pit with dirt.



The empty silage pit. The 2012 silage proved valuable as dry conditions hit East Gippsland.



The Joiners focus on growing quality pasture.

lated to get a value product.”

Four bales of the pit silage was mixed with a bale of cereal hay and the cows had access to green pasture.

Managing the 2019 season

The success story of spring 2018, as Mrs Joiner described it, was harvesting 350 bales of cereal silage and 550 bales of grass silage. It was achieved by reducing milking numbers to 180 cows and using the irrigation right to grow grass ahead of the herd.

In the past 12 months, Mr and Mrs Joiner averaged a milking herd of 200 cows (reducing to 180 cows) and bought about the same tonnage of pellets per cow and 161 tonnes of oat and vetch hay.

“We made a lot more silage. We did this by reducing the number of cows we were milking, so we could make silage,” Mr Joiner said.

He harvested 900 bales of pasture silage and mild weather saw him harvesting the lucerne crop into May this year.

“Milking less cows meant we didn’t have to buy as much fodder. There

was less stress on us,” Mrs Joiner said.

They were able to buy chopped maize silage locally in autumn this year and laid down 162t DM in the pit. It has only been covered with plastic as they intend to use it this season, feeding transition cows as they calve.

“We’ve got high protein grass for grazing. The low protein maize with a high ME quotient will be a good combination,” Mr Joiner said.

“As it turned out, we would have been better off with two silage pits. We’ve planned for that now.

“The competition to access and buy silage was intense. But it has to be excess pasture that we’re harvesting, to go into the pit.

“When you’re doing a pit, you need multiple paddocks out of rotation to have that surplus. So you have to get your pasture management right.

“I won’t lock up large chunks of the farm to harvest fodder.”

He plans to grow chicory and lucerne on the river flats this year and measure its success against the season.

Five steps to high-quality silage

Key points

- ✿ Cut pastures early
- ✿ Wilt and harvest quickly
- ✿ Compact stacks and bales
- ✿ Seal airtight
- ✿ Maintain quality



MAKING and feeding high quality silage with lower fibre levels encourages higher feed intakes and better cow performance. This article highlights five easy steps for making high-quality, temperate pasture silage.

1 Cutting pastures early

Cut early in the season. For maximum silage quality, cut pastures when they are at or near canopy closure.

This is also the optimum stage of growth for grazing in spring.

Providing pasture is at or only slightly past grazing height, and harvested in good weather conditions, milk production will be only marginally less than if the same pasture had been grazed by the cows.

Wilting rate of the mown pasture



Match mowing and harvesting operations so that mown material is not left unharvested for lengthy periods.

has a big impact on silage quality. The time of day that pasture is cut impacts on the wilting rate.

The following should be considered when deciding on mowing time to aid rapid drying but to avoid overdrying:

- Mow after dew has lifted.

- Match mowing and harvesting operations so that mown material is not left unharvested for lengthy periods.

- Reduce wilting periods for forages, such as legumes and young, leafy plants.

- Delay mowing until mid to late af- ►



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'Wilting rate of the mown pasture has a big impact on silage quality.'

- ◀ ternoon to reduce the risk of over-drying the forage during hot, dry and windy weather.

- Stagger mowing and narrow the swath width if there is a real risk of over-drying.

2 Wilt and harvest quickly

Have the forage in the pit or bale within 24-48 hours, if possible.

Wilt rapidly to the target dry matter (baled silage 40-50 per cent and pit silage 32-38pc) to reduce potential dry matter and quality losses.

Several strategies that can increase wilting rates:

- Mow crops at canopy closure (lighter crops with more leaf and less stem).
- Use a mower-conditioner with flail or tynes.
- Follow the mower with a tedder to spread the forage. Ted within 0.5-2 hours after mowing while plant stomata are still open, if possible, to substantially increase rate of wilting.
- Leave the swath of the conditioned forage as wide as possible (moisture evaporates quicker from thin, wide swaths).
- Do not over wilt — field losses increase and silage is harder to compact.
- Additives are available to improve fermentation if wilting conditions are poor.
- Inoculants may also improve silage quality and animal production.

3 Compacting stacks and bales

Compact stacks and make bales as dense as possible.

The better the compaction, the less air will be trapped in the stack or bale resulting in a higher quality silage

For bulk stacks:

- Chop material short (10-30 millimetres).
- Spread the forage thinly (150mm) to ensure thorough compaction.
- Roll slowly to allow the tractor weight to compact the forage.

For baled silage:

- Set bale density as dense as possible on the baler.
- Slower baling will increase bale density.
- Chopping balers (knives) can in-



Use a mower-conditioner with flail or tynes.



For an airtight seal use gravel bags, filled with pea gravel or washed sand along bunker walls and stack surface.

crease density by 8-15pc.

- Ensure feedout equipment can handle shorter chopped bale silage.

4 Sealing airtight

Seal airtight as soon as possible after harvesting.

- Seal stacks, don't just cover them.
- Finish rolling immediately after harvest is completed. Avoid rolling the next morning as this just 'pumps' more oxygen into the stack.

Rolling should keep up with forage delivery from the paddock.

- Seal pits or stacks as soon as harvest is complete. If leaving overnight minimise air getting into the stack by placing plastic on the stack and weighing down the edges. Finish weighing down the stack next morning and ensure seals are airtight.

- For an airtight seal use gravel bags, filled with pea gravel or washed sand along bunker walls and stack surface. Even a double row of tyres around the perimeter does not achieve an airtight seal.

- Apply at least four layers of film to individually stretch wrapped bales.

- Apply six layers: if placing on stiff stubble, e.g. cereal; for stalky crops



Maintain silage quality by repairing holes as soon as possible.

e.g. lucerne; if transporting; if wishing to store for up to two years.

- Apply at least six layers on continuous in-line wrapped bales.
- Minimise damage to stretch wrap by wrapping at the storage site or use specialist equipment to transport bales to storage.
- If a white/grey mould is present in silage, air has been or is present and should be prevented in future.

5 Maintaining quality

Maintain silage quality by repairing holes as soon as possible.

- Ensure the area to be patched is clean and dry.
- Use specific silage repair tape of similar colour to the holed plastic. This minimises the difference in contracting and expanding in hot/cold conditions and stops the seal leaking.
- Cut tape to length before applying.

Article courtesy of Gardiner Dairy Foundation and Dairy Australia Quality Pasture Silage booklet, developed in 2016 in response to the milk price drop. Portions of this booklet have been adapted from the TopFodder Successful Silage manual.

Minimise contractor disagreements

Key points

- ✿ Clear communication — in writing if necessary — key to avoiding disputes
- ✿ Understand why costs vary between contractors
- ✿ Collect evidence during harvest in case of future disputes



By Frank Mickan
Former pasture and conservation specialist
Department of Primary Industries
Ellinbank, Vic

DURING every silage and hay harvest season there are disagreements between farmers and contractors during the actual harvest or with the finished product. Unfortunately, many such arguments end up in court, often costing both parties a lot of money and, to add salt to the wound, sometimes the genuinely aggrieved party loses out.

At the risk of offending some and/or being told to mind my own business, I would like to offer some tips that may

help to avoid some of these nasty situations. Below are just some of the situations that occur every year.

Job specifications

Ensure the job specifications and “what ifs” are clear to both parties: Given the increasing number of disagreements or situations ending in court action, both parties need to be aware and clear of the rules and boundaries for the job at hand.

Both farmers and contractors need to have a good understanding of best practices for harvesting fodder as unfortunately, there are still unscrupulous operators out there willing to provide misinformation to inexperienced customers. Things can go pear shaped so as much as it is possible, agreement should be reached on potential compromise actions before they occur. Not doing so is why many court actions arise.

Possible solutions: Some contractors and their associations and even individual farmers now have a writ-

ten contract or agreement, which is signed before work begins. No one likes this but it is becoming more common. Also be clear as to who is supplying what at what quality and when.

Inclement weather conditions

Weather in spring is unpredictable and the Bureau of Meteorology and other weather forecasting web sites do not always get it right. Gut feeling can go a long way for experienced operators but even they can be caught out by a sudden change in weather. This often results in mown crops receiving unforeseen rainfall or being harvested before the silage has wilted or the hay has cured to their correct dry matter or moisture contents, respectively.

Possible solutions: If silage is within 5 to 7 per cent DM of the recommended DM content, use a fermentation enhancing silage additive to encourage the desirable lactic acid fermentation. If hay is within about 3 to 5pc of the recommended moisture

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◀ content for the bale type, apply a hay preservative to minimise heating of bales due to micro-organism activity. Of course, this assumes that the harvest equipment is already set up with an applicator and that the additive or preservative is readily accessible.

If not possible, the only options are to hope like hell the rain is light because heavy, and especially extended periods of rain, will lead to large losses of nutrients and DM. If material has not been already raked, it may be possible to rake the crop into windrows and re-spread or turn over the windrows onto dried ground once the rain passes and the ground dries out somewhat.

Contractor is late

The contractor can be late for many reasons, some causes under their control, some not. Unforeseen inclement weather, equipment break down, labour shortage, accidents, extra requests by farmers while the contractor is on the farm, consumables such as string, netwrap and plastic not being on hand or running out, are only some of the causes of their delay.

Possible solution: Farmers need to be aware that the contractors will

have lined up jobs to be done at specific times in the forecast period and unforeseen bad weather can stuff this up; it is no one's fault. However, the more professional contractors try to reduce this risk by not overbooking ahead or having contingency plans such as extra equipment or sub-contractors available, to try to head off this problem. Human nature being what it is, reliable and prompt payment of contractors will stand in a farmer's favour. To help them plan more effectively for everyone concerned, regularly communicate with them well ahead of harvest.

Job was too dear

This can be caused by many factors such as poorly compacted stacks and bales resulting in extra stack size thereby requiring extra plastic film, soft bales resulting in increased bale number, extra time taken to do a set job such as problem paddock, e.g. odd-shaped, steep slopes, wet flats, distance between paddock and storage site, inaccurate DM yield of fodder from paddock and so on.

Narrow or rough laneways and gateways can severely slow the transport

of chopped forage or for bales being carted elsewhere.

Machine breakdowns due to unseen obstacles (harrows, tree stumps, fence wire, electric fence posts, high tensile rake tynes, dropped limbs, etc) result in needless downtime and equipment repairs, delayed harvest, increased risk of poor weather, are all expensive to both parties, directly or indirectly.

Possible solutions: Farmers and contractors should be aware of the harvesting or baling speed of the machinery, the expected density of compacted stacks and bales, bale sizes and weights, speed of wrapping, etc. Ensure paddocks to be harvested have clear and safe access and if hauling chopped forage, that laneways are graded and entrances to gateways are wide or, alternatively, fences dropped. Before forage grows too long, check and remove, or at least mark well, where hidden obstacles are in paddocks to be harvested. Don't forget to check paddocks later thrown into the mix.

Regarding the density, the fingers of a hand should not be able to be pushed past the first knuckles into baled silage and not past the second set in a stack. For overdry forage, baling with dew on the windrows will assist in baling denser bales and similarly for chopped silage, although if there is wetter forage nearby, alternating loads of dry and wetter material can also result in better compaction.

Contractor charge rates are too high

Farmers often complain that some contractor rates are too high compared to other contractors or a local farmer doing some local contracting to help pay off his own new equipment. Sometimes cost may be too high for the job done (see above point) and updating machinery to satisfy the "mine is bigger than yours" syndrome is false economy often resulting in businesses going bust. However, the higher charges are usually necessary for many sound reasons.

Farmers want their job done when agreed upon without delay and before being affected by inclement weather. However, contractors have many farmers in this situation at the same time but are restrained by the high cost of machinery, labour availability and their experience, machinery breakdowns and weather. To minimise some of these constraints, contractors regularly update their equipment to the latest and usually more

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efficient machinery and to minimise breakdowns. These are expensive, as are any needless breakdowns caused by carelessness or poor planning.

Another major factor is the high cost of running a professional contracting business. To meet farmers' demands for a quick harvest of high quality forage they need reliable, high capacity equipment, which must be replaced and updated regularly to maintain their credible reputation. Professional contractors also have many overheads and variable costs that local farmer contractors and other smaller contractors may not have such as paying for the training and insurance cover of employees, occupational health and safety costs, advertising, downtime for whatever reason where labour is still being paid but not earning income, business related paperwork.

Cheaper rates usually also means a slower job due to lower throughput equipment and potential for more equipment failure if older equipment is being used. Cheaper rates usually mean that the full cost of machinery such as including repairs, maintenance and replacement have not been

fully costed in the charge out rate, eventually biting one way or another. Sometimes the ethics of professional contractors is not embedded in these operators but equally, it often is.

Possible solutions: By all means go for the cheaper cost farmer or smaller contractor business, especially if happy with their past results. However, be aware that delays due to regular breakdowns, slow throughput, or them having to fit harvest in between their own milking times, can result in having a lower quality silage and this can cost a lot of money in lower production. A silage stack of 200 tonnes DM testing 9.5 metabolisable energy instead of 10.5 ME due to extended delays, will result in about \$3000 less value in milk priced at \$0.35/litre.

The more expensive contractor on a high cost/hour will usually cover the ground faster and more reliably and have the crop in storage within one or two days. A lower charging, less well-equipped operator will usually take much longer increasing the risk of bad weather, more likelihood of breakdowns and turning up to the farm days, sometimes weeks, later due to their lower capacity, break-

downs, costing lost production due to lower fodder quality.

Mouldy silage

Too often court cases revolve around silage being mouldy, foul smelling and cattle refusing to consume the silage, or animal production is lower than expected.

Possible solutions: Harvest the forage at the recommended DM content. If material is too dry when forage harvesting, harvest with dew on the windrows, chop shorter, spread material in layers less than 15 centimetres depth and roll slowly and well and if possible, add in some loads of wetter material. Applying an aerobic spoilage inhibitor additive may prevent the production of yeasts, moulds and aerobic bacteria by producing acetic acid but no guarantees. If forage-harvesting material that is slightly too wet, apply a fermentation-enhancing silage additive allowing for increased application rate due to extra weight in the fresh material.

If baling forage which is too dry, wait for a dew before baling, increase bale pressure in the bale chamber and bale slower to increase bale density. ►



		
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- Apply extra plastic if stalks are likely to puncture the stretchwrap film. Apply an aerobic spoilage inhibitor additive. If baling too wet, apply a fermentation-enhancing silage additive and stand bales on the ends. Bales may be wetter at their base. Apply at least four layers of stretchwrap plastic on round bales and six layers on large squares and continuous in-line wrapped bales to ensure a good seal with no underlapping, i.e. no windows.

Fix holes in the plastic immediately when noticed with silage specific tape, not duct tape.

Mouldy or heating hay

This occurs from baling hay with too much moisture inside the plants and especially on the outside form insufficient curing, heavy dews at baling and rain events on windrows or bales.

Ensure the moisture content has reached the recommended level depending on bale form, large squares needing to be drier than large rounds and these drier than small squares. Use a reliable and calibrated moisture meter and ideally, check some readings against samples dried by a microwave oven to verify the moisture me-

ter accuracy. Many contractors now use food dehydrators, which can have 5+ trays allowing several samples to be dried at once. Spend some time to get experience with these or talk to those using them. Definitely consider using a hay preservative, allowing for extra bale weight due to the moisture.

Court cases


Unfortunately, there will still be a threat of legal action to those offering and those using fodder conservation services. Some court actions on both sides of the windrow will be genuine but some are unfathomable and the legal system does not always see justice done the way people think it should be done.


Possible solutions: The more robust, documented and scientifically supported is the evidence collected during and immediately after the job, the better the chances of having a favourable outcome in legal action. With smart phones and tablets now commonplace some high quality images with date and times shown on the shot would be a reliable source of evidence, not that I am a lawyer. As examples, get shots of tractors show-

ing how well stacks are being compacting, record the wrapping of a bale or three to show how much and how well film is being applied, indications that bales were too wet to bale (see Figure 2), handle some material as if trying to determine the DM or moisture content to show it is ready, or not. Even a shot of the paddock to be harvested as driving in and out (time and date stamped) could be useful to reinforce arguments.

Document other robust supporting information such as copying and filing away the weather conditions for the day(s), written record of any disagreements and the outcome of this, including reasoning as to what should have happened but didn't, close-up shots of plant material to show stage of maturity.

If told to go ahead against advice — have documents to support the case.

These suggestions are also the same from the farmer's point of view. Obviously with respected and valuable relationships between both parties these extreme measures should not be needed but there are times when this will be unknown and if disagreements turn sour, start collecting evidence, just in case. 



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Silage can help manage drought

- Key points**
- ✿ Silage can fit into a range of farming systems
 - ✿ Can help provide a fodder reserve for drought
 - ✿ Use inoculant to ensure high quality silage



GROWING or contract growing fodder may present a better long-term solution for many livestock producers in managing feed inventory and costs, according to Lallemand Animal Nutrition's Jordan Minniecon.

The company's Toowoomba, Qld, based technical services manager, Mr Minniecon said the drought was a compelling reminder for livestock producers to continually focus on their longer-term feeding strategies.

"A lot of extensive livestock producers think that feeding silage is purely in the domain of feedlots or large dairies with their own cropping programs," he said.

"Nothing could be further from the truth.

"Silage made from irrigated or dry-land crops forms the backbone of hundreds of feeding systems in dairy, beef and sheep enterprises throughout Australia."

Livestock producers are using baled silage through to large bulk silage systems.

"It really comes down to developing a silage system that meets the needs of each situation from drought reserves through to high level production," Mr Minniecon said. "Some are using silage in their weaning programs to make sure heifers and mature breeders achieve critical mating weights and body condition scores.



David Lewis covers a silage pit with Silostop oxygen barrier plastic.

"For others, silage is part of an intensive production systems for milk and meat and as reserves to sustain production or maintain their precious genetic base during bad years to limit destocking.

"Many beef producers are also increasingly using silage in their back-grounding or finishing programs to make sure their steers achieve market

specifications and leave the property on time."

Although the majority of silage produced nowadays is consumed within 12 to 18 months, silage can be stored for 10, 20 or even 30 years and managed as a long-term drought management strategy.

Lallemand Animal Nutrition has been involved in the Australian live-

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stock industry since the early 1990s and continues to provide an integrated silage production service, including inoculants, sealing systems and management advice.

Lallemand technical services manager David Lewis said talking about how to prepare for dry times during a drought might seem insensitive. "But now is exactly the right time for producers to consider and plan how they might be able to change their system," he said. "Attempting to source feed when it's dry is never the best strategy because everyone is facing the same problem."

Demand quickly outstrips supply, prices go through the roof and the quality of the remaining resource becomes variable and often geographically unfeasible to transport.

Inoculants

A tool that silage producers can and should use to ensure they produce, preserve and feed the largest amounts of the highest quality silage, are research-proven high-quality bacterial forage inoculants.

While there are numerous additives available to producers, selecting the

'It really comes down to developing a silage system that meets the needs of each situation from drought reserves through to high level production.'

best and most effective one for their farm should not be a difficult task.

Mr Lewis said using the right bacterial inoculant was part of an overall silage management program that would help producers achieve higher quality silages.

Selecting a suitable inoculant is about more than just managing the fermentation at silage harvest time; it's about storing and delivering high quality silage and fresh hygienic feed to animals for production at feed out as well, he said.

"Take into account your silage history and the challenges you face," Mr Lewis said.

"Generally, high protein crops present a greater fermentation chal-

lenges, while high starch crops have greater aerobic stability issues."

Also, be aware of specific challenges due to weather — such as crop dry matter, drought, hail, crop maturity and factors such as insect damage and field disease.

"Selecting a research-proven inoculant wisely and following the manufacturer's directions for storage and application will help ensure that the maximum benefits are obtained and maximise the return on investment in preserving silage," Mr Lewis said.

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Lallemand also has a range of conventional white and black PE silage films up to 20 metres wide which incorporates new five- and seven-layer technology, as well as woven protection covers and gravel bag sealing weights, which are ideal for longer term silage storage.

Article supplied by Lallemand Animal Nutrition, website <<https://lallemandanimalnutrition.com/en/australia/>>.

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Conference aims to empower women

THE 2019 Bale Up NSW Women in Dairy conference aims to empower delegates to “ignite and shine”.

It is the third year WID has run the conference, which attracts women from farms across NSW and interstate.

The first conference in 2017, hosted by the Hunter/Barrington and Mid Coast WID groups, attracted more than 40 dairy industry women and tackled topics of mental health, rural resilience and succession while also providing an opportunity for valuable networking

with like-minded women from across the state.

This year's conference is being held at Tamworth, NSW, from September 10 to 12. It provides for three days of networking and learning in a safe and supported environment.

The conference organisers said they aimed to provide delegates with workshops and sessions on strengthening their communities and developing skills that helped them with goal setting, leadership and communication.

Organisers said all these sessions

would provide positive outcomes and give women the confidence to return to their communities knowing there was a framework of support for them and their families.

This year's panel sessions on each day will be another highlight of the conference, with inspiring stories from female farmers throughout the country.

Delegates will also hear from women farmers across the state sharing with their success in reigniting their women in dairy groups.

Program of events

Day 1 Empowering and Leading

Tuesday, September 10

11am Check in & lunch
12:40pm MC — Welcome to Conference
12:45pm Official Conference Opening — Shirley Wilson, Shirleinn Jerseys & Legendairy Hero
1pm Rural Woman Taking the Lead — NSW Minister for Water, Property & Housing, Melinda Pavey MP (supported by NSW Woman in Dairy)
1:30pm Looking after each other — Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP)
2:45pm Drought Support Worker RAMHP
3pm Afternoon tea and trivia
3:30pm Session 1: (Rotating sessions)
Working with our Personalities/Optimising Traits and Leveraging our Strengths — Nicky McMillan Grants, Programs and Assistance in your Region — Hunter Local Land Services
4:45pm Free time
6pm Evening events at Quality Hotel Powerhouse Tamworth
Networking and Dinner (dress casual) (Supported by Lactalis Australia)

Day 2 Ignite and Shine

Wednesday, September 11

6:45am Yoga with Jenny Eggert (optional activity)
7:15am Breakfast
8am "Moovers and Shakers" discussion panel of four fabulous rising stars (Supported by Norco)
10am Christopher Morrison, The Farming Coach & Author (Supported by Daviesway)
10:30am Trade Session
10:45am Morning tea

11:30am Session 2: (rotating sessions)
Biosecurity & Diseases — Dairy Australia + Hunter LLS Vet Lyndell Stone
Animal Welfare Threats — Dairy Australia (supported by Agco)
12:30pm Farmers self-assessment employment tool — Dairy Australia
1:15pm Lunch
1:40pm Afternoon activities: Afternoon activities to finish at 5:00PM (See list of choices on registration)
6pm Shimmer and Shine Gala Dinner
Bus departs Quality Hotel Powerhouse Tamworth for evening events at Goonoo Goonoo Station Networking and Dinner. Guest Speaker Sallie Jones, Co-Founder of Gippsland Jersey (Supported by DairyNSW)
(Dress cocktail with a bit of Shimmer and Shine) (Supported by Rabobank & ACHMEA)

Day 3 Challenge and Change

Thursday, September 12

6:45am Yoga with Jenny Eggert (optional activity)
7:15am Breakfast
8am Panel "Adapt, Challenge, Change" (Supported by Alltech)
10am: Session 3: (rotating sessions)
Panel session, Woman in Dairy across the state in 2019 and Tania Luckin (Dairy Australia) WID in Australia.
Succession Planning Rabobank — Rosemary Bartle
11:30am Morning tea
12:15pm Building your Podcast Portfolio - Karen Sowter, Rural Resilience Officer, Department of Primary Industries
12:30pm Issues & Solutions - NSW Department of Primary Industries Rural Resilience Team
1:30pm Lunch and Conference Close (2pm)

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- ◀ There will be informative sessions on:
- Employing and retaining staff, hear from farmers firsthand how they are successfully doing it.
 - Biosecurity and animal welfare.

Sessions on a range of subjects will be conducted by the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program, Hunter Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries Rural Resilience Program, Dairy NSW, Rabobank, Hunter New England Health, milk supply compa-

nies and rural stores. A highlight of the conference will be a night out at Goonoo Goonoo Station. Optional events include farm tours, horse riding and a trip to Nundle Wool Mill.

Organising committee chair Megan Nicholson is a first-generation dairy farmer on the mid north coast of NSW.

"I love working alongside my husband Geoff," she said. "Farming sustainably and producing a quality milk product gives me satisfaction in what I

do every day. At Bale Up 2019 I'm looking forward to learning new skills, networking and seeing our women in dairy across NSW get away from the farm for three days sharing all things WID." **D**

For more information contact Megan Nicholson, mobile 0427 567 347 or email <meg.nicholson59@gmail.com> or head to the Women in Dairy facebook page at <<https://www.facebook.com/nswwomenindairy/>> for registration information.

Speakers to inspire dairy women

THE 2019 Bale Up NSW Women in Dairy Conference features a range of speakers to inspire attendees. These include:

Sallie Jones

Sallie Jones is the keynote speaker at the conference.

Ms Jones is a dairy farmer from West Gippsland. She is the owner and operator of Gippsland Jersey, an independent farmer-owned milk label.

The Gippsland Jersey project grew from a profound desire to honour the work and life of her father, Michael Bowen. The prevailing spirit and message behind Ms Jones's journey with Gippsland Jersey speaks to the importance of community connections, advocating for fairness and kindness within the dairy industry, and raising awareness around mental health and suicide prevention.

Shirley Wilson

Tamworth, NSW, dairy farmer Shirley Wilson will open the conference.

Mrs Wilson hopes to inspire a new generation of farmers with her stories of endurance and resilience. Mrs Wilson says younger farmers can learn from those who've lived through decades of challenges.

Mrs Wilson and her husband Lindsay were both born on dairy farms and lived for a short time in Gloucester but were always destined to return to the land. In 1964 they went out share farming together.

"When we started people thought we were crazy because there was a drought," Mrs Wilson said. "The drought didn't finish until October 1966 so we didn't have a good start but we loved it and got through."

In 1971 they registered their first Jersey stud cow and moved to Wingham, NSW, to lease a farm, staying until 1983 when they purchased a property.

In 1987 they purchased an adjoining dairy farm, working with their son Brian. In 2000 Shirley and Lindsay handed



Sallie Jones is the keynote speaker.

the farm to Brian and his wife Vicki but with deregulation they needed to expand to survive and moved to a new property at Tamworth, NSW.

About 15 months ago Brian's son Todd and his wife Sarah purchased Peel Valley Milk processing plant, giving their home-grown milk a local outlet. "It's going very well," Shirley said. "Every litre produced is processed through Peel Valley Milk and it's sold in Tamworth and around local towns and as far as Newcastle."

"Women have been the backbone of a lot of dairy farms and it's a good thing that more women are now getting involved in committees."

Melinda Pavey MP

The NSW Minister for Water, Property and Housing Melinda Pavey will present a session on day one of the conference. Her talk on rural women and leadership will be one to empower and inspire all.

RAMHP

The Rural Adversity Mental Health Program was established in 2007. There are RAMHP co-ordinators living and working across regional and remote NSW who provide advice to people experiencing mental health concerns and connect them to appropriate local services and support.

The RAMHP team has been supporting the women in dairy conference since 2016. They are also supporting the women in dairy groups across the

state. Many women have been struggling (often in isolation) with the ongoing drought and industry challenges and it has been such a kind, caring and supportive role these group of people have shown over the years.

Nicky McMillan

Back at this year's conference by popular demand, Ms McMillan will be presenting a session on "Working with personalities/optimising traits and leveraging our strengths".

A certified body language trainer with the science of people, she's on a mission to share this life-changing knowledge and skills so other aspiring regional bizpreneurs, and leaders can be the best version of themselves — wherever and whatever the occasion.

By showing them how to boost their presence, charisma and impact on those around them with relevant, actionable and effective tips to nailing their presentation and communication.

With a background in media and government and political communications, Ms McMillan's met and worked with people from all walks of life — from the Prime Minister's office to hardworking folk across remote, rural and regional Australia. Raised in the country, now married to a farmer near Corowa in the NSW Riverina, and mum to a feisty young daughter, she's had plenty of life experience to keep her real.

Daintry Gerrand

Ms Gerrand be presenting on the grants, programs and assistance available in the various Local Land Services regions throughout NSW.

Jenny Eggert

Back by popular demand, Jenny Eggert is a dairy farmer and yoga instructor.

Mr Eggert says she remembers her first yoga class — on a mat, on the floor of the CWA hall in Wauchope, NSW, leotard and fishnet tights. It wasn't any of

those things that gave her a light bulb moment from those classes but the ease and comfort that she felt not just physically but mentally as well, she said.

She said she was not sure if 'restorative yoga' was widely practised in the 1970s but today it was becoming increasingly popular as there was less focus on stretching muscles and more on releasing tension.

Ms Eggert plans to offer restorative yoga at the conference for all ages. Regardless of people's past yoga experience, if any, the sessions will offer a chance for everyone to experience as sense of relaxation and rejuvenation.

Chris Morrison

Chris Morrison is a certified business coach, speaker and trainer who works with business owners who are serious about taking their business and life to the top. His business Chris Morrison ActionCoach is highly focused on strategies and planning, delivering on outcomes with exceptional results.

As an ActionCoach business coach, Mr Morrison's passion is boosting profits while simplifying the business. He works with small business owners, helping them find ways to spend less time working in their business so they have more time to work on their business.

Julie Brown

Julie Brown is a dairy farmer from Tamworth, NSW.

She moved to Tamworth in 1995 from Marlee, NSW, with husband Wes and children. The couple has bought and sold a property since moving to Tamworth and moved to new property with a rotary dairy in 2017. Julie has four children and eight grandchildren; her son Mitchell and his partner Brianna work and live on the new property with their little son Braxton.



Tamworth, NSW, dairy farmer Shirley Wilson will open the conference.

The Brown family are milking 300 Holsteins, calving year round on 195 hectares of Peel River flats and rear all their replacement heifers. They irrigate from the Peel River and underground water. They produce corn silage and lucerne hay during spring and summer, which is fed out in a partial mixed ration on a feed pad.

Rosemary Bartle

Rosemary Bartle is one of Rabobank's succession planning facilitators and has extensive experience in working with farming families to achieve successful business, family and personal outcomes.

After working with family businesses for many years, Rabobank recognised the need for a succession planning process developed specifically to meet the needs of our rural clients. Rabobank's experience in this area has confirmed that families who start the process early have a much greater chance of achieving a positive outcome for all family members, as well as their farm businesses.

Ms Bartle holds a degree in Agricultural Science from Latrobe University, a Diploma in Financial Services (Financial Planning), and a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. Prior to joining Rabobank, she worked with farming and pastoral

families across the length and breadth of Australia as a business management consultant; specialising in business analysis, benchmarking, grazing management, facilitation and training. Growing up on a grazing property in eastern Victoria and having worked with farming families in a professional capacity for over 25 years, she has a thorough understanding of family businesses and the elements necessary to ensure their success.

Rural Resilience Program — Department of Primary Industries (DPI)

The Rural Resilience Program defines resilience as a 'process' rather than an outcome or personality trait and acknowledges that levels of resilience among farmers and their families can be impacted by adverse events. The team works proactively in partnership with farming communities and service providers across NSW to strengthen networks, exchange information and deliver relevant initiatives that build personal and business resilience skills and knowledge, enabling people to move forward in a positive direction.

The program creates opportunities to connect people with support services and others in farming communities. For example it partners with other services to support local Rural Support Networks to deliver more holistic, co-ordinated and targeted initiatives tailored to a person's needs. It also supports new and existing farming groups to achieve their objectives.

The program also provides information, tools and development opportunities that build skills, knowledge and experience. Not only can it connect people to existing opportunities, it also facilitates workshops.

It also supports people and their families recovering from adverse events.

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July 10-11 Bega, NSW	Dairy Research Foundation Symposium Phone: (02) 4655 0631 Website: < http://sydney.edu.au/vetscience/foundations/drfsymposium/ >
July 16-18 Creswick, Vic	Grassland Society of Southern Australia Annual Conference Phone: 1300 137 550 Email: < office@grasslands.org.au > Website: < www.grasslands.org.au >
July 29-31 Hunter Valley, NSW	Australian National Fodder Conference Phone: (03) 9670 0523 Website: < www.afia.org.au/ >
August 9-18 Brisbane, Qld	Ekka Phone: (07) 3852 3900 Email: < enquiries@ekka.com.au > Website: < www.ekka.com.au >
August 14 Warrnambool, Vic	South West Dairy Ladies' luncheon 2019 Contact: WestVic Dairy Phone: (03) 5557 1000 Website: < https://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/westvic-dairy/ >
August 30-September 9 Adelaide, SA	Royal Adelaide Show Website: < https://theshow.com.au/ >
September 10-12 Tamworth, NSW	Bale Up Conference Contact: Megan Nicholson Phone: 0427 567 347 Email: < meg.nicholson59@gmail.com > Website: < https://www.facebook.com/nswwomenindairy/ >
September 11-12 Korumburra, Vic	South Gippsland Dairy Expo Phone: (03) 5659 4219 Email: < dairyexpo@jaydee.net.au > Website: < www.dairyexpo.org.au >
September 17-19 Brisbane, Qld	Nuffield Australia National Conference Website: < http://nuffield.com.au >
September 21 Melbourne, Vic	Royal Melbourne Show dairy judging Phone: (03) 9281 7416 Website: < www.rasv.com.au/dairy >
September 23-26 Istanbul, Turkey	International Dairy Federation World Dairy Summit Website: < http://www.idfws2019.com >
September 25-29 Wagga, NSW	Australian Society of Agronomy conference Email: < office@agronomyaustralia.org.au > Website: < http://www.agronomyaustralia.org >
October 1-3 Elmore, Vic	Elmore and District Machinery Field Days Phone: (03) 5432 6176 Email: < info@elmorefielddays.com.au > Website: < www.elmorefielddays.com.au >
November 11-13 Brisbane, Qld	TropAg2019 Phone: (07) 3848 2100 Email: < tropag2019@expertevents.com.au > Website: < http://tropagconference.org/ >

Dairy team to compete in Belgium

THE first ever Australian team is set to compete at the European Young Breeders School, to be held in August at Battice, Belgium.

Jersey Australia, The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria and Holstein Australia announced that the team members, selected from a rigorous application and interview process, come from five dairying regions across three states and represent a number of dairy breeds.

The team members include: Brady Hore from Leitchville, Victoria; Julia Paulger from Kenilworth, Queensland; Ricky Nelson from Irrewillipe, Vic; Sam Hall from Australind, Western Australia; and Zoe Hayes from Girgarre, Vic.

Justin Johnston of Glomar Holsteins will lead the team, with team reserve Alexander Crawford from Daltons Bridge, Vic.

Mr Johnston said this was something he had wanted to get off the ground for a while, and with the backing of Jersey Australia, The Royal Agricultural Society (RAS)

of Victoria and Holstein Australia, as well as other industry partners, it had been made possible.

"This is the 20th year the European Young Breeders School (EYBS) has taken place and it has become the international reference point for training and show preparation, with many countries entering teams year-on-year. It will be a great learning experience for our team members, and a real opportunity to showcase the talent of Australian dairy youth on the world stage," he said.

Taking place from August 26 to September 6, the EYBS is an annual five-day event run by the Association Wallonne de l'Elevage (AWE). The Australian team will then travel through Holland on an educational tour.

The AWE involves hands-on workshops including bedding, showmanship and clipping, as well as classroom-based sessions on marketing and herd promotion. After three days of workshops and practice, participants

put their skills to the test in stock judging, showmanship and calf classes.

The team is being supported by a number of Australian enterprises and industry bodies including Dick Smith, ST Genetics, Dairy Australia, Genetics Australia, Smyth Seeds and Gippsland Dairy Youth.

Jersey Australia general manager, Glen Barrett, said the team of five were outstanding young individuals selected from a group of 25 high-calibre applicants, which was an amazing response.

The RAS of Victoria CEO, Paul Guerra said the RAS of Victoria was proud to support the inaugural Australian youth delegation to the European Young Breeders School.

Holstein Australia CEO, Graeme Gillan, said he gave full marks to Mr Johnston for getting this project up and running.

"The selection panel has put together what I think is a strong cross-breed team from a number of different dairy regions throughout Australia," Mr Gillan said.

Chasing the Daughter Fertility ABV



By Ee Cheng Ooi*

Key points

- ✓ Fertility ABV developed to help tackle problem
- ✓ Many farmers unaware of it or not confident in using it
- ✓ Large study confirms it is associated with improved fertility

In the last article, we looked at the history of declining dairy fertility. For those of you just joining us, a quick summary:

It came hand-in-hand with increasing milk yield, but isn't directly caused by high production.

It's difficult to monitor unless you collect data; unlike pasture growth, it's hard to 'see' pregnancies.

Finally, the Australian dairy industry invested in two major initiatives in the late 1990s to turn the ship around.

The first initiative was the InCalf project, which we'll cover in the next issue.

The second initiative was the Daughter Fertility Australian Breeding Value (ABV), which was devised by dairy geneticists in 2003 and upgraded in 2013.

This was the first time farmers had the ability to pick bulls with daughters that were easier to get pregnant. Up until that point, farmers had to wait years before realising that a particular bull's daughters were no good — and by then they'd stopped using it and were onto the next bull.

The ABV gave farmers a way of looking into the future to avoid accumulating these problem cows within their herds.

From my perspective as a dairy vet, I'd always recommended that farmers use the ABV, but found that not all of them had heard of it or trusted that it worked.

Some farmers were skeptical about whether you could make measurable progress in reproductive performance just using genetics, or whether Australian proofs were as reliable as international figures.

Over time, I started to question these things myself.

In 2016, I had the opportunity to complete a research master's thesis with the University of Melbourne dairy clinical resident program.

So, I decided to pursue validation of the Daughter Fertility ABV, using farm data that I could trust.

I collected records from 38 farmers who were identified as good record keepers, herd testers and early pregnancy testers with Rochester Veterinary Practice, in northern Victoria.

I interviewed them about the Daughter Fertility ABV to get a better understanding of farmer attitudes and opinions, and collected farm management data as well — things like herd size, level of concentrate feeding and number of employees.

'For the Holsteins, one point of ABV was associated with a 2.6 per cent increase in the likelihood of submission, a 5.1pc increase in the likelihood of conception and a 5.7pc increase in the likelihood of calving in the first six weeks after calving start date.'

After the dust had settled, I found I had 86,974 cows with birthdates ranging from 1965 to 2017.

Some of our farmers had been keeping meticulous records for generations.

This included 438,578 pregnancy test and insemination records and 219,156 calving and lactation records.

Having such a large data set meant I was able to get results for both Holstein-Friesians and Jerseys.

The last year has been a whirlwind of writing code and wrangling statistics.

After months of analysis, I'm pleased to say that we can be confident that the ABV is associated with improved reproductive performance in both breeds.

For the Holsteins, one point of ABV was associated with a 2.6 per cent increase in the likelihood of submission, a 5.1pc increase in the likelihood of conception and a 5.7pc increase in the likelihood of calving in the first six weeks after calving start date.

For Jerseys, one point of ABV was associated with a 4.8pc increase in submission, a 6.5pc increase in conception and a 5.4pc increase in the likelihood of calving early.

These results are statistically significant with narrow confidence intervals and a p-value of less than 0.0001 or less than 0.001 for all measures.

The challenge is that artificial insemination sires only contribute half of their genetics to a new calf, and cows can have poor inherent fertility after decades of decline. Improving this will take time.

On average, it took the herds in the study five years to increase their herd average daughter fertility ABV by 1.5 points.

Another finding of the study was that management is still an important part of improving fertility.

While one point of the daughter fertility ABV was associated with a 2.6pc increase in the likelihood of submission for Holsteins, being calved 65 days before mating start date was associated with a 71pc increase — a much larger impact.

However, we were pleased with this result and will continue to recommend to our farmers that they select bulls based on their daughter fertility ABVs — preferably over 105 and certainly nothing below 100.

I'm not a geneticist and I don't sell semen, so I don't benefit commercially from the ABV.

But I do want to see the reproductive performance of my clients' herds continually improve and I'm satisfied that we have a useful tool to help achieve this.

Next up, we'll take a good look at the InCalf project.

**Ee Cheng Ooi is a cattle veterinarian and fertility researcher working with the animal health team at Dairy Australia. All comments and information discussed in this article are intended to be of a general nature only. Please consult the farm's vet for herd health advice, protocols and/or treatments that are tailored to a herd's particular needs.*

Making the most of fast data delivery

- Key points**
- ✓ Numbers drive everything on farm — budgets, harvest and herd
 - ✓ Genomic testing of females provides more data
 - ✓ Constantly pushing for genetic gain

EVERY decision on Bob and Jacqui Biddulph's dairy farm is data driven. There's no stone unturned when it comes to measuring and monitoring performance for the self-confessed "number crunchers".

"We keep a lot of records, but that's only so we can look at them and make decisions," Mrs Biddulph said. "From paddock performance, the number of hay rolls coming out (of each paddock), to seed selection, we do financial analysis of the business every year, so with breeding, it is not much different.

"We like to keep our herd genetically modern, using new bulls all the time rather than older bulls. We are completely commercially focused: our money comes from selling milk and we want cattle that last."

So, it is no surprise that the couple have embraced Australian Breeding Values for females, based on genomic testing, pedigree estimates and their own performance records.

"We have a report on our herd, every cow from milking to non-milking," Mrs Biddulph said. "Some calves were born on the 8th of April and on the 17th of April we got their pedigree — only BPI."

The Balanced Performance Index (BPI) is an estimate of an animal's genetic merit, based on the traits that contribute to farm business performance under Australian conditions.

The couple milk 420-registered Holsteins at Cowaramup near Margaret River in Western Australia off about 300 hectares with the support of a 125ha run-off block and 50ha of leased land.

Targeted, individual matings underpin the Biddulphs' breeding program, a task which relies heavily on data.

"We've always focused on strong cow families, three generations of type and udders and now we use cow BPIs as well," Mrs Biddulph said. "All the information is there now and more



Bob, Jacqui and Hannah Biddulph have used ABVs to improve their dairy herd over many years.

importantly it is readily available. "I've reared bulls from maiden heifers now that we have got more information. Before their dams even hit the dairy, we know a fair-bit about them.

"We then genomically test our home-bred bulls to confirm they are good enough. This early information puts us in front compared to where we used to be."

Constantly pushing for genetic gain, earlier information has helped the couple sharpen their focus for culling and export heifer selection.

Inseminating all the heifers and running an extensive artificial insemination program with the main herd ensures the couple has plenty of replacements each year. Their annual replacement rate is 25-30 per cent, with young animals keeping herd health issues to a minimum. These extra heifers also mean there's more

available to send to the export market. Traditionally 30-50 animals are exported each year.

Profitability is at the heart of all business decisions, including breeding.

Thorough analysis of sires starts as soon as DataGene's April ABV proofs are released, with bulls selected within 24 hours. This tight timeframe's crucial to ensure semen arrives in Western Australia in time for joining.

DataGene's *Good Bulls Guide* is a starting point for sire selection with the BPI the primary source of information. "That's the first cut and then we look for bulls with a positive fat percentage, cell count and fertility," Mrs Biddulph said.

There was always a focus on udders, rumps and feet and legs as well to ensure functionality and in the end a consistent team of bulls was chosen

including a mix of genomically tested, progeny test and proven bulls.

A strong believer in the science behind the BPI system, Mrs Biddulph said progeny-test bulls were always a good option as they had high genetic merit.

She said the focus on BPI has delivered accurate results in the paddock and on paper.

"At the end of every year we separate all the first-calf heifers by bull and look at their average production," she said.

"The poorer production ones always have the lowest BPIs."


Averaging about 550 kilograms/

'Before their dams even hit the dairy, we know a fair-bit about them.'

cow/lactation, the 600kg Holsteins are fed a diet of pasture for the short (180-day) growing season, supplemented by concentrates and silage. Bale feed is about 2.5 tonnes/cow/lactation as there's no pasture available after November.

"For us, it is all about bringing in consistent lines of heifers that per-

form for us in a variety of ways, they produce milk, are quiet, have decent udders, easy to milk on a rotary, get in calf, are able to walk to the back of the farm — 1.5 kilometres away — and back again and are as efficient as possible converting feed to milk.

"We get all this information out of ABVs and BPIs now, on the cow sides as well as bulls' side. We used to only have cow pedigree information to rely on, now we have genomic information that tells us stuff that's real." 

For more information, contact DataGene, email <enquiries@datagene.com.au>, website <www.datagene.com.au>.

Dairy farmers refresh knowledge

Key points

- ✓ Dairy farmers staying up-to-date with best practice for euthanasia
- ✓ New ADIC policy requires provisions for on-farm euthanasia through firearm or captive bolt
- ✓ No blunt force trauma, except in emergency situations.

AUSTRALIAN dairy farmers are showing their commitment to the welfare of their animals by staying up-to-date on recent changes to industry policy.

A stronger industry policy has been implemented by the Australian Dairy Industry Council on emergency euthanasia, under which dairy farmers must create provisions for on-farm euthanasia by using a licensed firearm or captive bolt device.

To comply with the new industry policy, farmers must not use euthanasia by blunt force trauma, except in emergency situations.

Dairy farmers are also actively encouraged to ensure they are able to perform euthanasia humanely and in line with best practice, and provide training for their staff.

The changes come after the Australian Dairy Industry Sustainability Framework was strengthened in 2018 by a fourth pillar — striving for health, welfare and best care for all animals throughout their life.

Gippsland dairy farmer Sharon Mattern sees the changes as an opportunity to refresh her knowledge of best practice. "Nowadays, you have to

'Through the courses, I gained confidence that I was undertaking best practice procedures on-farm.'

keep up-to-date," Ms Mattern said. "Animal welfare is a big issue, as it should be — you want to ensure that you are doing the right thing for your animals."

Ms Mattern has been farming alongside her husband since they were married and started a family in 1998, trading her laboratory role in product testing at Murray Goulburn for a job closer to home.

She milks 1100 cows through a 52-unit rotary, with a split-calving pattern.

To get across the latest animal welfare standards, Ms Mattern took advantage of Euthanasia Livestock courses being offered regularly through her local Regional Development Program.

"Through the courses, I gained confidence that I was undertaking best practice procedures on-farm," she said.

"You hope that you don't have to use the knowledge often on your farm, but it's important for every farmer to have the ability to do what's best for their animals."

Ways to stay compliant with industry policy


1. Create provisions for on-farm euthanasia using a licensed firearm or captive bolt device.
2. Do not use euthanasia by blunt force trauma, except in emergency situations.
3. Encourage your team to undergo training through your Regional Development Program's Euthanasia Livestock courses.

Ms Mattern manages the farm alongside a farm team of her husband, four full-time staff and three casual staff.

For Ms Mattern, a key priority is ensuring her staff understand best practice, so they handle animals humanely and in line with industry standards.

"I know that if my staff go to training, they are going to be taught up-to-date information by someone who has the time and experience to get the information across to them," Ms Mattern said.

"I can now have confidence that my staff are capable of making good decisions when it really counts."

Dairy farmers can access Euthanasia Livestock courses by contacting their Regional Development Program. 

Irrigation area farmers plan for future

- Key points**
- ✓ Volatile water market continues to directly affect irrigation farmers
 - ✓ Dairy Australia and Murray Dairy supporting farmers with up-to-date info and resources
 - ✓ Farmers looking to increase certainty for their businesses

DAIRY farmers in Australia's irrigation regions are thinking outside of the box to weather climate extremes and a volatile water market.

As limited rainfall continues to place pressure on water supplies across the country, farmers in Victoria's north and the Riverina region of NSW are being directly impacted.

Water is trading at close to record prices, with prices exceeding \$500 a megalitre for temporary water in the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District, a zero per cent general security allocation in the Murray Irrigation District, and a shortfall of water predicted for the Macalister Irrigation District.

Murray Dairy regional manager Jenny Wilson said Dairy Australia and Murray Dairy were focused on providing up-to-date information and resources that farmers could use in their business planning.

"Dairy farmers are feeling the pressure of increasing volatility in the water market, after a season of record-high prices and dry conditions," she said.

"Coupled with uncertainty around water policy and what next season will bring, farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to plan how they manage their business."

Hundreds of local farmers have taken advantage of Dairy Australia's free Taking Stock sessions to work through their options with experienced advisers, including feed and water budgeting, herd decisions, and water procurement strategies for the short and long-term. Water in Focus events have also brought together a range of experts with updates on federal, state and local water policy, seasonal water allocations and trading, water procurement strategies and irrigation management.

"These events are giving dairy farmers and service providers the informa-



Rachelle and Carl Moon with their children Heidi, 9, Jonny, 4, and Harry, 11, at their Numurkah, Vic, dairy farm.

tion they need on water policy and outlooks, as well as on management strategies for a range of different business models," Ms Wilson said.

Dairy Australia and Murray Dairy are also investing in research, development and extension to support the changes that farm businesses in the Murray region are making to manage seasonal volatility. This includes the use of alternate forages and summer and winter crops, optimising fodder conservation and nutrition, understanding the value of infrastructure for feeding and housing cows, and herd improvement.

Managing water portfolio

Dairy farmers Rachelle and Carl Moon, from Numurkah in northern Victoria, manage their water portfolio in 'three thirds' to minimise the impact of water volatility on their business. "Dairy farming has been a massive rollercoaster ride and water prices are having a huge impact on our business," Mrs Moon said.

"We have milked through the wettest winter in history, and now we have drought conditions.

"The climate has kept us on our

toes, but we are still very positive about what we are doing and what we are setting out to achieve."

Mrs Moon milks 120 cows on an autumn-calving pattern, across 105 hectares and is heavily focused on home-grown fodder, while using a mixed grain ration and buying in about 90 per cent of her hay.

The Moons currently own 90ML of water, which accounts for one third of their farm's water usage. They lease one third of their water supply and purchase the remaining amount from the temporary market.

To increase certainty for her business, the Moons locked in an average water price on a three-year lease, which they will continue to review.

They also participated in the Plan2Farm program, funded by the Victorian Government and delivered by the Goulburn Broken and North Central Catchment Management Authorities.

Through Plan2Farm, a consultant visited the Moons' farm to assist them to clarify their business goals, identify their options and develop a long-term plan. The plan is something they can refer to as they make decisions about their investments and management of

the farm.

Mrs Moon has also taken steps to improve her farming system, by focusing on increasing the organic matter in her soils to boost its water-holding capacity, allowing more rain water to be captured.

Looking to the long-term, Mrs Moon is also exploring the possibility of launching an on-site milk manufacturing business, working directly with consumers and specialised retailers.

"We are focused on sustainability, and we eventually want to be able to produce fresh milk and package it in stainless-steel bottles, which can be washed and returned into circulation," she said.

"This is a plan which will take a lot of investment and a lot of time — but to weather challenging seasonal conditions, we have to think outside of the box."

Long-term relationships

Scott McKillop, a dairy farmer in Victoria's north-east, is feeling the flow-on effects of the volatile water market.

Mr McKillop milks 380 cows with a

'Dairy farming has been a massive rollercoaster ride and water prices are having a huge impact on our business.'

split-calving pattern to boost pasture growth in the winter on his 485ha farm. "While we are not directly impacted by water prices and availability, it is something that affects us across the board," Mr McKillop said.

"To compensate for the reduction in home-grown feed across irrigation and drought-affected areas, farmers are buying in more hay and grain, and input costs are being driven increasingly higher in as a result."

Mr McKillop feeds upwards of two tonnes of grain per cow per year, with high grain prices having a major impact on his cost of production.

To offset the impact of climate extremes on his business, Mr McKillop is increasingly focused on changing

his farm system to normalise seasonal extremes.

"What we're noticing is the lack of distinction between the seasons," Mr McKillop said.

"While we've had a traditional autumn this year, the seasons blur from one into the other, and earlier seems to become later as summer heat lingers into March and April."

For Mr McKillop, the key to securing his farm's viability is securing longer-term relationships with suppliers for grain and hay, as well as extending agreements for milk pricing with his processors.

"We want to take the peaks and troughs out of what we do to achieve a sustainable average throughout the year," he said. "We know we can make money on average, so we need to take the instability out of the market for a level of security around our prices and profitability."

To learn more about the impact of water prices on irrigation region farmers, dairy farmers can listen to Dairy Australia's podcast at soundcloud.com/dairy-australia.

Crossbreeding lifts herd fertility

- Key points**
- ✓ Three-way crossbreeding program used
 - ✓ Sires selected for fertility
 - ✓ Simultaneous heat detection aids used

NSW dairy farmers Ruth and Neville Kydd are proving that a three-way crossbreeding system can work profitably on a large herd size farm.

Implementing a simple, visual system ensures that three-way crossbreeding takes place with ease, achieving consistently outstanding results.

Why crossbreed?

The Kydds have not always milked crossbred cows; originally, their herd was all Holstein-Friesian.

However, Mrs Kydd became concerned about inbreeding within their purebred herd and consequently was spending a large amount of time matching semen choices for their cows.

The Kydds Neville were also unsatisfied with their reproductive performance as they were consistently achiev-

Table 1: Farm Description

Operating arrangement	Owner
Business Phase	Growth
Effective milking area	430 hectares
Cow numbers	1300
Breed	Three-way crossbreds (FF, AA, JJ with some Norwegian Red)
Feeding system	Grain at milking time
Production	18–20 L per cow per day
Calving pattern	Seasonal
Joining length	11 weeks
Empty rate	5.5%

ing a 20 per cent empty rate, despite a long mating.

In 1992, the Kydds made the decision to start inseminating their Holstein-Friesian heifers using Jersey semen. In 1995, when the Jersey-Friesian heifers had entered the milking herd, their records indicated that they were getting in calf much easier and appeared

as though they were producing as well as the pure Holstein-Friesian heifers. This gave the Kydds the confidence to start crossbreeding their whole herd with Jersey semen.

There was, however, always a dilemma as what breed of sire to use on the first generation of crossbreds.

This decision was made easier in ►

◀ 2006 when the Kydds started using a 3-way crossbreeding strategy.

A simple approach to three-way crossbreeding

The Kydds have adopted a visual cow identification system. With only a glimpse of the cow or herd ID system, they instantly know the breed of the sire of the cow and the breed to which it will be mated. Ear-tags, tail paint, markers within their artificial insemination semen tank and even cow numbers on their computer program are all colour-coded.

Their AI technician is also on board with their ID system as he has colour-coded his AI guns.

For instance, a cow with an Ayrshire sire will have an eartag with the sire breed written on it. The back of the eartag will be red and the cow's number will also come up as red on their herd data system ("Identity"). At mating time the cow will be painted red, and the Jersey semen that will be used on the cows with an Ayrshire sire will be identified with a red marker in the AI tank. At mating time, the Kydds don't talk about breeds — they only talk colours.

Breeding for fertility

The Kydds' herd has exceptional reproductive performance. This is the result of years of selective breeding by the Kydds for high reproductive performance combined with the benefits of heterosis (hybrid vigour).

Heterosis is the reason why the fertility of crossbreed cattle is generally superior to the fertility of their purebred parents.

However, the Kydds have not simply relied on heterosis to improve their



Neville Kydd with some of the cows in their herd, which has a 5 per cent empty rate.

'Ear-tags, tail paint, markers within their artificial insemination semen tank and even cow numbers on their computer program are all colour-coded.'



Ruth Kydd in the dairy. The farm's simple crossbreeding system relies on colour-coding.

herd's fertility. When they select their AI sires, they heavily weight their sire selections for high daughter fertility ABV.

To simplify their mating system even further, the Kydds only choose one sire for each of the three breeds each year (that is, each year they only have one Holstein-Friesian sire, one Jersey sire and one Ayrshire sire).

To offset the risk of using only a small number of sires, the Kydds en-

sure that the sires chosen have highly reliable data for the characteristics that they are most interested in, especially daughter fertility.

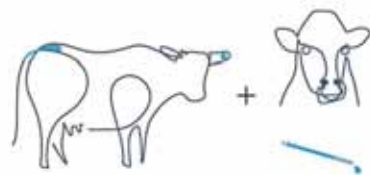
Mating management

The AI period for the milking cows in the Kydds' herd is only 14 days. Three weeks before mating start date, all cows receive a prostaglandin injection.

Once mating starts, the Kydds AI cows with detected heats. Any cow not

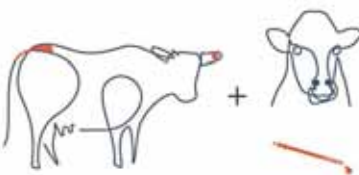
Figure 1 Kydd's colour coded three-way crossbreeding system

Female with Friesian sire identified by a blue ear tag and with blue tail paint



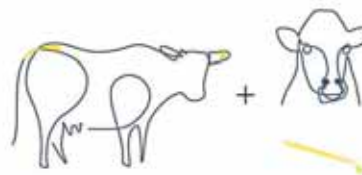
Mated to Ayrshire semen using a blue AI gun

Female with Ayrshire sire identified by a red ear tag and with red tail paint



Mated to Jersey semen using a red AI gun

Female with Jersey sire identified by a yellow ear tag and with yellow tail paint



Mated to Friesian semen using a yellow AI gun

joined by the end of the first week is given another injection of prostaglandin.

By the end of the 14 days of AI mating, the Kydds will submit 90pc of their cows and achieve a 70pc conception rate.

Jersey bulls are then run with the herd for nine weeks with 15 bulls in the herd during the day and another 15 during the night.

Although only AI calves are reared as replacements, the Kydds rear 35 Jersey bull calves out of the heifers each year as future mop-up bulls to minimise calving issues in the naturally bred cows.

The mating program has led to the Kydds achieving an empty rate of 4.5 to 5.5pc for several years.

Given their large herd size, all heat detection has been undertaken in the dairy. The Kydds have some rules to maximise the number of cows detected that are on heat.

Firstly, the same person does all of the heat detection for the two-week joining period.

Secondly, tail paint and Kamars are used simultaneously.

Mrs Kydd is adamant that this is of crucial importance in their system.

Despite the exceptional reproduc-

tive performance within the milking herd, the Kydds continue to undertake a fixed-timed AI program for their maiden heifers.

Heifers are mated to start calving about two weeks before the milkers, to ensure that they have time to recover from calving by the next joining period.

Currently they use Jersey, Ayrshire and Norwegian Red easy-calving sires but not Holstein-Friesian sires to join the heifers. Although many farmers find this strategy successful, the Kydds choose smaller sires as they want to maximise the chance of their heifers getting back in calf quickly. **D**

Gearing up for the new season

Key points

- ✓ Run tight calving pattern to match pasture growth cycle
- ✓ Track profitability through year with Xero system
- ✓ Prepared early as season worsened in 2018

WESTERN Victorian dairy farmers Ben and Anna Kenna are looking to take advantage of this season's milk price with a strong business approach powered by good analysis and cost control.

The former Focus Farmers have owned their current dairy operation for the past six years and milk 630 cows, a majority Friesian herd, on 257 hectares — at a higher than average stocking rate for the region at 2.5 cows per hectare.

The couple bought their farm at market rate from Mrs Kenna's parents after share farming the property for a number of years. Their farm near Terang has well established infrastructure and pastures to manage their autumn calving herd.

The 2018/19 season

With a focus on efficient feeding and monitoring the numbers in the business through the Xero accounting package and Dairy Australia's Dairy-Base, the couple made a profit in a challenging 2018/19 season. The way the operation is structured set up the Kennas well during a time where the milk price was about \$6 a kilogram milk solids, yet high bought-in feed costs were affecting all dairy regions.



Issac, Ben, Hope, Charlie, Ruby and Anna Kenna on their western Victorian farm in 2017. They are gradually building equity in the farm.

Low overheads in the business are a feature of the operation. A relatively new rotary dairy and feedpad means low maintenance costs. The couple keep the labour bill at \$140,000 per annum and employ two staff.

Calving is set up to take advantage of drier autumn conditions. Calving starts on April 1 and ends on July 1. This also means they can match lactating cows with spring pasture growth and maximise homegrown feed.

The Kennas use concentrates in the form of pellets to supplement the

diet of the herd through winter and in recent years they have continued to push concentrates in the bail into spring.

This not only helps from a milk production point of view but also helps conserve and make silage.

Last year 600 tonnes of silage was harvested off the milking areas. The Kennas know this as they are charged by contractors by the dry tonne.

"You want to know what you've paid for, but you also want to know how much you've got in your stack," Mr Kenna said. **▶**

◀ However, a key to the success of the season was the approach to buying in a range of feed.

“As we got into spring it was looking a bit of a worry up north,” he said.

“Grain was getting dearer, hay was getting dearer. All the talk was concerning, I made a lot of calls. It took a bit of time and patience and there was stress in not committing too early.”

After some negotiating, Mr Kenna managed to get 500 tonnes of medium quality hay (9 megajoules of metabolisable energy per kg of dry matter) for \$200/tonne/DM (market rate was \$300-\$400/tonne) which was fed to milkers, dry cows and calves.

He also bought 300 tonnes of high-quality maize silage at \$290 a tonne.

In addition, pellets were used as normal and bought at an average price of \$460/tonne, which was \$80-\$100 more per tonne than a normal season.

Overall, they achieved 8.8 tonnes DM/ha with home-grown feed accounting for more than 50 per cent of the total.

As a result, the operation produced 366,000kg/MS which enabled debt reduction, all bills to be paid and a profit from the 2018/19 season.

Running the numbers and EOFY

During the season, Mrs Kenna uses Xero to assess the figures from month-to-month to review how much money they have left over at month's end. The Kennas' goal is to have to have enough cashflow to pay the monthly bills and they like to see what they have left over.

When it comes to the end of the year, Mrs Kenna prints out a Profit

Table 1: Farm details

Milking area	257 ha
Dairy	60 unit rotary with feed pad
Cows milked	630 cows
Annual stocking rate (cows/milking ha)	2.5
Milk Production (Kg Milk Solids)	Approx 366,000kg/MS by season's end
Homegrown feed (t/DM/total Area ha)	8.8
Homegrown feed in diet %	52%
Cows/labour unit FTE	153

‘There is a lot of negativity around the dairy industry but we want to show people that you can be successful and we are happy to talk about our journey.’

and Loss statement with the yearly totals and that data is then entered into DairyBase including things like hay tonnage and fertiliser costs.

After entering the information from their milk statement into DairyBase, they then have a good analysis of their own yearly performance, in comparison to past years, as well as comparing to other farms in their region.

A key report in DairyBase they like to check to track how they are going is the Wealth Report. This allows them to see if there has been a change in their overall wealth position, but

also their asset growth and equity position.

“As we started from a low equity position of 20pc, we really like to have more security going forward,” Mrs Kenna said.


The couple have now built their equity over time and are now at 54pc.

Consultants in the past have helped Mrs Kenna enter data into DairyBase but she is now comfortable to do it herself.

Next season's focus

The Kennas see few changes in their business in 2019/20 and are hoping for favourable seasonal conditions to take advantage of the positive outlook on milk price, and to continue to improve their position and gain an operating surplus.

They are happy to showcase their progress and show some of their practices to other dairy farmers.

“There is a lot of negativity around the dairy industry but we want to show people that you can be successful and we are happy to talk about our journey,” Mrs Kenna said. 

Thinking business heading into the new financial year

- Visit dairyaustralia.com.au for all of Dairy Australia's farm business management tools, resources and training.
- Set up accounts using the Dairy Standard Chart of Accounts — it provides an agreed industry breakdown on income and cost categories that line up with DairyBase. Talk to the accountant about using the Dairy Standard Chart of Accounts too.
- Know expected income — get an income estimation from 2018/19 from the processor to know milk income for production.

- Do a livestock and feed inventory stock take at the end of the financial year and start pulling together physical and financial numbers for the last 12 months. Not on DairyBase? Go to dairybase.com.au and register now.
- Prepare an annual budget to be able to confidently discuss income and costs with others and track them as the year progresses. Dairy Australia's Cash Budgeting Tool can help do this.
- Talk about it — sit down and talk through goals, plans and budgets for the

year ahead with a partner and/or business partners.

After that, talk to the wider team including advisers, bankers and staff. Having a shared view and everyone on the same page is the best way to head into the new financial year.

- Understand the new pay rates — remember new pay rates apply from the first pay period that starts on or after July 1. Check the peopleindairy.org.au in the new financial year for more information.

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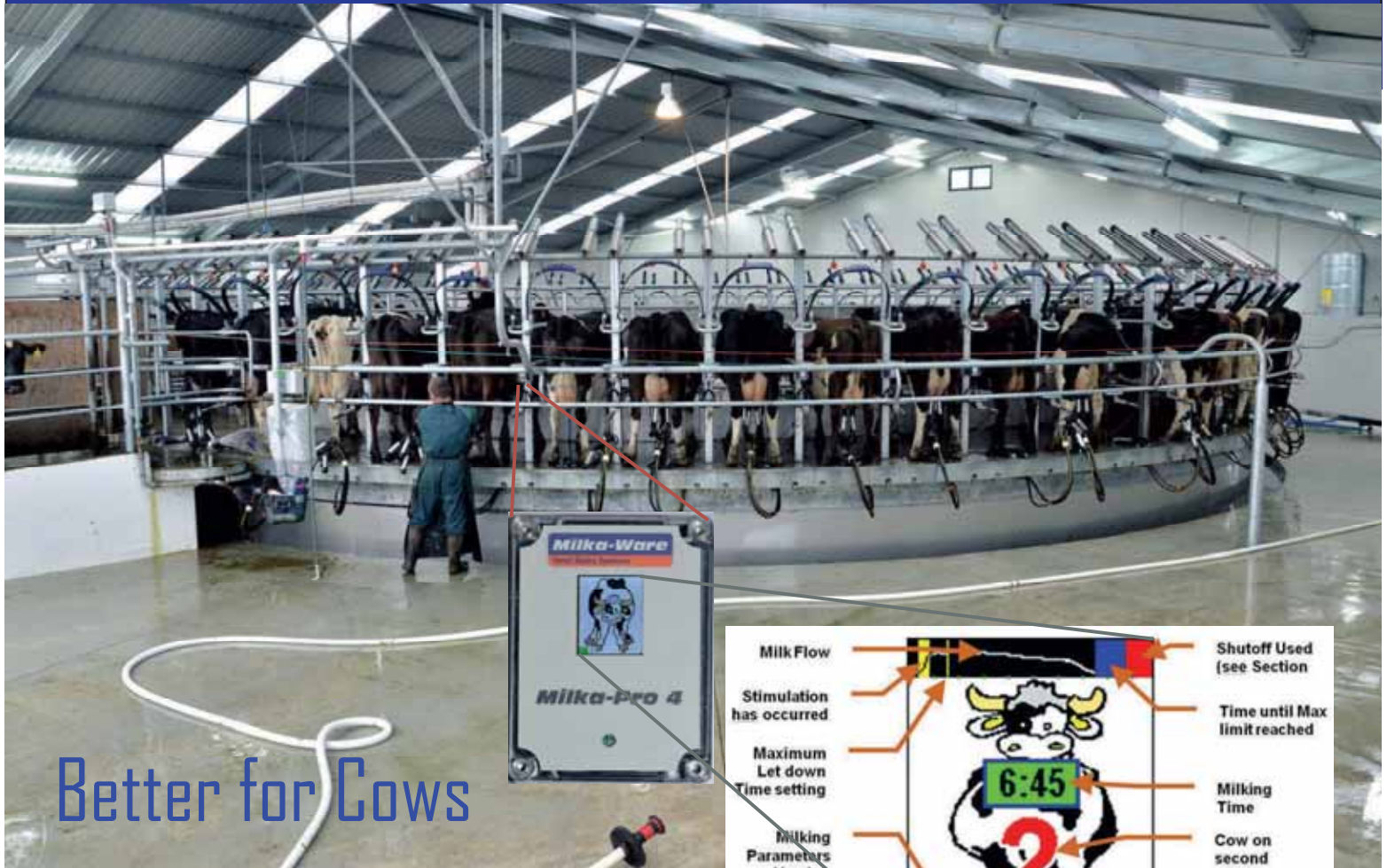
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