Cutting edge ideas shared at evokeAG Conference

Through the assistance of DairySA, Rebekah McCaul from Alexandrina Cheese Company, Mt Jagged, recently attended ‘evokeAG’ – Australia’s largest international agrifood tech conference held at the Royal Exhibition Centre in Melbourne.

The innovative two-day event, powered by AgriFutures Australia, highlights the new technologies, products and practices emerging in our dynamic and growing agriculture sector. Themed ‘Food, Farm, Future’ the program featured more than 100 international and national speakers covering cutting-edge developments across the agricultural spectrum.

Rebekah’s story

My family own and operate Alexandrina Cheese Company and I’ve been involved in the dairy industry since we established in 2001. I was keen to start the new year by seeking knowledge and understanding of how and where to align our business alongside the future of Australian agriculture.

Prior to attending evoke AG, some of my big questions included: What do we need to do to adapt and survive? What will I need to equip our children with to navigate to 2050? and, How can we keep abreast of all the rapid changes occurring, and not be left behind?

‘evokeAG’ caught my interest for a couple of reasons. We are all faced with challenges bigger than our small farms, and the opportunity to hear from speakers tackling these challenges head-on was too good to resist. I offer my thanks to DairySA for the opportunity to attend, and now I am a step closer to being ready for the future!

Close to 1,200 delegates including farmers, entrepreneurs and innovators from twenty countries filled the Royal Exhibition Centre in Melbourne for the evokeAG Conference in February.

Being the inaugural international agrifood technology event this was a poignant moment. But what is the ‘agrifood tech sector’?

I was here to find out.
The conference was fast paced, with delegates moving from plenary to breakout and back again at breakneck speed. There are too many highlights to list, so here are my top few:

• Cofounder and CEO of Aerofarms, David Rosenberg launched the first of the speaker sessions with his keynote address ‘Thinking up solutions’. Aerofarms’ aeroponic technology provides the perfect conditions for healthy plants to thrive, taking indoor vertical farming to a new level of precision and productivity with minimal environmental impact and virtually zero risk. To be amazed and inspired, head to aerofarms.com

• Silicon Valley venture capitalist Spencer Maughan detailed future ag-tech trends giving delegates a nuanced perspective on the shifting landscape in the agrifood tech sector. “Estimated as a $100 billion industry by 2030 – rivaling Australia’s mining and construction sector,” he said. Maughan spoke of the “enormous potential, and need for greater investment flow”

• David Blackmore from ‘Blackmore Wagyu’ – internationally recognised producer of 100% Fullblood Wagyu beef that has been in operation for over 30 years – had a standout session on developing a premium brand for an Asian audience

• Frances Bender from Huon Aquaculture outlined her vision of “grow locally, think globally” to secure their controlled growth strategy to produce world-class salmon products. Bender gave insight into improving fish quality, health and welfare, improving employee safety and how to positively participate in our local communities. She was probably my favourite speaker of the conference

• On tasting at the conference were ‘alternative protein’ options: grasshoppers, broccoli lattes and molecular whiskey. On ‘The Paddock to the Plate’ bus, I experienced MLA’s ‘Australia: Good meat doesn’t just happen’ virtual reality and saw the lamb from farm to fork. It was an exceptional way to communicate directly to the consumer

• A ‘Pitch tent’ saw rotating finalists take to the stage going head to head in front of a live audience, sharing pain points and agricultural challenges. From bee production to the lack of abattoirs with export accreditation, the three minute pitches were met with world-class propositions from a panel of judges

• Over two days, one hundred ‘thought leaders’ took to the stage and had one simple objective: to share information about how we will feed the world’s rapidly growing population. The future of food and fibre was laid bare – with robots, drones, ecosystems all top of mind. The message was loud and clear – the agricultural sector is crying out for international cohesion

• The most profound message I took away was from Israeli Ethy Levi from ‘The Bridge Hub’ who stated “with the waste we are producing, we could feed 9 billion people in the future. Australia could lead this”. For more on this global agrifood tech innovation hub, check out thebridgehub.co

Perhaps next year I will be able to use my hovercraft to move around the Royal Exhibition Building instead of the stairs – one can only hope! This event exceeded my expectations, as I walk away with plenty of futurist food for thought.

– Rebekah McCaul
Alexandrina Cheese Company
February 2019

Australian Dairy Conference offers valuable insights for two young dairyfarmers

With support from the Australian Dairy Conference, Dairy Australia and DairySA, two young people (18–35) working on-farm, were given the opportunity to attend the 2019 Australian Dairy Conference in Canberra in February.

For Chris Hunt, Mt Gambier, the Conference offered a stimulating range of topics and speakers over the three days. Topics included highlighting new ideas around pre-calving heifer management, the benefits of Genomics, and exploring the range of farm apps currently on the market that are designed to manage farms and animals more efficiently and profitably.

“The benefits and implementation of Genomics were explained well by US dairy farmer Brad Nosbush, who provided tips such as focusing on the new heifers each year to reduce the impact on the budget,” Chris said.

“There were also discussions around the various performance indicators - BPI versus other indices - and the challenges that come with some of them,” he added.

The discussion was placed into an Australian context by Jared Ireland, a Northern Victoria dairy farmer, who links productivity gains on farm, to decisions that are made based on the use of genetic data.

Chris Hunt (left) Beston Farms SE, and Simon Grosvenor (right) Mulgundawa (near Wellington) were reinvigorated about the dairy industry after attending the recent Australian Dairy Conference in Canberra.
"Jared pointed out that specials at certain times can help, as well as how to select for polled genetics whilst keeping in high BPI range," he added.

"Jared explained that continual measurement and selection of AI sires had the biggest gain, providing heifers are kept and tested - which ensures the finest animals are kept, and making those days spent raising a heifer more worthwhile," Chris said. "It was great to hear several speakers – as well as other attendees – reinforcing most of what was said, while also pointing out the differences in operations and herds and how that potentially changes outcomes," Chris added.

Chris is grateful to DairySA for the opportunity to attend the Conference. "I’d thoroughly recommend it to anyone to make the time to go, I certainly found it very worthwhile", he added.

Simon Grosvenor, Mulgundawa (near Wellington) cited the “insightful and passionate guest speakers” and the opportunity to network with other farmers and “hear about what they’re doing differently” as some of his highlights of attending the event. "Attending the Australian Dairy Conference and being surrounded by positive farmers has reinvigorated me." Simon said.

"In the words of Dr Brendan Nelson, it’s given me the confidence to be ‘bold and brave’."

"It’s great to be back on the farm sharing what I’ve learnt with my family and employees", he added. "I’d like to thank DairySA and Dairy Australia for the opportunity to attend this year, and I’m looking forward to the next event”.

**Dairy Situation & Outlook: update report**

High costs are putting continued pressure on Australian dairy farmers, according to Dairy Australia’s latest Situation and Outlook report. Released as farmers prepare for autumn and winter, the report ensures farmers and the industry have access to current market insights and future projections to inform farm business decisions.

The February report shows parts of South Australia, especially around Mount Gambier, are experiencing a good season. The state is in a reasonable position in terms of hay and grain availability.

Global markets remain well-balanced and offer the potential for further farmgate price increases in 2019, albeit with continued growth in milk supply evident.

To access the full report, head to dairyaustralia.com.au/SandOFeb19

**Autumn tech notes designed to assist**

As South Australian farmers move towards autumn, conditions are variable and bought in feed costs remain high. The decisions you make about feed continue to take on a heightened level of importance and planning will pay off.

In conjunction with Dairy Australia, DairySA has produced an ‘Autumn tech notes’ booklet containing information to assist you to plan for autumn and winter feeding. The information includes revising budgets, assessing feed options, maximising home grown feed, thinking about nitrogen usage in autumn, pest control, assessing the cash position over the coming months and sourcing an updated income estimation.

To get your copy of the ‘South Australian autumn tech notes’ please call Kylie Boston on 0407 231 547 or Beck Burgess on 0438 262 966 or email DairySA on info@dairysa.com.au and we will post one out to you.

For more information, tools and resources on feeding, go to dairyaustralia.com.au/feed

DairySA's South Australian autumn tech notes booklet contains information to assist you to plan for autumn and winter feeding.
Maintaining cow health when changing diets

In current circumstances, the feed we have available for our transitioning cows may not be the same as we would use in normal practice. This increases the need to understand threats to healthy rumen function, and the costs of not getting a transitional diet right.

Diet transition in dairy cows should be made gradually to allow them to adapt to the new feed. Abrupt transitions can disrupt healthy rumen function, feed intake and health. Monitor cow responses for early warning signs of problems that will have a negative effect on cow performance.

Gradual transition of diets is essential for healthy rumen function
The majority of feed that cows eat is digested by microbes in the rumen and the composition of the population of rumen microbes depends on the diet the cows eat.

Changes in diet composition such as introducing a new type of feed will cause the rumen-microbe population to change and adapt. However, this process takes time. Gradual changes to the diet will allow time to monitor how cows are responding to the new diet and make adjustments if necessary before they receive the full amount.

For more information around transitioning onto feed, and the effect of palatable and less palatable feeds within changes to diet, head to feed.dairyaustralia.com.au/feeding-your-herd or consult your animal nutritionist.

Key messages
- Transition cows gradually onto new feed over 7–14 days
- Rumen microbes need time to adapt to new feed sources
- Also monitor animal responses to other risk factors such as toxic components in feed
- Equal access to feed for each cow is essential
- It is not about what you feed, it is about what they eat
- Highest risk is when introducing very palatable, low fibre feeds to the diet

Sponsorship opportunities now available!

The 2019 DairySA Innovation Day to be held in Mt Gambier in June is designed to showcase an exciting program, securing insightful speakers who will inform and challenge delegates around getting the right forage base for optimal milk production, and highlighting the latest on precision dairy and grazing technologies including robotics, sensors and acoustics.

Sponsorship opportunities are now available to be a part of this exciting event, and provide the ideal opportunity for your business to align itself with the SA dairy industry’s most anticipated and popular events.

To find out more, please get in touch with DairySA’s Sponsorship Coordinator Katie Moorhouse on 0419 821689 or email katie@dairysa.com.au

We’d love you to be part of our annual showcase event and look forward to your support of the dairy industry and SA dairyfarmers.