A Message from DairySA Chair, Michael Connor

Feed Shortage 2018… be proactive and act early

It feels like we can’t take a trick as dairy farmers. Just as milk prices are heading in the right direction and with some more hopeful sustainability with processors, along comes a tough season. Just how tough it is will differ across the state and will depend on spring rain.

I know I sound like a broken record but the best outcomes are always achieved by focussing on our own businesses and on things we can control. What we have seen through past tough seasons is that it’s important to be proactive – and act early. Building and reviewing budgets, and planning and taking action can be a tough thing to get started and face up to, but there is always help available. DairySA is committed to a long term focus on farm profitability, and provides a suite of relevant and tangible programs for dairyfarmers to access – please contact one of the DairySA team to find out how they can help.

With dry conditions taking hold across the east coast of Australia, Dairy Australia has launched a nationwide response, Feed Shortage 2018, to provide the tools and resources needed to support farmers to make informed decisions.

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The most important message is to act now to best prepare your business for the coming year. Please contact a member of DairySA to find out what other information and support is available to help you navigate your way through the season as it unfolds.

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Latest Production Inputs Monitor now available

Dairy Australia’s latest Production Inputs Monitor report is now available, giving farmers another tool to assist with planning during challenging seasonal conditions.

The report contains current information on weather, water, feed and fertiliser and gives a monthly snapshot of core farm inputs so farmers can keep track of trends.

In August, water trade spot prices of over $350/ML were reported – more than double the five year average. Meanwhile, cull cow prices have risen to an average of 407c/kg, an increase from a record low of 353c/kg in June.

For more insights, download the report here: dairyaustralia.com.au/feedshortage

New DairySA Regional Manager/Executive Officer brings wealth of experience

Following the departure of Verity Ingham, Kerry Grigg has been appointed as the new Regional Manager/Executive Officer for DairySA.

Kerry joins DairySA with extensive experience in the agricultural sector, having worked in the cropping industry as the manager and executive for farmer led organisation, Vic No Till Farmers Association.

Vic No Till operates in a similar way to Dairy Australia’s RDPs, with a farmer led Board and a focus on the management of on-farm projects. Prior to this Kerry was the Engagement and Communications Officer with the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority and has also held a number of roles in business and marketing as well as spending time in agribusiness banking.

Welcome aboard Kerry!

Call for DairySA Board nominations

If you’re keen to shape the future of dairying in SA, and provide input into dairy research and extension in South Australia – consider a position on the DairySA Board. Nominations are now being accepted.

The DairySA Board is responsible for deciding on and directing funding to regionally relevant research and development, contributing to an increase in the profitability and sustainability of the State’s dairy industry.

If you would like to have a chat about joining the DairySA Board, or for more information please contact Chairperson Michael Connor on 0419 036 500.

Glenn Dohnt and Michael Krichauff are two current DairySA Board members – hear why they joined, and what they’ve achieved – through videos on the DairySA website.
Good planning helps reduce odour issues

As dairy herd sizes grow and urban boundaries get closer to operating farms, the odour from farm dairy effluent can be a challenge to manage. However with good planning and management, odour can be reduced, ensuring potential complaints are minimised whilst also limiting compliance concerns from the Environment Protection Authority (EPA).

Sources of odour from dairy farms include ponds, tanks, solids separation systems, sludge piles, feed pads, and silage stacks. Effluent application – the desludging of ponds and muck spreading operations – also release odour.

Keep the neighbours happy

If you are planning an activity you know will generate some odour, such as spreading a large solids pile or desludging a storage pond, consider these handy tips:

- Spread effluent on paddocks downwind of neighbouring properties and avoid spreading when the wind is blowing towards the neighbour
- Spread effluent in the morning to take advantage of warming conditions which help disperse the odour
- Rotate paddocks used for discharge
- Don’t stockpile effluent
- Let the neighbour know when you are planning some activities. If they know in advance, they are likely to be more accommodating (and appreciative of your thoughtfulness). They may be planning an outdoor event in which case you might be able to reschedule spreading to another day.
- Adhere to setback distances as per the Code of Practice for Milking Shed Effluent, which dictate the following for the application of effluent that relate to neighbouring properties:
  - Within 100m of a house not owned by the owner of the milking shed
  - Within 10m of land not owned by the owner of the milking shed.

It’s important to note that after spreading it can take a couple of days for the odour to disperse. Consider spreading early in the week to reduce the risk of residual odour on the weekend.

If you receive a complaint or you notice some issues yourself you must investigate further and document the actions taken. DairySA and Dairy Australia have a range of resources available to assist farmers to ensure their management meets industry performance goals.

Further information can be found at the following websites/links:

- www.dairyingfortomorrow.com.au
- Wastewater – EPA

Genomics creates path for ‘ImProving Herds’

Over thirty dairyfarmers from SA’s Central region headed to SA’s most northern dairy farm in August to hear the impact that genomics has had on its business performance and herd management.

Hosted on the farm owned and operated by Gary, Ros and Justin Zweck at Blyth SA, the day was a chance to see and hear first hand how the Zweck’s involvement in the ImProving Herds Project – a three year undertaking – is already showing proven positive results in their herd profitability.

The Zweck’s run a TMR (Total Mixed Ration) System; 230 Holstein Herd with a 60:40 (autumn: spring) calving pattern. This is supported by their 700ha broad acre cropping farms with an annual rainfall of just 350mm. Their focus is on production, and making genetic progress to improve their herd’s profitability.

Lucy Webb-Willson of Data Gene started the day by describing the ImProving Herds Project. The study identified the top and bottom 25% of each herd ranked on BPI (Balance Performance Index) – the genetic index for profit used in Australia Dairy industry. By using ten years of historical performance – coupled with the Zweck’s herd records – it found that the top 25% of the Zweck’s herd produced 876 more litres of milk / cow/year, 57 more kg of fat and 42 more kg of protein than the bottom 25%. This equated to an extra $532 milk income over feed costs/cow/year.

Lucy explained that the project also found that cows in the top 25% for BPI in a herd, outperformed cows in the bottom 25% for production, fertility, longevity. This contributed an average of $300 extra to farm margins for project participants.

The benefits are clearly demonstrated where the performance of genotype heifers aligned with their genomic breeding values, made possible by the speed and reliability of the information. For example, genomic ABV (Australian Breeding Values) for heifer calves will be found within year 0. However reliable ABV’s are not generated until the cows 7th lactation.

Vaughn Johnson (Semex) and David Peglar (NHD) – together with Gary Zweck – discussed the benefits of genomic testing within the industry,
The role of drones in dairy irrigation

A key finding from the DairySA Smarter Irrigation Project has led to further research into a potentially game-changing approach to irrigation – using drones.

Farmers from the Project discovered that the cost of sub optimal productivity couldn’t be properly identified without a clear understanding of daily pasture growth rates – with the traditional manual collection of pasture biomass being time consuming and often inaccurate.

This discovery prompted DairySA to seek further funding from Natural Resources SE to investigate the potential role of drones in capturing pasture biomass.

As part of the project a commercial provider flew the site using visual and NDVI – normalized difference vegetation index. NDVI is a simple graphical indicator that can be used to analyse remote sensing measurements, assessing whether the target contains the presence of live green vegetation.

Aerial photographs from the drone provided a basis for checking the farmers’ perspective of performance in key areas of the pivot. Pasture recovery post grazing was particularly obvious, along with waterlogged areas.

The NDVI images were useful in identifying the impact of grazing and areas where poor pasture performance was not easily identified with the naked eye.

It also enabled the project to identify how plant vigour was impacted by both management and different soil water availability.

But while these sensors were useful in identifying underperforming pasture for further ground truthing, they were not able to calculate pasture biomass, prompting further research in alternative techniques to NDVI.

Through the Smarter Irrigation Project, DairySA has provided a site for NCEA (National Centre for Engineering in Agriculture) Mecatronics Engineer Alison McCarthy to test her methodology of using leaf length from photographs taken by mobile phone cameras attached to the pivot.

As research progresses, it may be possible to estimate biomass through further image analysis.

This project was supported by funding from the South East NRM Board as part of the grant program Best Practice Agriculture in a changing climate.

For further information on this project, head to a short video clip here: bit.ly/180621DronesinDairy

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