



# Macalister Demonstration Farm

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## NEWSLETTER 102

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Your Levy at Work



*Macalister Demonstration Farm is supported by Genetics Australia, HICO and GippsDairy.*



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## Macalister Demonstration Farm – Future Directions

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The Macalister Demonstration Farm (MDF) held its Annual General Meeting on Tuesday night 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015 at Duart Homestead in Maffra.

The meeting was attended by around 40+ stakeholders and shareholders, with a great deal of interest generated around the main topic for discussion – the future direction of the Macalister Demonstration Farm.

Historically, a partnership with the Victorian Department of Agriculture helped to fund research and demonstration / extension sites at the farm. These were the halcyon days of the demonstration farm, and once the Department moved on from utilising the MDF for its extension activities, the farm was forced to source funding opportunities from an alternative wide range of investors. Over the years, the focus of the funding landscape has been changing and opportunity to secure funding for small to medium sized projects and demonstrations is becoming quite difficult.

With the advent of the changing funding landscape, the co-operative side of the farm has become more and more reliant on economic support from the income generated by farm profit when available! Fluctuations in milk prices and differing skill sets of managers engaged to manage the dairying operation of

the farm have contributed to a downturn in income generated and ultimately cashflow. Coupled with the co-operative becoming reliant on the farm for continued operation, the current model, as it now stands is *not sustainable*. Although, some co-operative costs can and are being reduced, a large percentage cannot be removed nor diminished.

The mission of the farm is to:

*enable shareholders to improve the profitability of their farms and their lifestyles, through the demonstration of superior and sustainable management systems, and the provision of education programmes necessary for their adoption.*

The board recognises that at this point in time, the MDF is not meeting the objectives of its stated mission and wants to set in train a set of actions to once again return to its original goal.

In recognition that the current model is unsustainable, and to ensure that into the future the MDF does meet the obligations of its mission, discussion at the AGM was focussed on creating long term sustainability for the co-operative.



Although farm performance and profitability will continue to be variable (similar to many other farms in the Macalister and Victoria), the focus will be directed to seeking external funding necessary for some base-level funding of the co-operative, but also the need to expand projects and extension capability in order that the board can return to its mission. It was noted that over the past 50 years, good extension from the MDF was entirely linked to

periods of external funding and similarly, the good demonstration farms in New Zealand have extension officers (often multiple!) and even farm labour funded by Dairy NZ to ensure adequate performance and extension output.

Possible longer term funding to be considered for the co-operative include

1. Industry: currently a submission is being prepared for discussion with Dairy Australia, especially in light of proposed changes to Dairy Australia funding of Department Dairy extension work.
2. Corporate: a number of options are being explored with corporate sponsorship
3. Private: capital raising through shares and private donations will also be considered to achieve longer term sustainability of the co-operative.

A 12 month time frame for exploring all funding options was proposed with a commitment to report back on progress by September 2016 (prior to the 2016 AGM). This time frame is necessary given the need to limit any further reduction in equity position of the MDF.

If the board is not successful in building longer term funding options for the co-operative, then other alternatives will be presented to the 2016 AGM.



Over the next 12 months the board will continue to liaise with stakeholders and shareholders seeking input and ideas for the MDF's future directions. If you would like to participate in on-going dialogue over the next 12 months, please do not hesitate to contact the board secretary by phone 0488 175 366 or email [mdf@wideband.net.au](mailto:mdf@wideband.net.au) to register your interest.

## Dale Scott announced winner of the 2015 RF (Bob) Pitman Award

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Local dairy identity, Dale Scott, has been selected as the 2015 recipient of the RF (Bob) Pitman Award. Mark Humphris, Chairman of Macalister Demonstration Farm (MDF) presented Dale with his award at the recent MDF Annual General Meeting.

The RF (Bob) Pitman Award is made available annually by the Board of the MDF to someone who has gone above and beyond the call of duty with integrity, humility and altruism to strive to better the lot for the broader dairy farming community.

On receiving his award, Dale's initial response was "how embarrassing, but I'm honoured and proud." He also went on to add that the award is really for "Dale and Robyn Scott" – Dale's recognition of Robyn's enduring endeavour in supporting Dale in achieving his goals.



Dale's unassuming demeanour as he worked tirelessly on things he is passionate about has earned him the respect and belief by his peers as being one of the dairy industries' "quiet achievers". He has been known to open up his home to aspiring veterinary graduate students requiring accommodation in the Maffra district. Local media recognised Dale as the "go to" man to receive commentary on local events, milk prices, weather conditions and even on extreme events such as flood and fire. Dale was instrumental in organising events to support farmers through difficult and stressful conditions in time of drought; and in times of flood and fire, Dale was again at the forefront: organising fodder and relief for affected farmers.

For many years he sat at the helm of the local chapter of UDV, representing the MID at both state and VFF forums. He was also a long standing member of the local dairy industry's Macalister Extension Group.

Dale has never shirked from giving his time freely to position himself to assist, guide and advance the betterment of not only the dairy industry but on things for which he has a passion. Aside from his efforts within the dairy industry, Dale is a strong community minded person and his many years of involvement

with the Nambrok Cricket club, roles as past president for the Local Landcare Group and chair of the Wellington and District Blackberry Task Group, all volunteer duties, are testament to his commitment to community.

Dale is a natural teacher and says that helping others is a rewarding experience. His advice is simple: "work on something you are passionate about and just go for it!"



**Mark Humphris (right) Chairman of the MDF presents the RF (Bob) Pitman Award to Dale Scott**

## **Yellow Rag Bit Have you seen these pests in your pastures?**

Gavan Lamb, MG Trading Maffra  
Maria Rose, Dairy Extension Officer, DEDTJR Maffra  
Frank Mickan, Senior Dairy Extension Officer, DEDTJR Ellinbank

Pastures in the MID are under attack this spring from large numbers of both red legged earth mites and lucerne flea. These two pasture pests are very small and hard to see but you can identify them if you look hard enough (a magnifying glass will certainly help). Despite their tiny size they cause massive amounts of damage to existing pastures, newly sown pastures and some crops.

### **Red legged earth mites**

Red legged earth mites (Figure 1) typically hatch from their 'hard' over-summer eggs in autumn and quickly grow into adults which then lay 'soft' eggs during the winter months to rapidly increase the earth mite population (Figure 2). During spring, as the days get longer and conditions warm up, the female earth mites are triggered to again lay the 'hard' earth mite eggs. The number of 'hard' eggs laid before the heat of summer sets in determines the number that will hatch next autumn.



**Figure 1: Red legged earth mites feeding recently on clover leaves in an MID paddock**

Research has found if adult earth mite can be controlled in spring, just before they start laying the 'hard' eggs, then the risk of a pasture establishment failure and damage the following autumn can be greatly reduced.

The Australian Wool Innovation's TIMERITE® RLEM Control Tool suggests that for the MID area, earth mites must be controlled before the end of October to stop the 'hard' eggs being laid. Paddocks planned to be re-sown next autumn in the MID should be inspected now for earth mites and controlled immediately if found. For a more accurate date of when to spray at the right time on your paddocks you can enter your own GPS coordinates into the Timerite Tool on line at <http://www.wool.com/woolgrower-tools/timerite/>

### **Lucerne Flea**

The lucerne flea (Figure 3) has a similar seasonal biology to the red legged earth mite. Lucerne fleas generally hatch from 'hard' over-summer eggs in March-April following soaking autumn rains. At the onset of warmer and drier conditions in early summer, the 'hard' eggs are produced which are protected from



**Figure 2: Red legged earth mites can number in the "thousands per square"**

drying out by a clay cement layer excreted by females. Consequently, lucerne fleas are more common on heavier loam/clay soils which are common in the MID, and are rarely found on sandy soils.



**Figure 3: Lucerne flea feeding on a clover leaf flea**



**Figure 4: Damage on clover leaf caused by lucerne**

Lucerne flea adults attack broad-leaved plants such as clovers, lucerne and capeweed, and can also cause considerable damage to crops such as canola and field peas. In pastures, lucerne fleas have a preference for clover (Figure 4) and lucerne, rarely attacking ryegrass.

### **Monitoring**

The key to reducing impact on valuable spring feed and the laying of the 'hard' over summer eggs is accurate and regular monitoring of these pests. As part of your strategy the first thing to do is correctly identify them and the extent of their numbers and damage. This will help determine whether one or both are present and which control method is warranted. Remember that the TIMERITE® Tool does not assist in controlling lucerne flea; it is only useful for red legged earth mite.

As both red legged earth mites and lucerne fleas are mobile it is important to frequently inspect newly sown pastures and crops next autumn; particularly in the first three to five weeks after sowing. Crops are most susceptible to damage immediately following seedling emergence. Be mindful both pests (and slugs), can move down direct drill rows, protected from the sun and birds, and nip off the emerging plants. Seriously consider a seed treatment to provide a few weeks of initial protection.

Contact your local agronomist for help to monitor your spring pastures and to set up effective control strategies to suit your situation.

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## **What's been going on at the MDF?**

### *What's been going on at the MDF?*

The current numbers as at 16<sup>th</sup> October are as follows;

Cows: 306 in herd and 294 in the vat, producing 24.3 litres at 4.2% fat and 3.5% protein or 1.87kg milk solids per cow. They are being fed 4.5 kg wheat @ \$330/t and no pellets or additive. A mineral dispenser has now been installed to allow the cows to be fed an additive pellet for minerals (particularly Calcium given the strong history of milk fever on the farm), vitamins and buffers as required. Production is disappointing, but a decision was made to make milk cheaper this year, with more pasture harvested. This

is costing some production at this stage, but the net production is only very slightly lower than the same time last year at a lower milk price.

There are only 8 late calvers remaining and these are just cleaning up spare areas.

65 bales of top quality silage were harvested in late September and a further 12ha harvested last week. The aim is to get 120 rolls of top quality fodder for later in lactation. With water possibly short for this season given the conditions at this stage, a strategy will be developed in late November and reviewed in late January for water and feeding and this will all be based around cow numbers, with a likely reduction in herd numbers early in 2016 if water and therefore pasture production reduces. The strategy adopted by the Focus Farm Support Group this season has been around maintaining a high stocking rate for the first half of the season to maintain pasture quality and make milk when it is cheap to do so, and then reduce stocking rate when pasture production becomes limiting, without impacting on the next season's herd size (in other words cull early rather than later).

Pasture quality is beginning to change slightly due to heading of particularly lower quality species such as Prairie Grass and dog's tail, but with ryegrass heading date just commencing, topping will begin in earnest to maintain pasture quality across the farm.

	<b>Litres</b>	<b>Solids</b>
Production	24.3	1.87
Components %	4.3%, 3.47%	4.3%, 3.47%
Milk price on current test October	40.0c	
Gross milk income less levies	\$9.72	\$5.20
Minus grain @4.5 kg	\$1.49	\$1.49
IOSFC (\$/cow/day)	\$8.23	\$8.23
Net IOSFC \$/herd/day	\$2420	\$2420
Net production	20.6 litres	1.58kg
Supplement cost	3.7 litres	0.29kg

By back calculation, the cows are consuming 13.7kgDM pasture per cow per day (assuming no weight gain or loss and pasture at 11.5MJ/kgDM), or 4000kgDM/24 hours. With an allocation of 3.2-3.5ha/24 hours (22 day round), the harvest is around 1200kgDM/ha. Cows are leaving around 1400-1500 residuals, and so pre-grazing cover is around 2600-2700kg/ha. The required growth rate to keep up with eat rate is 55kgDM/ha/day.

Irrigation interval on the flood is at 8-10 days, and the fixed sprays are delivering 17.5mm every second day.

When the price of irrigated pasture is calculated at 14c/kgDM (\$140/tDM), the net margin per cow becomes \$1.92/cow/day less at \$6.31/cow/day.

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