

Macalister Demonstration Farm

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NEWSLETTER 69

Monday June 25th 2012



Extension projects at the MDF are funded by Dairy Australia, Sustainability Victoria and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, with support from GippsDairy.

TRIALS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY AT MACALISTER DEMONSTRATION FARM

Project Name: Soil Biology and soil pH interaction project

Project Objectives: The objectives of this project are to compare pasture productivity and profitability between paddocks managed using a conventional fertiliser regime and the addition of lime to lift pH from 5.5 to 6.4 to test the hypothesis that a rise in pH to 6.4 results in lower nitrogen fertilizer inputs and equivalent pasture production by enhancing soil biological driven nutrient cycling. Additionally, changes in soil microbial community associated with nitrification at three different pH levels will be assessed.

Hypothesis: Increasing soil pH at the same time as adding carbon-based soil amendments (e.g. sugars, fish and seaweed emulsions, humus, compost and worm castings) have been associated with positive pasture, animal health and profitability responses in some cases. However, it is not clear whether it is the change in pH alone, the application of carbon-based additives, or both in combination that are responsible for the observed response. This project aims to investigate management of soil biology in order to reduce fertiliser inputs while maintaining profitable pasture production and provide the advice to farmers.

Results: The trial plots have been established and managed within the normal farm operations. A field day will be held in late 2012 to showcase the trial and to discuss any trends that may be emerging.

Contact: If you are interested in obtaining further information about this project contact Sandie Brown on 0488 175 366 or by email at mdf@wideband.net.au

Macalister Demonstration Farm Profitability Project

Bits and pieces from recent weekly reports in the Gippsland Times and on AusdairyL

Apr 27, 2012

The BMCC average for period ending 20/04/2012 was 133,000, giving the farm a factory ranking of 16 out of 376 farms.

May 4, 2012

The current grazing rest time of 35 days is achieving only 2.3 leaves re-grown, and it really would be better if the grazing rest time was closer to 45 days. On some paddocks the bulk of grass that can be achieved by allowing the much bigger third leaf to have its full chance is simply not there. To get to a longer rest time, which needs to happen for the future grass growth rate, the cow will have to be offered an even smaller

area of paddock, and when this paddock does not have much grass, it creates a double whammy, and not much grass per cow. Slowly but surely reducing the grazing allocation, earlier enough in autumn, is the key.

The BMCC average for the period ending 30/04/2012 was 147,000, giving the farm a factory ranking of 22 out of 374 farms.

May 18, 2012

The MDF is considering all the talk about a lower milk price next season, and thinking what to do, how to increase income, how to make better use of inputs, or what costs to cut. All sorts of inputs could be reduced: dry cow antibiotic, teat seal, semen, insurance, electricity, grain and fertiliser. We could rear less calves and not use the consultant. Maybe milking a few less cows would be best. Should we continue with plans to laser grade the bike shift area?

The MDF keeps its budget up to date all the time. Transactions go into Mistro, in a good set of categories that identify well where all the money has gone. Then, a future cashflow, running from an accurate past, is updated continually, as the future become clearer: as interest rates change, as water fills Glenmaggie dam or not, as step-ups are promised or not, as the milk production curve gets established, and as tractors breakdown. It is a lot of work, office work. Things could get rough but guessing more accurately how rough, is a good start. You will sleep much better, and so will your bank manager. It's called financial control, with you in control.

The BMCC average for the period ending 10/05/2012 was 168,000 which gave the farm a factory ranking of 37 out of 370 farms.

May 25, 2012

48 mm of rain fell during the week. Rainfall for the 12 months to date is 829 mm (33 inches) and for the same period last year was 749 mm (29.5 inches). Some paddocks had not been irrigated in early May, because of the risk of having them too wet as winter approaches. These paddocks had got to the stage of needing a drink. If the root zone needs more than 30 mm of water, it has got too dry for fast grass growth. The root zone holds only about 30 mm of readily available water (RAW) or "fast grass growing water". It does hold more water than the RAW, but that water is held tightly, and the plant cannot get it fast enough to grow fast. So when the first 30 mm arrived on Thursday night, that seemed ideal. The additional 18 mm was bit too much. Never happy are we.

The BMCC average for the period ending 20/05/2012 was 166,000 which gave the farm a factory ranking of 43 out of 370 farms.

Jun 1, 2012

A farmer from Yarram, about to build a new dairy, recently asked the dairy industry's email discussion group, AusdairyL, should she include a foot bath. She asked: "Will it affect cow flow? What does everyone use in their foot bath and do you think it works?" A to-and-fro discussion entailed, involving 20 emails with very practical advice from farmers, vets and other people experienced in footbaths. If you would like to join this free email discussion group provided by Dairy Australia contact Frank Tyndall ftyndall@ozemail.com.au

Jun 8, 2012

The farm had 85 mm of rain and a couple of hectares flooded. Because the paddocks are very wet, and endeavouring to maintain the grass intake of the cows, and not to bog the paddocks too much, the grazing rotation allocation was been increased temporarily from one 55th to one 50th of the farm.

The MDF has a new website <http://www.macalisterdemonstrationfarm.com> It contains background information about the farm, projects being conducted, and publications. It also contains videos showing some practical aspects of the farm, such as body condition of the cows, spinner cuts, grass grown, manure, and how the Tracker analysis works.

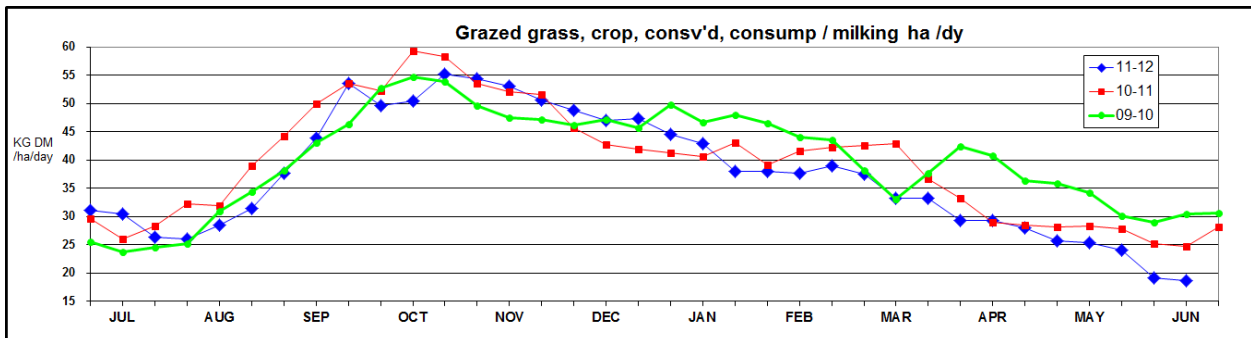
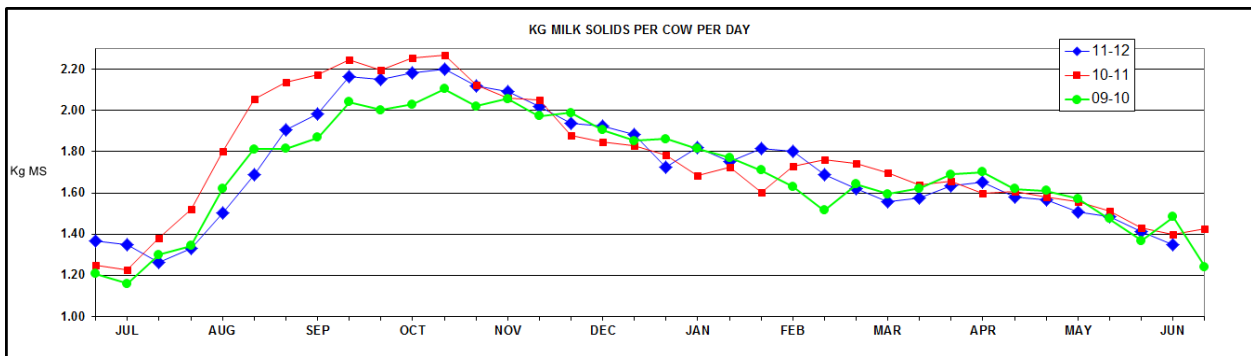
On the home page, the What's New button takes you to the most recent, and archived, Weekly Updates, Newsletters, and videos. The videos are not the most sophisticated, some taken with my phone, as I walk the farm. The videos come via You Tube; on the bottom right of the video window you can ask for higher video quality and full screen.

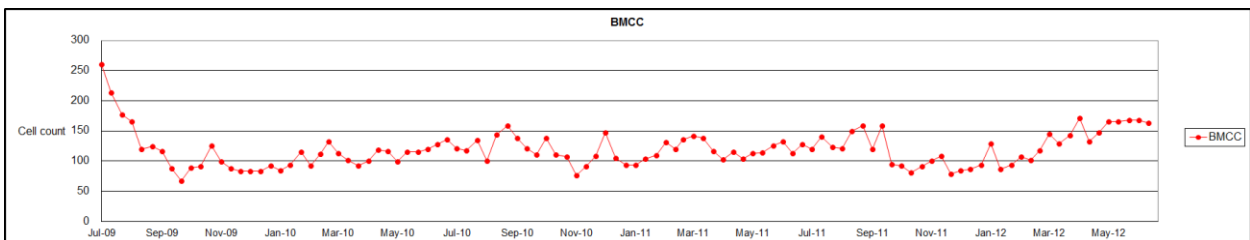
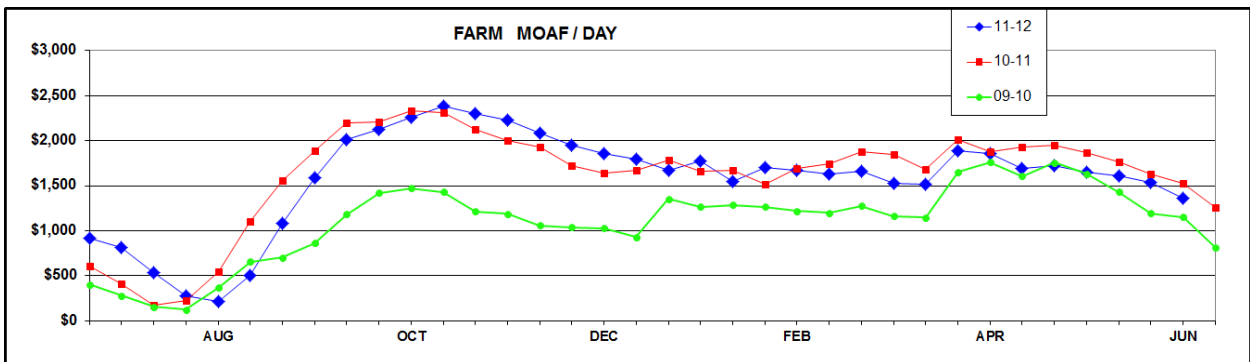
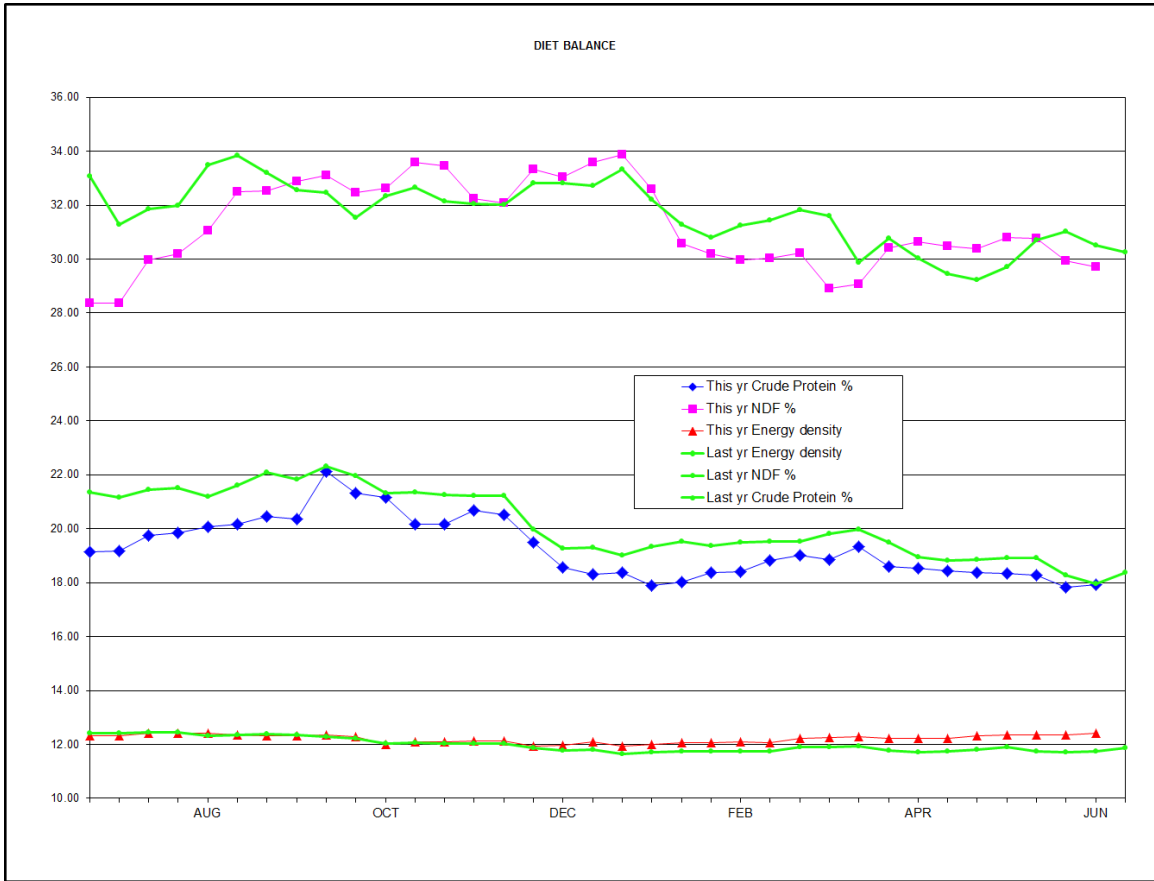
Jun 15, 2012

The farm has just purchased some "oaten" hay. Oaten hay usually has a low DCAD rating, so the plan was to feed it to springing cows just before calving. The hay looked pretty good but a sample was cored from a couple of bales on the outside row. The bales looked heavy, and were "thought" to be 600 kg plus. The truckload was weighbridged and the bales averaged only 530 kg. Dry matter was 84.3 % which is fine, but energy was 7.9 MJ ME which is poor. Protein was 10.8%, low, but the hay was not being purchased for the protein. NDF fibre was 63.1%, high but acceptable. But the major problem was the high DCAD of 37.5 meq/100gm. This hay is unlikely to be fed to springing cows. The DCAD of the cereal hay bought for springing cows over the last four years has never been over 14.8. The feed test cost \$110; we should have waited for the results before deciding to buy.

The BMCC average for the ten days ending 10/06/2012 was 168,000, giving the farm a factory ranking of 41 out of 358 farms.

MDF PRODUCTION GRAPHS





Frank Tyndall 0409 940 782

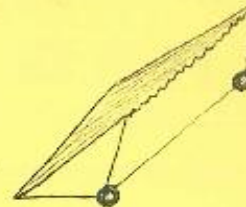
Yellow Rag Bit

Jason McAinch, Dairy Advisor, DPI Maffra

The Yellow Rag contribution for this edition of the MDF Newsletter is a Yellow Rag article from June 1991 ... 21 years ago!!

PORTABLE CALF SHELTERS ARE ALL THE GO

Anne Miller



Portable calf shelters are cheap, simple and easy to build. They provide excellent shelter for young calves from the winter and spring winds and rain.

The wheels make the shelter very portable and when regularly moved will provide calves with a fresh, clean, dry sheltered patch.

To minimise disease infection, calves should be removed from their mothers once they obtain a good colostrum meal and kept totally isolated from ALL adult stock. All it takes for a calf to become infected with Johnes Disease is for the calf to consume faecal material from a clinically affected cow.

A portable calf shelter will keep your calves happy and dry this season.

MACALISTER RESEARCH FARM

Report at 24/6/91

Production: Through the last 10-day period, 191 cows produced 20,490 litres at 10.7 litres/cow/day, 1,027 kg butterfat at 5.01% test and 775 kg protein at 3.76% test.

At this level of production, the feed has now been restricted so that the herd can be progressively dried off by 28/6/91.

Animal Health: At drying off the cows all get a leptovaccination and also a fluke drench (Fasinex for heifers and trodax for mature cows). S4 dry cow treatment is also given to any cow which has had a cell count above 250,000 during the year, and there are about 53 cows to receive this.

Wintering Plan: Once dried off, the herd will head into winter in two groups. The first group will be the rising two year olds, the rising three year olds and the early calvers, and the second group will be the more mature cows and later calvers. All the stock are presently in good condition, so the aim will be to hold them at their present level by feeding pasture and supplementing with grain. The winter grazing management will see about 1 ha per day offered to the cows, which puts the rotation length at 60-70 days. This will aim to cause minimum pasture damage while giving the pasture a chance to grow after grazing. The present pasture cover on the farm is good, and this bank of feed will be very useful in the coming month.

Young Stock: The rising two year olds are in good body condition, and are being fed grass plus 2 kg/day crushed barley. The calves receive 1 kg barley and are doing well.

This Year: This year, total production will finish at about 46,000 kg butterfat (200 kg/cow for 230 cows) and 34,650 kg protein (150 kg/cow). On 78 effective hectares, this is 590 kg BF/ha.



POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

SENDER:



Macalister Demonstration Farm
PO Box 87 **MAFFRA** VIC 3860