

Macalister Demonstration Farm

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NEWSLETTER 77

13 March 2013



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

REMINDER

Soil Biology and Soil pH Interaction Trial Field Day

This trial aims to compare pasture productivity and profitability between paddocks managed using conventional fertiliser after the addition of lime to lift pH from 5.5 to 6.4. This is to see if a rise in pH can result in lower nitrogen fertiliser inputs while maintaining pasture production by enhancing soil biological driven nutrient cycling. A field day has been scheduled so interested people can come along to inspect and discuss this trial. All welcome.

When: Tuesday 19th March 2013

**Where: Macalister Demonstration Farm
285 Boggy Creek Road
Riverslea (Maffra).**

Time: 10.30am (followed by BBQ lunch at approximately 12.30pm)

RSVP Sandie Brown on 0488 175 366 for more information and for catering purposes.



*This trial is supported by the West Gippsland Management
Catchment Authority*

MDF HEALTH FIELD DAY

MDF is planning a field day as a follow up to the key note address by Sue Brumby at the MDF AGM in October 2012. Activities and topics to be covered on the day are effectively a practical application of Sue's address. Topics to be covered on the day include:

1. Health overview: sun smart, depression, health assessments
2. On farm safety – 4-wheelers, general farm vehicles
3. Managing Fire risk : the importance of tagging and testing
4. Zoonoses – eg leptospirosis
5. Chemicals on the farm
6. Safety in the Dairy

More details will be provided as planning progresses.

When: Tuesday 14th May 2013

**Where: Macalister Demonstration Farm
285 Boggy Creek Road
Riverslea (Maffra).**

Time: 10 am to 2 pm. Free BBQ Lunch provided

Yellow Rag Bit

Maria Rose Dairy Advisor, DPI Maffra

Read your Own Wheel

Having just come out of a long dry summer and with no Low Reliability water allocated to date, your water usage per irrigation needs to be as accurate as possible. The reliance on a water budget is critical to help you plan for your remaining irrigations. Read your meters at the start and end of each irrigation!

This time my "yellow rag bit" serves as a reminder that you can now enter your own meter readings on SRW's 24 hour Waterline Service. This allows you to find out how much you've actually got left rather than an estimate of what you might have left. Until the existence of this service, developing your water budget has relied on estimates rather than actual usage.

To enter you own meter readings through Waterline either;

- Phone: 1300 360 117

OR

- Go online: www.srw.com.au/worder

Reading your own wheel and providing these figures to Waterline allows you to manage your water entitlement effectively and accurately. By getting rid of the ordered estimate section on your Water Usage Reports, you will have a better idea of your total water usage to date; an important aspect in developing your water budget as accurately as possible.

For more information, contact SRW on 1300 139 510 or your planner on 1300 360 117.

The first month for our new Managers at Macalister Demonstration Farm



Our new farm managers, Lee and Sheree Smith commenced working with Macalister Demonstration Farm on 29 December 2012.

Like moving onto any new enterprise, Lee and Sheree have had to navigate their way through the complex and mysterious workings of the farm. This situation is no different to any person taking over a new farm and learning the “ins and outs”. Lee and Sheree are not newcomers to the workings of a dairy farm but they are learning about irrigation, fires and drought. Below is a snapshot of the challenges they faced in their first month at Macalister Demonstration Farm.

4/1/2013

I will need to run the Irrigation on the paddock 9. As of yet I have not contacted the water board, but I now have the info so I will speak to them asap and book in for Monday. I however am not sure how to run it! I know the basic principle and how to open and close the gates but not how to activate the pump. If you know of anyone that would be free to run me through this that would be great.

The fixed spray pump is due for repair once I can get the farm water line connected to a pipe running to the pump room. This should be done by Monday. It will run with manual prime until then.

I am getting on top of our little fencing issue and we are now imminent for our tractor and Ultra Terrain Vehicle [4-wheeler].

Production is climbing steadily back to normal and cow health is good, but the weather is making rotation complicated so that adequate shade can be provided.

12/1/2013

We have been swamped in problems for the last few days; first the bulls broke their fences and escaped all over the farm, then the wheat crusher trapped a bolt and stopped working (luckily I managed to open it up and clear the blockage), then we had two cows down with milk fever and no tractor, but both got up and are now fine.

The cows again broke their fence yesterday and proceeded to graze most of their next paddock, leading to the discovery that most of the far end of the farm is without power.

I also had to get into the channel to remove the foot valve from the draw line for the fixed irrigation and deliver to be fixed, as our engineer still hasn't managed to get out to fix it, still hasn't got parts for the backing gate motor and still hasn't fitted the meter to the bore.

Finally this afternoon the pit in the shed flooded and we have been unable to unblock it thus far, hopefully it will drain out enough over night for me to get something down there and clear the blockage.

So as you may have already guessed we're a little tired and a little stressed, hopefully things will get sorted over the next week or so. We hope we'll be able to get our tractor sorted soon so I can top some paddocks and spread some N!

19/1/2013

We have had a rough couple of nights with a vat wash breakdown and of course keeping tabs on our local bushfire.

Vat is up and running now and a field rep is going to come out at nearest convenience to discuss problems.

We have checked the plant extensively and there are no major build ups primarily the problems were being caused by the vat not washing correctly.

All of the shed rubberware will be replaced on Tuesday.

All irrigation (except bike shift) is now working as near to optimal as possible and will be running as much as time will allow.

Bike shifts are next week's project! Lots of kinked pipes and leaking hydrants...

N was applied this week by a contractor and once a tractor is on board we will be able to 'spot spread' behind the cows.

27/1/2013

All irrigation was operating normally until Friday when the fixed irrigators stopped working. Not sure if its computer or pump. We hope to get it sorted next Tuesday (unfortunately Monday is a holiday).

Contractor has been out for one day to clear up plantations and fix fences but the ongoing saga with the power continues. I plan on creating a "best practice" power map for the fencing to maximise power output without buying new gear. I will then implement this, hopefully starting tomorrow.

Our pasture round is getting a little slim again, so from Monday I will be feeding some dry feed (silage) in the evening for 2 - 3 days until we have some breathing space. The cows will re-graze their day paddock during this period.

Sadly we lost a cow yesterday, she broke her leg in (I believe) a foxhole or sinkhole near (or in) one of the plantation areas, it was a total break and she had to be euthanised.

We also have a bull with some nasty lesions on his leg from the same paddock. Hence the urgency to get the very poor fences fixed and carrying more than 1 volt.

On the plus side, we now have a fully functional backing gate and the cow's demeanor in the shed has greatly improved.

All rubberware has now been replaced in the shed and a deep clean will be completed this week.

Finally (phew!), we now have a map of the farm drinking water supply and it's taps and outlets. I will put a final copy into the 'N.O.P' folder with the other stuff I have written up.

..... to be continued...

Well done Lee and Sheree!! As we all know, learning the intricacies of a new farm are challenging and time consuming. Lee and Sheree are documenting their learnings and from that MDF will produce an Operating Manual of the farm.

POSTAGE
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SENDER:



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