

Macalister Demonstration Farm

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NEWSLETTER 78

10 April 2013



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



Do you own a SMART PHONE?? We have included a QR code with this issue of the newsletter to provide you with instant access to our website. So, if you do own a SMART PHONE with a barcode scanner, scan the QR Code on the right hand side of this page and the link to the MDF website will be automatically fed into the browser of your SMART PHONE. An easy way to stay in touch with Macalister Demonstration Farm.

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

IF YOU'VE GOT A GOOD DAIRY FARMING IDEA THAT YOU WOULD TO INVESTIGATE, A MACALISTER DEMONSTRATION FARM TRAVEL AND LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP MIGHT BE FOR YOU!!

In 2013, Macalister Demonstration Farm (MDF) established an annual scholarship up to the value of \$10,000 for the recipient to undertake a study tour that would benefit the dairying community in the Macalister Irrigation District (MID).

The aim of the program is to broaden industry networks and improve information flow by bringing new ideas, new management systems and improved technologies into the MID, with an emphasis on the farmer perspective. It also promotes lifelong learning in dairying and supports the personal and professional development of participants in the dairy industry to encourage them to take on leadership roles in the wider industry.

MDF Deputy Chairman, Brad White, is encouraging in his advice "Farmer development is intrinsically the key to a successful dairy industry and MDF encourages people who are passionate about the dairy industry to step forward and take advantage of this great opportunity to travel, investigate, learn, and ultimately share their findings with the dairying community."

The MDF is seeking applications from interested persons to apply for the 2013 Travel and Learning Scholarship. Areas of study could include alternative systems of dairy farm management (fertilizer management, irrigation practice, animal nutrition, breeding and genetics), sustainable farm practices (waste management, water use efficiency, energy use efficiency, nutrient use, carbon emissions reduction, integration of farming with the natural environment); and, new technologies and innovations.

To assist potential applicants in preparing their application, MDF offers the following selection as a guide to possible areas for study and investigation:

- The effectiveness of the latest in irrigation automation
- Are on farm wind turbines cost effective?
- Effluent solids separators
- Alternative pasture species for heavy soils
- Lowering production costs to maintain economic viability

The scholarship is open to anyone of any age working in the dairy industry in the MID and the study tour is expected to be for a minimum of two weeks. Travel is not restricted to Australia alone, if international travel is determined to be invaluable to the chosen area of study it will be considered favourably by the selection panel. Preference will be given to applications received from farmers within the MID but will not be limited to only farmers if the proposed study will benefit the farmers of the MID.

The successful applicant will be assigned a mentor with experience in their nominated field of study to assist with developing study tour objectives, with network links and itinerary. It is expected that, upon return, the scholarship recipient will prepare a report for wider distribution and participate at least two events organised by the MDF to disperse their findings. MDF staff will assist with the preparation and

planning of the study tour as well as follow up support for the preparation of presentations and the study tour report.

Applications opened on Monday March 25th and will close on Friday April 29th 2013. Call Sandie Brown on 0488 175 366 or email mdf@wideband.net.au to discuss your great idea, for an application form and for help and advice in preparing your application.

Yellow Rag Bit

Maria Rose Dairy Advisor, DPI Maffra

Are your heifers on target?

Recently I witnessed a very valuable and useful two-hour pilot session, conducted with 14 Macalister Irrigation District dairy farmers. They were part of Dairy Australia's 'Heifers on Target' program out at Farmtech's irrigation farmlet (AdvanceTAFE, Sale campus).

'Heifers on Target' is designed to give dairy farmers new tools for monitoring heifers and the chance to share ideas for better heifer management - from weaning through to first calving.

Having been developed from scratch by Victorian and interstate veterinarians and farmers under the guidance of Kathryn Davis from Dairy Australia, the 'Heifers on Target' program follows a discussion-style approach. It uses flip charts as a stimulus for facilitated "information and insight sharing" rather than information overload through "death by PowerPoint!"

Out at the Farmtech farmlet, farmers looked at some of the Macalister Demonstration Farm heifers being contract-reared there in two groups (calves from last season and the current season). Participants joined in a hands-on activity comparing weight observations to actual recorded weights. They also discussed various aspects on how heifer performance can affect farm profits, the different ways to monitor heifer growth progress (including non-weighing options) and the development of suitable targets.

Key points of feedback and ideas worth considering for keeping your own heifers right on target, include:

- The struggling point seems to occur 10-12 weeks after weaning up until six months and even 12 months. This is an important time to consider investment in high quality supplementary feeding.
- Regular weighing with cattle scales is certainly useful to monitor growth, but not the only way. A 44-gallon drum or a mark on a fence post can be used as a sight gauge for height to assess how well the heifers are growing

- Over time and lots of practice you can train yourself to be more accurate in weight estimation by sight; but it's worthwhile to calibrate your eye with strategic weighing (every 3 to 6 months) and increase observation times.
- Weighing and/or regular observation without taking corrective action (if required) is a waste of effort.
- Challenges are greater with mixed herds; separation into different sized groups and/or breeds works best if relevant follow up preferential treatment occurs.
- Consider a minimum weight for a calf to warrant being reared (particularly if you use contract rearing); selling it early may be a cheaper option than pouring concentrate feed into it unnecessarily.
- Consistency is the key. When you play catch up it's already too late. Applying the four-point "85% Heifer Rule" to your herd will help you assess how well you are growing your heifers;
 - ✓ your heifers should achieve a six-week in-calf rate of greater than 85%
 - ✓ production of heifers vs. mature cows should be greater than 85 %
 - ✓ the ratio of second to first calvers should be greater than 85 %
 - ✓ heifers should be at least 85 % of mature body weight at calving (which will vary with production level).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Maria Rose on 5147 0843 or 0438 28 22 05

Visit the Dairy Australia website page: <http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/heifersontarget>



ProHand® Dairy Cows

Professional handling of dairy cattle achieve best practice in dairy cattle handling minimise stress and maximise productivity

A TWO-DAY COURSE TO BE HELD AT MACALISTER DEMONSTRATION FARM

29TH APRIL AND 27TH MAY – 10.00AM TO 2.30 PM

PH: 5142 2541 for further information

A training course for all people who work with dairy cattle (owner/operators, family members, employed staff, sharefarmers, relief milkers or herd owners/managers).

Stockpeople play a vital role in the in the overall productivity, welfare and health of the cattle in their care

The ProHand® training program:

- improves the quality of human animal interactions
- minimises handling stress
- improves animal performance, health and welfare
- improves stockperson job satisfaction, work motivation and performance.

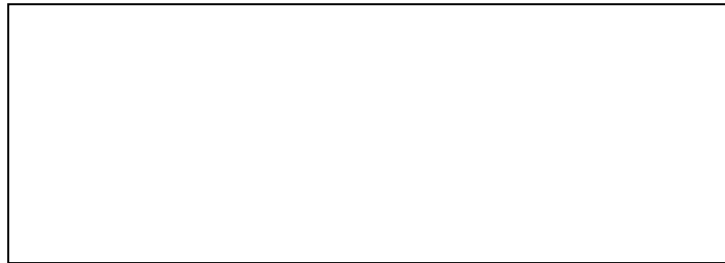
The course runs over two days (approx 10 hours in total), including a self paced interactive ProHand® session and discussion around many topics relating to cow behaviour, cow flow, productivity, health and welfare.

ProHand® can be used to make a substantial contribution to the farm's animal health and welfare program.

Participants will gain a certificate of completion of the course and may also gain the Level 2—Handle livestock using basic techniques (AHCLSK205A) unit qualification.

The course is available through the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia at a cost of \$150 per participant and includes the course materials.

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SENDER:



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