

Macalister Demonstration Farm

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NEWSLETTER 82

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MACALISTER DEMONSTRATION FARM

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Macalister Demonstration Farm Annual General Meeting will be held on **TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER 2013**. For this year, the Annual General Meeting will be held during the day at the farm with Heyfield Lions Club to provide catering. The winner of the RF (Bob) Pitman award will be announced, a key note speaker, Joe Jacobs, DEPI, will be in attendance as well as MDF Learning and Travel Scholarship awardee, Jon Ryan who will present an outline of his scholarship project and where he hopes the journey will take him.

DETAILS ARE:

WHEN: TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER 2013
WHERE: Macalister Demonstration Farm
285 Boggy Creek Road, Riverslea
TIME: 10 am to 2.30 pm

FREE LUNCH CATERED BY HEYFIELD LIONS CLUB

Please RSVP attendance to Sandie on 0488 175 366 or by email at mdf@wideband.net.au

CRUCIAL ISSUES BEING DEALT WITH BY MDF THIS SPRING

A look at the crucial issues being dealt with at the MDF this spring

Now that we are on the verge of the flush of spring, it is worth sharing with you the thoughts and philosophies being put in place at the MDF over the next few months. Calving has been a bit later than what I would say as being ideal for the farm, and there appears to be a reasonably long “tail” to the calving period, with some late cows expected to calve well into October. Numbers are also likely to be down on budget and down on ‘preferred’ levels, meaning that total solids per cow required to meet the budget will be greater. The budget worked on 293 cows doing 522kgMS/cow, or a total production of 152,871kg. The likely number is 265 cows after some early losses and culls, and numbers just not where they were expected to be. This would mean per cow production needs to be 577kgMS/cow to meet the total budgeted production. With lower cow numbers and lower total expenditure on grain and fodder in particular, it is my thought that the slightly lower stocking rate (3.6 cows/ha) be used to harvest additional silage and reduce the need for as much purchased fodder, therefore potentially reducing the impact on the budget bottom line from the lower total solids.

As a result, the approach for this spring is to achieve a high solids peak per cow from the cows that the farm has, through offering plenty of quality grass, and continuing to feed 5.4kg DM of 13MJ pellets. If the cows are leaving too much in the paddock, pellet intake may reduce slightly, to around 4.5kgDM/day, but at the moment they are consuming good levels of grass and production and intake are still rising.

Pasture quantity will be driven by regular applications of nitrogen, based on supplying 1kgN/ha/day, and frequent but light applications of P,K, and S. Base fertility levels on the farm are high, but small regular applications of P,K and S will still be applied, particularly where there appears to be nutrient stress and post-silage harvest.

Silage will be harvested on milking area when a surplus appears in front of the cows- if it is not going to be grazed at ideal “milker quality” stage, then it is to be cut as silage (contractor permitting!). This process will continue as long as there is a surplus and as long as quality silage can be made. It is my desire to obtain 1.5 bales (375kgDM/cow) per cow quality silage from milking area, or enough for 5kgDM/cow/day for 75 days. This would remove the need for the equivalent amount of purchased fodder from the budget, given adequate water availability through the late summer and autumn.

Whilst some may say creating a surplus to produce silage is “false economics”, the rationale this season is as follows:

- a kg of concentrate is costing around 38c and a standard litre (4.15% fat, 3.3% protein) is worth 39c through spring on current price (without further stepups), so as long as the response is equal or greater than 1 litre/kg fed, then the farm is no worse off;
- a kg of pasture “not eaten” is going to be harvested as silage and not wasted;
- a kg of silage harvested will replace a kg of purchased fodder in late summer, autumn or winter;
- a kg of purchased fodder in summer/autumn is ‘likely’ to be worth 30c/kgDM minimum;
- any extra kg harvested makes the farm a little less exposed to risk with a high stocking rate.

We will see the impact of these decisions as the spring progresses.

Matt Harms, ONFARM Consulting, 0408 311 118 or mattharms7@bigpond.com

Yellow Rag Bit

Maria Rose, Dairy Extension Officer, DPI Maffra

Key messages for MID from Dairy Farm Monitor Project 2012-13

I recently attended a workshop for service providers, held locally, on the financial and production performance of dairy farms in Gippsland and across Victoria. Below are the key findings presented at this workshop from the recently released 2012-13 Dairy Farm Monitor Project, which should be of interest and relevance to you.

The 2012-13 season was very tight for the whole of the Victorian dairy industry. The results from the 75 farms showed an 11 per cent fall in the average milk price to \$4.90/ kg MS and the average grain price rose 14 per cent to \$336/t DM from the previous year. Adding to the challenging market conditions, the seasonal conditions across the majority of Victoria’s three dairying regions were drier than usual with lower than average rainfall impacting negatively on profits. Particularly for the MID, despite water allocations closing at 100 per cent HRWS plus 20 per cent LRWS, the dry conditions prompted the sacrificing of lesser producing country very early on, in order to maximise water use efficiency on better country.

Participating Gippsland farmers comprised one third of the total 75 farms monitored in Victoria; on average they produced 462 kg MS/cow, received a milk price of \$4.75/kg MS and paid \$356/t DM for grain. The average home grown feed produced per milking hectare was almost 1.0 t DM/ha lower in 2012-13 as a result of the extremes of a wet winter and a dry summer. The

average pasture harvest was 7.4 t DM/ha, with the top 25per cent only 0.6 tonne higher, at 8.0 t DM/ha. Drawing heavily on long term stores of fodder, these Gippsland participants had an average feed inventory loss of \$27,696.

For the 25 Gippsland farmers concerned, pasture consumption averaged 28 per cent of energy intake (ME) and concentrate intake ranged from 18 per cent to 41per cent. Furthermore, challenging conditions in Gippsland in the 2012-13 season resulted in average earnings before tax and interest falling to \$38k, compared to \$211k last season (2011-12); while, the average net farm income fell to \$-59 k, compared to \$113k in 2011-12.

At the workshop it was highlighted that the performance of top performing Victorian dairy farmers was due to their ability to;

- control costs relative to income,
- focus on home grown feed as the key energy source, with minimal supplement use, and
- make sound farm management decisions.

Another factor highlighted was that the two most profitable farm operators (one of them located in the MID and the other in the South West) had been involved in the monitor project for a considerable time and displayed the following characteristics;

- a thorough understanding of their business
- a fundamental understanding of the principles of managing a profitable dairy farm; and
- a habit of only spending money where they know they will get a return.

FUTHER INFOMRATION

Copies of the Victorian Dairy Farm Monitor Project Annual Report 2012-13 can be obtained as follows;

- For a web interactive pdf version: Visit <http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/dairyfarmmonitor>
- For a printed version: Contact Maria Rose on 5147 0843 or maria.rose@depi.vic.gov.au

Silage Information Session

Frank Mickan, a Pasture and Fodder Conservation Specialist from the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, will be at the Macalister Demonstration Farm to present a silage information session.

Session details

Topics covered include:

- The importance of silage quality
- Silage analysis
- Harvesting silage
- Storage of silage
- Additives

Where: Macalister Demonstration Farm, Boggy Creek Rd, Riverslea

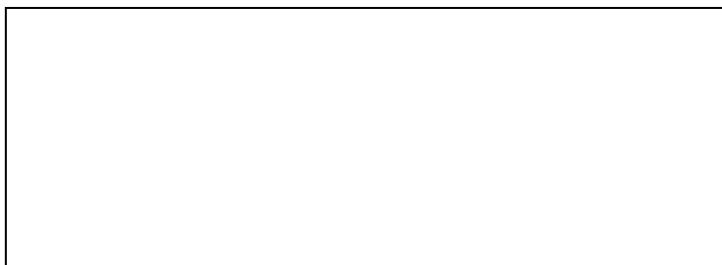
When: Thursday 3rd October 2013

Time: 10:30 am to 12:30 pm followed by BBQ lunch

For more information contact: Sarah Killury DEPI Maffra on 5147 0845 or sarah.m.killury@depi.vic.gov.au



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