



# Macalister Demonstration Farm

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## NEWSLETTER 87

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*Extension projects at the MDF are supported by Genetics Australia and GippsDairy.*



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### IN THE NEWSLETTER THIS MONTH

A big thank you

BVDV at the Demonstration Farm

Yellow Rag – Understanding about investments being made by Dairy Australia

The value in comparing electricity providers

Upcoming Events / Upcoming Courses

## **THANK YOU!!**

The Board would like to thank all who participated in the recent round of farmer consultation meetings designed to gather input from stakeholders. Your responses have been collated and are now in the process of being considered by the Board. Further updates will be forthcoming in future newsletters.

## BVDV at the Macalister Demonstration Farm

BVDV was detected in the replacement heifer herd after an unwell heifer was tested as a persistently infected BVDV animal last year.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Virus is a disease that is widespread amongst cattle in Australia. It causes reproductive losses and affects the immune system of cattle, making them more susceptible to other diseases. It is a disease that can cause economic losses every few years; when there are a lot of infected animals through many management groups, there will be a relatively high proportion of antibody positive or resistant animals. However, when there is a fewer number of infected cattle, the chances of them being antibody negative or susceptible to the disease, especially at a vulnerable time during the first 150 days of pregnancy is higher. Cattle can become infected in the first 150 of gestation, causing either abortions or to carry calves that are persistently infected (PI) animals which harbour and spread the virus. Other cattle that are exposed to the virus for the first time are transiently infected, causing some production loss. There are significant economic losses associated with this disease.

Many Scandinavian and European countries have national BVDV eradication programs. At present, there are no plans for this within Australia. The MDF have decided to actively manage BVDV as this is not the first time it has presented in the herd. The main motivating factor in controlling the impact and eliminating it from the herd is the losses from the heifers. Economic losses are attributed to increased abortions, calving inductions, calving to conception interval and services per conception and decreased milk production.

Following the diagnosis of BVDV, further testing was undertaken by ear notching all young stock and a bulk milk screening test for the milking herd. Testing an ear notch sample is the most accurate and inexpensive way to test for the presence of the BVDV virus in cattle. Three further yearling heifers were detected as PI's and the milking herd showed some prior exposure to the virus. All dams of the PI calves were tested as calves can be infected in utero from their mother if they are also a PI; the dams were negative indicating that the virus was present some time during the joining and early gestation of the spring 2012 calving mob. All calves born and retained from spring calving 2013 tested negative.

In total, four heifers were found to be persistently infected, with the original unwell heifer dying, leaving three PI heifers from the 2012 spring calving.

Testing of a portion of the healthy 2012 heifers showed that they had a strong level of immunity against the BVD virus. This means that if there were to be a future exposure, the chances of becoming transiently infected or developing a PI calf would be minimal, i.e they are naturally vaccinated.

All calves from the 2013 spring calving and all other herd members are essentially naive, or susceptible, if there were to be another exposure of BVDV to the herd. To prevent further calves being born as PI's or significant production losses in the face of another outbreak the farm will start vaccination against BVDV in this age group prior to being joined for the first time.

Vaccination in a herd, previously unvaccinated, requires an initial two dose course, with the second dose given 2-4 weeks prior to mating beginning. Annual boosters are required thereafter, again targeted before the mating period. Each mob of maiden heifers, prior to mating commencing, and any bulls brought in should receive the initial two dose course, after being tested negative for the disease. The investigation cost approximately \$1,000. The first year of vaccination with Pestigard will cost approximately \$2,500 and then be \$2,000 per year after that.

For more information about BVDV, you can visit [www.controlbvd.org.nz](http://www.controlbvd.org.nz) or [www.swansvet.com](http://www.swansvet.com).

## Yellow Rag Bit

Maria Rose, Dairy Extension Officer, DEPI Maffra

### Understanding about investments being made by Dairy Australia

For my yellow rag bit this time, I encourage dairy farmers to take up a great opportunity by GippsDairy to meet informally over dinner later this month in Maffra with managers and directors from Dairy Australia to discuss investments being made with Australia's dairy levy.

Those from Dairy Australia who you will have the unique opportunity to chat with include;

- **Ian Halliday**, the Managing Director of Dairy Australia who will talk about the Legendairy campaign.
- **Chris Murphy**, Group Manager of Farm Productivity & Delivery Group which invests in research, development, extension and education activities such as the InCalf and Countdown programs, discussion groups, dairy energy assessments and Focus Farms.
- **Charlie McElhone**, Program Manager of Trade and Industry Strategy Group responsible for facilitating profitable international trade of Australian dairy products and providing information, analysis and market intelligence to the Australian dairy industry. Familiar examples include the Situation and Outlook survey and the Hay and Grain Report.
- **Helen Dornum**, Program Manager of the Sustainability Group (including Food Safety & Integrity) manages the national sustainability framework, focusing on working in with farmers and manufacturers to demonstrate how well our milk is produced.
- **Geoff Akers**, Chair of the Board and farmer from Northern Victoria.
- **Kelvin Jackson**, Director of the Board and farmer from South Gippsland.

This meeting is guaranteed to be a 'powerpoint free zone'. Guests will rotate amongst tables during the night so everyone has a chance to meet all members. They are keen to know what the current dairying related issues are in the MID as well as what's working and what needs attention in the context of their overall investment of Australian dairy levies.

**When: Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April**

**Time:** 6.30 for 7.00 pm start

**Where:** Avon Winery, 446 Maffra-Stratford Road, Maffra

**Cost:** Dinner provided, drinks at your own cost

**Format:** Informal rotating discussion over dinner

This informal dinner meeting with guests from Dairy Australia will accommodate 25 to 30 farmers maximum. So if you are keen to be involved, get your RSVP in by emailing [admin@gippsdairy.com.au](mailto:admin@gippsdairy.com.au) or phoning (03) 5624 3900 by Friday the 11<sup>th</sup> of April.

## THE VALUE IN COMPARING ELECTRICITY PROVIDERS

In the 2012-13 financial year, Macalister Demonstration Farm paid in excess of \$35,000 in electricity costs. The demonstration farm has 3 electricity meters, 2 are attached to irrigation pumps and usage is charged on a quarterly basis and the third, and biggest electricity user, is the meter in the dairy which is charged on a monthly basis.

In an attempt to alleviate the burden of electricity costs, the demonstration farm undertook its own investigation and comparison of energy providers to the MID. Five different providers were selected for comparison purposes. The choice of these providers was arbitrary (except for the incumbent provider) and chanced upon by word of mouth. Many in the district would be aware of the Momentum Energy deal which is available through MG Trading. This company was included in the comparison process, but for reasons explained further on, the package on offer was not pursued. Other companies assessed shall remain nameless for the purposes of this article, however, if readers are interested to seek further information, please do not hesitate to contact Sandie Brown on 0488 175 366.

The demonstration farm is fortunate to have detailed data relating to energy usage (kWh) dating back to 2006. This data was utilised when comparing energy providers and the deals each had on offer, including reduced peak and off peak kilowatt rates, pay on time discounts and in one instance, a complete breakdown of costs into "Provider charges", "Industry charges" and "Network charges". This break down of costs could only be applied to the meter at the dairy which in the 12/13 financial year had an annual usage in excess of 80,000 kWh. Of the five companies compared, two committed to a "no annual increase from the provider for 3 years" clause, whilst the remaining three provided varying pay on time discounts and "special business" discounts as incentives.

Two companies were stand outs when quoted rates were applied to the annual kWh figures, with barely \$500 difference across a 12 month period. At the high end of the field, there was a 23% differential in costs between the company coming in at the high end of the spectrum (unfortunately the company from whom Macalister Demonstration Farm currently purchases its electricity) and the two companies with lowest projected annual costs.

The table below provides a comparison of estimated annual costs of the five companies researched.

	Current company	Company 1	Company 2	Company 1 variation	Company 3	Company 4
Bore	\$7,681.18	\$6,808.64	\$6,474.96	\$6,109.11	\$6,051.41	\$6,542.30
Dairy	\$20,656.16	\$18,378.86	\$16,852.90	\$16,213.10	\$16,056.04	\$15,029.56
Fixed Pump	\$5,085.90	\$4,397.36	\$4,038.87	\$3,880.41	\$3,824.55	\$3,944.58
<b>TOTAL PROJECTED ANNUAL COSTS</b>	<b>\$33,423.24</b>	<b>\$29,584.86</b>	<b>\$27,366.74</b>	<b>\$26,202.62</b>	<b>\$25,932.00</b>	<b>\$25,516.44</b>

The Momentum Energy deal has not been included in the above table. It was a very attractive package on offer, but was not considered by the Board because of the strict parameters imposed when accessing this deal.

It is not necessary for the individual to undertake the research in sourcing the cheapest energy provider. There are brokers who will do the work for you. MDF currently has a broker looking at the deals that have been offered to MDF and it will be interesting to see if they are able to come up with some better options.

This exercise undertaken by MDF demonstrates to our readership the value in spending time and effort in looking at and comparing energy company providers. In this case apples ARE NOT apples and as can be seen by the above table, significant savings can be made.

## Upcoming events

### Southern Farming Systems Integrated Pest Management (IPM) farm walk

Thursday 17th April 10am - 12pm at Paulet's farm, Rosedale - Flynn Creek Road, Rosedale. Looking at IPM in a demonstration paddock with expert IPM consultants Dr Paul Horne and Jessie Page - what pests are present, what could become a problem and control management.

To RSVP and for more info contact Janice Dowe at SFS on 0488 600 209

## Upcoming courses

1. **Fodder Conservation** (*Making quality Hay and Silage*) Maffra Wednesday, May 7, 14, 28
2. **Manage the Dairy Production System** (*System targets, Performance indicators, Linkages and analysis, Profit drivers, Marginal thinking*) Maffra Wednesday June 4, 11, 18, 25
3. **Managing the Dairy Farm as a Business** (*Budgets/cashflows, Profit & Loss, Balance Sheets, Financial performance indicators*) Maffra Thursdays, April 3, 10, 17, 24 May 1
4. **Grazing Dairy Pastures** (*pasture consumption, its importance, calculating it, factors affecting it, cost of pasture; factors affecting leaf appearance and growth rate; how to count leaves; pasture as a cow feed - quality vs quantity - factors affecting cow intake; reading a pasture; how to graze ryegrass to get GROWTH, UTILISATION, QUALITY and PERSISTENCE; setting up a grazing rotation or pasture wedge; grazing rest time (rotation)decision; the post-graze residue decision; grazing in practice*), Maffra 3 days, 10.30am to 3pm, TBA
5. **Dairy Soils and Fertilisers** (*requirements for plant growth; soil composition - minerals, organic matter, water and air; soil nutrients and how they cycle through the system; soil nutrient testing; fertilisers-straight- blends-NPKS; deciding fertiliser type, rate, application timing; fertiliser calculations, capital, maintenance; fertiliser budgets*) Maffra 4 days, 10.30am to 3pm, TBA
6. **Irrigation Management** (*best practice flood and spray irrigation for pasture performance - understanding soil water plant relationships (soil characteristics, soil water capacity, infiltration, and movement) - deciding when to irrigate - managing water logging; flood irrigation design and layout issues; spray irrigation design and layout issues; assessing irrigation performance*), Maffra Wednesdays, 10.30am to 3pm, sometime in JULY

*for more information contact Frank Tyndall on 0409 940 782 or [ftyndall@ozemail.com.au](mailto:ftyndall@ozemail.com.au)*

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