

Macalister Demonstration Farm

PO Box 87, MAFFRA, VIC 3860

Ph. 0488 175 366

Email: mdf@wideband.net.au Web: www.macalisterdemonstrationfarm.com

NEWSLETTER 90

July 2014



Your Levy at Work



Macalister Demonstration Farm is supported by Genetics Australia and GippsDairy.



Do you own a SMART PHONE?? Use the QR code on the right hand side to provide you with instant access to our website. Simply scan the QR Code with your phone and the link to the MDF website will automatically be fed into the browser of your SMART PHONE. An easy way to stay in touch with Macalister Demonstration Farm.

IN THE NEWSLETTER THIS MONTH

WTC Irrigation Expo Tour
Yellow Rag – Lameness in Dairy herds
What's been going on at the MDF?
Upcoming Events



WTC Irrigation Expo Tour



Earlier this year, Southern Rural Water (SRW), Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) and Macalister Demonstration Farm (MDF) extended an invitation to farmers of the MID to attend the WTC Irrigation Expo in Shepparton. Transport for the tour was sponsored by SRW whilst logistics were handled equally by DEPI and MDF.

A group of 21 boarded the bus early on the morning of Tuesday 28th May and returned late evening Wednesday 29th May. During their time away the tour participants had the opportunity to attend the WTC Expo, take a comprehensive tour of the Rubicon factory and visit two farms of the Shepparton region to view the practical application of new irrigation technology.



Contractor Mick Lawless of Sale, consultant Greg Hair of Maffra and farmer Tom Strothers of Maffra talk with Peter Moller from Rubicon

On arrival in Shepparton, the participants attended the WTC Irrigation Expo where they had the opportunity to browse and learn about the the range of new technologies available. After the Expo, a short trip back to the accommodation and the opportunity to enjoy pre-dinner drinks which were sponsored by AWMA. At this function participants had the opportunity to mix with AWMA representatives.

The following day the group spent a couple of hours touring the Rubicon factory and learning about the vast array of products on offer which was followed by two on-farm visits: the first to an organic dairy farm which uses a WiSA flood irrigation system and the second to a farm which has installed an Observant irrigation automation system.

The general consensus of the participants was that the tour was a resounding success and that a bus tour to the WTC Expo in Shepparton should become an annual event. The benefits from gaining a better understanding of the new technologies available in the market place were invaluable. A big thank you to SRW, DEPI and MDF for making this tour possible.



Gippsland farmers visiting Goulburn Valley.L-R Greg Hair, Neil Lett, Gavan Lamb, Rod Cannon, Brett Matthews

photos courtesy Macpherson media group

Upcoming events

Denison Discussion Group

Thursday 4th September

More information contact Sarah Killury: 0458 004 918

Boisdale Newry Discussion Group

Date in August to be advised

Bairnsdale Discussion Group

Tuesday 5th August

More information contact Maria Rose: 0438 282 205

National Breeding Objective Review

Monday 28th July

DEPI Office

Maffra

7.30 pm

More information / RSVP: Mal Sayers 0428 443 549
or Bec Phelan 0400 265 870

Yellow Rag Bit

Maria Rose, Dairy Extension Officer and Eddie Alvares, District Veterinary Officer, DEPI, Maffra

Minimising foot lameness in your dairy herd

Given that lameness in dairy cattle has been quite prevalent in the MID so far this winter, I asked Eddie Alvares, our district veterinary officer with DEPI Maffra to write a short article for this month's Yellow Rag Bit. In the following, Eddie focuses on the important factors you need to identify, consider and address appropriately as part of your everyday dairy farm management; in the context of minimising fundamental causes of this disease that may well contribute to both reduced milk production and herd fertility.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of control of herd lameness. As is the case with most production diseases, the cause of the problem is likely to be multi-factorial. A number of predisposing or risk factors are thought to influence, either alone or in conjunction with one another, the severity and the prevalence of lameness. Lameness is a chronic painful condition which decreases milk production and fertility in dairy cattle.

Foot lameness may be caused by a single factor such as direct trauma to the sole of the foot, but more commonly a number of factors may contribute to an increased incidence of lameness in a herd. These include;

- poor track maintenance and design,
- impatience moving the cows along the track or in the yard,
- long periods spent on concrete, or cows twisting and turning on concrete yards,
- excessive moisture or pronounced changes in ground moisture,
- nutritional effects, including the effect of subclinical rumen acidosis (SARA), laminitis and the effect of trace elements and minerals on hoof production,
- specific infectious agents, for example, *F.necrophorum* (footrot), *D. nodosus* (scald), *Spirochaetes* (strawberry and/or hairy footrot), and
- genetic factors and claw conformation.

Infectious causes of lameness often develop after weakening of the skin barrier due to mechanical irritation and hyper hydration which lead to introduction of bacteria. Treatment of the infectious agents alone will not resolve the incidence of lameness without addressing the underlying predisposing issues.

Once lameness has been detected in a dairy cow, it is important to identify and record the cause and pathological change in the claws. Proper records must be kept of the diagnosis, progression and treatment of lesions. Accurate records will help determine a course of action for prevention of further lameness. Veterinary advice and treatment will assist in resolving significant lameness issues.

For further information about minimising foot lameness contact Maria Rose and/or Eddie Alvares at DEPI Maffra by phoning 5147 0800 and/or contact your local private veterinarian.

What's been going on at the MDF?

The 2013/14 budget has been completed for actual income received and expenses outlaid, and overall, despite the excellent milk price and very good season, it has to be said that the financials for the farm have been disappointing. I have indicated in this article at various stages throughout the season that production has been well below expectation, and inputs have been higher than desired. This has led to an overall cash deficit for the season just gone, and so it is time to explain the overall situation, and the steps that are being put in place for this season so that it doesn't happen again!

In summary, the key points of the 13/14 season were as follows:

Total production for the season of 127,924kgMS, or 457kgMS/cow, well below budget and was the main reason for the poor financials. Why? A spread out calving pattern meant many cows did not complete a 300 day lactation within the financial year. Also the body condition of the milkers at calving was lower than ideal, at around 4.75, and pre-calving pasture cover was well lower than ideal at around 1800kgDM/ha, largely due to all the dry cows having to be run at home and hay difficult to source. The performance of the first calving heifers has also been disappointing and will be the subject of review over the coming season.

Milk price paid: \$6.53/kgMS under the Murray Goulburn Traditional payment system.

Farm Working Expenses (herd, shed, feed, overheads and paid labour) of \$6.76/kgMS, an incredibly high figure, and still high at \$5.37/kg MS when labour costs are removed. This needs to reduce by around \$2.00/kgMS and will be a focus over the coming season. What areas will be focussed on? Reducing the amount of purchased fodder, reducing the cost of concentrates through returning to own-crushed grain later in lactation, reducing the cost of AI and reducing the cost of power for the dairy (\$90/cow!) through switching power companies. There will also be much less spent on repairs and maintenance, as there was a large injection of funds (\$82,000) spent on repairs and maintenance, to get the farm into a condition conducive to being safe, manageable and attractive for staff to operate on.

Pasture consumed was 11.1tDM/ha or 2.9tDM/cow, well down on previous years' figures and well below what is achievable on this farm. This reduced pasture consumption is attributed to poor irrigation under the sub-surface drip irrigation area and bike-shift irrigation areas that were in a bad state of repair following the irrigation season the year before, the break-down in the fixed spray pump for around one month in March and poor performance of the tree-lined paddocks along Boggy Creek Rd. The aim for the new season is to return pasture consumption to around 13tDM/ha and will be a major focus of the year ahead.

On the positive side, labour and staffing has been excellent, with Becky performing a great role picking up the pieces of a disastrous January-August 2013, and assisted with minimal additional labour. Most understand that taking on a new farm is always a challenge, especially when faced with taking on a herd soon as calving had started, with barely enough pasture, milk fever galore, and many areas of the farm in a poor condition. Much has been done by Becky, Tahlia, Craig the maintenance contractor, Mark, Brad and the rest of the Board, in trying to get things back on track. Let's hope that 2014/15 can show better farm physical, financial and 'emotional' performance!

Matt Harms, ONFARM Consulting, 0408 311 118 or matt@onfarmconsulting.com.au

Your herd.
Your asset.
Your future.

NATIONAL BREEDING OBJECTIVE REVIEW

**THE TEAM IS COMING TO
YOUR AREA SOON**

Monday 28 July, 2014

7:00 cuppa for 7:30 pm start, DEPI office, 1 Stratford Rd, Maffra
Michelle Axford, ADHIS, will be reporting the latest research findings
All are welcome. Hosted by East Gippsland Sub-Branch. Supper provided.
RSVP Mal Sayers 0428 443 549 or Bec Phelan 0400 285 870

For the first time, Australian dairy farmers have had a direct say on the next generation dairy herd as part of a review of the National Breeding Objective. Currently this is expressed by the Australian Profit Ranking (APR).

Hundreds of people have participated in Australia's Longest Farmwalk and a sector-wide survey run by the ADHIS through Autumn 2014. Now, it's time to hear what the nation's dairy farmers said and see what changes are under investigation.

Once the National Breeding Objective Review is completed later this year, the results will be widely publicised and used to update indices so that our 'next gen' herd is as productive and profitable as possible.



POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA



SENDER:



Macalister Demonstration Farm
PO Box 87
MAFFRA VIC 3860