



# Macalister Demonstration Farm

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## NEWSLETTER 95

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## ***FIRST MACALISTER FOCUS FARM FIELD DAY***

This first Macalister Focus Farm field day is on **Thursday 26 February**, on the farm at Boggy Creek Road, Maffra.

Meet the Farm Manager Becky Horsham, Facilitator Matt Harms plus the local Support Group.

**The field day will run from 11.00am to 2.30pm, come for a cuppa from 10.30am.**

### **Key topics on the day:**

- Managing the farm daily decision-making in order to meet the physical and financial budget parameters that have been set;
- How does a 'corporate entity' manage the staff, business, inputs and decisions in order to achieve the desired return on asset as set by its Board;
- Exploring the risks faced by this moderately stocked, 100% irrigated dairy business in terms of the farming system and the labour structure in place;
- Current farm production and financials, plus a walk to check the pastures and cows.

Tea/coffee and light lunch provided,

Look for the GippsDairy Field Day signs.

**Dairy farmers and others interested in the dairy industry are all welcome**

For more information contact John Gallienne 0407 863 493 or email: [gallienne@dcsi.net.au](mailto:gallienne@dcsi.net.au)

# Yellow Rag Bit

Maria Rose, Dairy Extension Officer, DEPI Maffra

## ***Keeping a watchful eye on summer pasture quality early***

Regular measurements by MID farmers over the past two seasons revealed that pasture quality has reduced significantly during early summer this season. This has affected cow energy intake and milk production considerably.

Both a small drop in ME and a small increase in NDF of pasture may not be so unusual during summer in the MID, but a large change in both, which has happened over only a two week period this season, is highly significant to all grass - based irrigation dairy businesses. The recent awareness of this pasture quality decline by a number of MID dairy farmers highlights the key question “Has this always been the case?” If so, what are the actual physical events which may have caused such a hastened deterioration in pasture quality this summer? Did the major rain event in early December and poor drainage conditions, encourage weeds and or earlier appearance of a greater number of seed – head tillers (in comparison to the preferred vegetative ones)? Or perhaps subsequent irrigation events (flood or spray) did not occur regularly enough, once these physical effects directly resulting from earlier rains had subsided?

The actual characteristics of MID irrigated pasture that directly contribute to grass quality deteriorating over summer does warrant further exploration, and regular observation on your own farm will be the key. For example, within the pastures concerned, are you observing bare patches and or an obvious invasion of poorer quality species, a sparseness of more desirable plant species, sudden increase in “seed-head to vegetative” tiller ratio, etc.? Additionally, a change in prior spring grazing practice next milking season may be worth your consideration. A timely light back-grazing in the latter part of spring, for example, could lead to the encouragement of more summer vegetative tillers and thicker higher quality pasture. This spring grazing practice may help in delaying sudden significant deterioration in subsequent summer pasture quality, as was measured this milking season.

If you detect potential problems with reduced pasture quality on your own farm early, then you can change the milking herd’s diet both appropriately and in time, minimising any potential avoidable decrease in milk production.

For more information about observing early signs of deteriorating pasture quality, contact your trusted agronomist or dairy extension officer. If you wish to further discuss some of the strategies covered above, contact Maria Rose on 5147 0843 or maria.rose@ecodev.vic.gov.au

## ***What’s been going on at the MDF?***

Pasture quantity has certainly lifted over the past two weeks, with unbelievably kind mid-January growing conditions being experienced. Quality of pasture is certainly better than in the mid-December to early January period, and this is being reflected in the stabilising milk production, lift in protein % and the improved body condition- all what you could hope for!

Feed inputs have also decreased, with silage feeding stopped, and grain remaining at 6.4kg. The transition across to wheat has commenced and the process will be ramped up with around ½ kg wheat going in every few days and a similar reduction in pellets. The decision has been made to go to a 1-1.5kg/cow/day additive pellet with Eskalin, Rumensin, Magnesium, 150g/cow/day limestone, minerals and elevated Zinc for Facial Eczema. While Becky is nervous about the change over, all steps are taken to minimise any risk of acidosis.

The current figures are in the table below. The cows are being fed 6kg pellets at \$385/t and 0.4kg wheat at \$335/t, at a total cost of \$2.38/cow/day. Silage feeding has stopped, as pasture availability has increased considerably.

|              | <b>Litres</b> | <b>Solids</b> |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Production   | 23.5          | 1.75          |
| Components % | 4.1%, 3.42%   | 4.1%, 3.42%   |

|                                   | <b>Litres</b>        | <b>Solids</b> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Milk price on current test        | 43c                  | \$5.72        |
| Gross milk income less levies     | \$10.10              | \$10.10       |
| Minus grain/pellets               | \$2.31+\$0.07=\$2.38 | \$2.38        |
| IOSFC (\$/cow/day)                | \$7.72               | \$7.72        |
| Minus irrigated grass (\$140/tDM) | \$1.54               | \$1.54        |
| Net IOSFC (\$/cow/day)            | \$6.18               | \$6.18        |
| \$/herd/day                       |                      |               |
| Net production                    | 18 net litres        | 1.35kgMS      |
| Supplement cost                   | 5.5 litres           | 0.4kgMS       |

The grazing round is currently 22 days, with 3-3.5ha/day being allocated, with signs that this can be tightened slightly where there is high pasture cover to force residuals lower.

Pasture cover has increased over the past two weeks given the good growing conditions, to just below 1800kgDM/ha, a great position to be in, however quality on some paddocks is poor, in part due to summer species, some waterlogging but also due to high residuals last grazing round. Topping will be performed as a priority on the areas when and where required. Dock infestation is severe in some areas and topping then spraying when new growth appears will be done through February and March

Growth rates have averaged 50kgDM/ha on the fixed spray area in the past two weeks, and 40kgDM/ha on the flood areas, leading to the increase in pasture cover. Urea is still being applied at 80kg/ha.

Resowing will commence mid-late February, with pastures to be renovated sprayed mid-February with a knockdown spray, and prepared for a late-Feb or early March resow. More detail will come in subsequent reports as to the varieties and preparation methods being used this season.

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

## **Upcoming events**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Event</b>  | <b>Contact</b>                          |
|-------------|---|---|
| 26-Feb      | Macalister Focus Farm Open Day<br><i>Open to the district to hear about the goals business and progress early on in the Focus Farm</i>  | Tony Platt<br>0477 440 339              |
| 18-Feb      | Irrigation Automation Bus Tour<br><i>Tour around the MID to view various irrigation automation systems and hear from farmers using them</i>   | Gavan Lamb / Sarah Killury<br>5147 0800 |
| 18-Feb      | BVDV seminar @ the MDF<br><i>Hear from Dr Enoch Bergman, a leading expert on BVDV. Presented by Maffra Vet Clinic and IDEXX Laboratories</i>  | Noel Goddard<br>5147 1177               |
| 3-Mar       | Shade and Shelter for Livestock Production<br><i>Using shelterbelts and tree planting to maximise livestock production heat and cold extremes</i>   | Sam Shannon<br>5613 5978                |
| 18-Mar      | Irrigation Technology Expo<br><i>Hosting irrigation technology companies for a farmer expo in Sale</i>  | Gavan Lamb<br>5147 0800                 |
| 2-Apr       | Stepping In/Stepping Back<br><i>Looks at options for farmers to step back from the day to day farming tasks. Also how to prepare someone in the business to "Step In" to take up responsibility</i> | GippsDairy<br>5624 3900                 |
| 8-Apr       | Irrigation Course<br><i>3 day course over 3 weeks, 8, 15 and 22 April.</i>  | Frank Tyndall<br>0409 940 782           |
| 9-Apr       | InCharge Fertility Workshop<br><i>5 day workshop (over 2 months) covering all aspects of reproductive performance</i>   | Ashleigh Michael<br>0428 307 250        |
| 15-Apr      | Churn Milk into money<br><i>2 day course - 15/16 April. Develop people so they can have careers in dairy, accumulate wealth and have lifestyles they want</i>                                       | GippsDairy<br>5624 3900                 |

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