

# Macalister Demonstration Farm

PO Box 87, MAFFRA, VIC 3860

Ph. 0488 175 366

Email: [mdf@wideband.net.au](mailto:mdf@wideband.net.au) Web: [www.macalisterdemonstrationfarm.com](http://www.macalisterdemonstrationfarm.com)

## NEWSLETTER 96

March 2015



Your Levy at Work



Macalister Demonstration Farm is supported  
by Genetics Australia, HICO 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

The road to recruitment  
Yellow Rag Bit – Considering pasture renovation this autumn?  
What's been going on at MDF?  
Survey - What do you want from your MDF?  
Quick bits  
Upcoming events

## *The road to recruitment*

After a respite of almost 2 years from the recruitment merry-go-round, the board of the MDF is once again faced with finding a new manager. After ably picking up the reins in August 2013, Becky Horsham, our current manager, has succumbed to the wanderlust and will be heading off overseas when her contract ends on 30 June 2015.

And so, the search for a new manager has commenced with the recruitment process planning being the first step. Initially, the board has prepared a discussion paper which has been issued to the Focus Farm Support Group for consideration at their next meeting.

This paper explores the inherent intricacies of engaging a manager at the MDF. The board recognise that the work conditions for the manager should offer a rewarding experience whilst also optimising farm profitability. Developing people is a well recognised strength of the MDF and continuing education is something which is well supported by the current board. In the search for a new manager, the board is seeking to engage someone who can be developed through close support and guidance of a farm consultant.

The manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the farm, and therefore a basic skill set commensurate to this responsibility would be expected. However, the skill set may not be typical of a high end farm manager, and the intent of developing, educating, guiding and supporting does add an element of risk to overall farm profitability. In saying this, it must be stressed that the successful candidate would need to demonstrate that they have the potential and motivation for self improvement.

The discussion paper also broaches the complex issue of contractor versus employee engagement model. Advice has been sought from the Workplace Relations Team at the Victorian Farmers Federation in respect of this. There is no straight forward black and white answer here, and this issue needs to be fully explored. Ultimately, the model of employment must sit well within the regulations of the Fair Work Commission.

A further resource utilised by the MDF is the People in Dairy Employment Starter Kit (ESKI): <http://www.thepeopleindairy.com.au/eski-landing-page.htm>. This site provides excellent guidance for the recruitment process as well as leading the prospective employer through the myriad of documentation which is necessary to have on hand when engaging staff.

As the recruitment process continues, so our readership will be kept up-to-date with the progress of the engagement of our new farm manager.

## Yellow Rag Bit

*Maria Rose, Dairy Extension Officer - Economic Development, Maffra*

### Considering pasture renovation this autumn?

Although the MID had a mild summer season some farmers had grass quality issues, particularly in older pastures with higher levels of summer species. This trend was more noticeable in paddocks with poor irrigation infrastructure or drainage. Autumn is now upon us and this is traditionally the ideal time to re-sow old, tired and under-performing paddocks. It is important to critically assess paddocks and tailor your pasture renovation program to achieve the most profitable outcome. There is no doubt that home grown is the cheapest way to provide milker quality feed. To ensure cost of production is kept as low as possible, well thought through decisions are crucial.

Some areas to explore as a useful starting point include;

**What is your main reason to renovate a particular paddock?** Is it poor pasture performance, high level of undesirable species, poor irrigation infrastructure, pasture prone to root pulling, soil structure or more than one of these in combination? Every issue identified needs to be addressed to achieve success with your renovation. Investigate the real causes of the issues you have identified and determine an appropriate solution.

**What is the weed burden like across the paddock?** Can you identify what the undesirable species are and what they may further signify? Dandelions in the pasture may indicate low potassium and phosphorus levels; highlighting potential fertility issues. The presence of distichum or nut grass, can indicate poor drainage. An over dominance of capeweed may indicate overgrazing as this is a prime opportunist weed or it may also indicate soil structure issues.

Before renovating your paddock consider;

- How does compare to better performing paddocks on the farm?
- Would “improved” irrigation practice fix the identified problems?
- Will it require cultivation or laser grading in order to improve the drainage?
- Does it require a complete spray out and resow or can you oversow with a suitable species (e.g. annual, Biennial, or perennial)?

Soil testing a paddock before renovation is critical as it helps identify and address any fertility or soil structure issues. Limiting factors such as soil acidity/sodicity and soil structure must be addressed to ensure the same underperforming issues of paddocks do not recur. Also, good soil fertility when sowing ensures good establishment of new pasture.

Some final points to consider before you begin renovating paddocks, include;

- Talking with your seed supplier and contractor to ensure they know what you plan to do, so they can slot it into their own as well as your planned work timetable.
- Chatting with your trusted agronomist about recommended species for your paddocks soil type and your farm.
- If using ryegrass, look for cultivars that have good production with high rust resistance; and consider the need to reduce the seed pool of the existing rust-susceptible variety (eg double cropping phase) before the final resowing.
- Be prepared to monitor weed germination and insect damage in the establishment phase. A good starting point is Dairy Australia's website. Go to the following page;

<http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/Pastures-and-Feeding/Pastures-forages-and-crops/Weeds-and-pests.aspx>

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

The Open Day was held on February 26<sup>th</sup> and was attended by around 60 people. It was a great opportunity to showcase the discussions and the issues thrashed around so far by the Support Group. But on top of that, there were some really good discussions raised and issues tackled by members of the farming community who were there to see what had been going on at the MDF over the past few years. Pasture quality was a hot topic, with strong opinions voiced in regards to pasture residuals, quality of the pasture pre and post grazing and what can be done about it in the short term and the longer term. Some of these discussions led on to resowing to remove the poor species, but then the question was raised that if there were structural problems in the paddock and the drainage and watering inefficiency was causing the problem, then it may be best to fix the problem first prior to resowing.

The conclusions reached were that there needed to be some on-going resowing of the poorest pastures to generate more growth and reduce the reliance on purchased feed (particularly fodder), but if there was a structural problem that could be easily fixed then this would be a priority before the resowing. If it wasn't an easy or cheap fix, then other paddocks would be selected to resow and achieve a better result. In other words, the 'low hanging fruit' would be picked first!

Some of the other issues covered on the day was where the budget was sitting for the 14/15 season, and were there any 'blow-outs', and how were the physical targets sitting for the season to date. Where there were cost blow-outs, these were highlighted and discussed. We are now closer to seeing the full year picture, with five full months of the season left.

**In summary, the key budget points are as follows, with all referenced to the end of February 2015:**

**Production:** 4423kgMS up on target, 96 073kgMS in total YTD or 349kg/cow. It is predicted that the target of 527kgMS/cow or 136,900kg total will be achieved by the end of June.

**Pasture consumed to date:** 9.44tDM/ha with a further 0.47tDM/ha conserved, or a total of 9.91tDM/ha, with an annual target of 13.3tDM/ha. It is predicted that the farm will come in with 13tDM/ha to the end of June.

**Costs** are generally running to budget, with the exception of Animal health and mating costs, which have been high but have delivered an exceptional 6-week in calf rate of 70% in the herd, also with 90% of the rising two year old heifers in calf. One of the main focal points on this farm, being seasonal calving, is how

to reduce and then eliminate the need for calving induction. The expense and effort put in to fertility, animal health and joining is all part of the aim to eliminate calving induction.

Repairs and maintenance expenditure is also causing grief, with a lot of breakdowns being experienced particularly in the last two months. This is seeing the budget for the full year nearly being reached at the end of February, and so it is likely that there will be large over-runs in this category.

Another significant cost on the farm is the contract rearing of the young stock. This has an annual budget of around \$50,000 for both classes of heifers, and to the end of Feb the farm was only \$2000 under the annual total. This will be reviewed in detail prior to next season!

Labour, feed costs, shed costs and other overheads are all running close to, or under budget.

The current numbers for the farm see 266 cows in the vat and 268 in the herd, being fed 5kg wheat plus 1kg additive pellet, and 3.25ha/24 hours pasture (20 day round), with quality of pasture still an issue. Production is 'volatile' depending on the pasture quality on the day, but production is slightly up on the figures from two weeks ago and has returned to being on target for the 10-day period.

|   | <b>Litres</b> | <b>Solids</b> |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| Production  | 19            | 1.57          |
| Components %  | 4.7%, 3.6%    | 4.7%, 3.6%    |
| Milk price on current test                          | 48.5c         | \$5.87        |
| Gross milk income less levies                       | \$9.22        | \$9.22        |
| Minus 5kg grain (\$335/t) and 1kg pellets (\$541/t) | \$2.22        | \$2.22        |
| IOSFC (\$/cow/day)                                  | \$7.00        | \$7.00        |
| Minus irrigated grass (\$140/tDM)                   | \$1.44        | \$1.44        |
| Net IOSFC (\$/cow/day)                              | \$5.56        | \$5.56        |
| \$/herd/day   |               |               |
| Net production                                      | 14.4          | 1.19          |
| Supplement cost                                     | 4.6 litres    | 0.38kgMS      |

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

### ***Survey – What do you want from your MDF?***

---

Help us to help you!!

MDF would like to know what sorts of demonstrations / projects you would like to see happen at your MDF. On the following page is a separate sheet with some survey questions: if there are other specific areas of interest please feel free to express those ideas as well. The survey will only cost you a few minutes of your time. Postage is free. Simply fold the sheet along the lines shown – address side facing out, sticky tape the loose ends together and pop into the post.

## WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM YOUR MDF?

---

Please provide some advice to the MDF Board on areas of interest to you that you would like to see developed into demonstration projects:

### Farming Themes

Pasture Production

### Specific interest

- More pasture variety trials
- Pasture additives



Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Animal Health

Genetics and Breeding

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Alternative Management Systems

- Biological Farming
- Managing for Soil Carbon



Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Fertilizer & Production

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Irrigation

Improved irrigation practice to increase production

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Feed Supplements

Demonstration of new feed supplements

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Effluent Management

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

OH&S

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

People on Farms

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Financial Management

Your interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Anything else? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *fold here*

*fold here* \_\_\_\_\_

**Macalister Demonstration Farm  
Reply Paid 87  
MAFFRA VIC 3860**

\_\_\_\_\_ *fold here*

*fold here* \_\_\_\_\_

## Quick bits

- In keeping with one of Macalister Demonstration's Farm core principles, our full time farm hand, Tahlia Petersen will be attending an In Charge Fertility workshop, Feeding Pastures for Profit course and an Irrigation course. These training courses, coupled with a Cert III in Agriculture Tahlia obtained last year bode well for her development in the dairy industry.
- 500 native trees and shrubs will be provided to Macalister Demonstration Farm through a partnership with Maffra Landcare. These indigenous species will be utilised to infill tree plantations already in existence on Macalister Demonstration, create a native garden around the RF (Bob) Pitman plaque and to improve the general amenity of the farm.
- If you would like to receive a copy of the notes handed out at the Macalister Focus Farm Open Day, either download from our website at <http://www.macalisterdemonstrationfarm.com/about-us/events-2/macalister-focus-farm-open-day-26th-february-2015/> or ring 0488 175 366 to request a copy to be posted out.

## Upcoming events

| Date   | Event   | Contact                            |
|--------|---|------------------------------------|
| 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            |
| 22-Apr | Irrigation Course<br><i>3 day course over 3 weeks, 22, 29 April and 6 May. Course fees apply.</i>   | Frank Tyndall<br>0409 940 782      |
| 22-Apr | AI Course<br><i>Includes heat detection, semen handling, disease management, genetics. Course fees apply, max 10 places. Course to be run at Warragul on day 1 and Sunbury for days 2 &amp; 3. Enrolment essential.</i> | Robin Bell - NCDEA<br>0427 574 229 |
| 23-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            |



Tahlia hard at work!

POSTAGE  
PAID  
AUSTRALIA

**SENDER:**



Macalister Demonstration Farm  
PO Box 87  
MAFFRA VIC 3860