

# Macalister Demonstration Farm

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## NEWSLETTER 16

Monday, March 30th, 2009



*Extension projects at the MDF are funded by Dairy Australia and the Gardiner Foundation with support from GippsDairy.*

### It's new!

Each week the Monday Farm Walk will take on a theme to highlight some of the activities at the farm.

Next Monday (April 6<sup>th</sup> 2009) we will focus on the **effect of spinner cuts in flood irrigation bays** as well as looking at the general performance of the farm.

Watch for farm walk topics for the following Monday in the MDF report each week in the Gippsland Times.

Meet at 11am each Monday – call Frank first on 0409 940 782 to check in.

### Second Tuesday Session @ MDF - April

Tues 7th April 10.30am - 1.00pm

#### **"Setting and achieving the optimum GRAZING ROTATION"**

LUNCH PROVIDED RSVP: Frank 0409 940 782

### Yellow Rag Bit

Jason McAinch Dairy Advisor DPI Maffra

Running low on irrigation water! Thinking of purchasing water?

#### FACTS:

1. The current allocation of 95% allocates **ALL** the water in Lake Glenmaggie to irrigators (less delivery inefficiencies).
2. This means that irrigators own the water remaining in the dam.
3. To access more water for your farm, you need to purchase water from a fellow irrigators' Allocated Bank Account.
4. The irrigation seasons has 6 weeks remaining.
5. Evaporation rates for the next 6 weeks average 2.5mm/day, which equates to approximately 2 full irrigations.
6. Irrigations late in the season are extremely valuable in growing pasture throughout the winter months and early spring.
7. Unbundling means what ever price you purchase water for, you still will pay another \$9 to SRW through the meter.

#### RISKS:

1. A rain event in the catchment which increases your allocation.
2. Rain on farm which results in more irrigation water not being required.

#### PURCHASE PRICE CONSIDERATIONS:

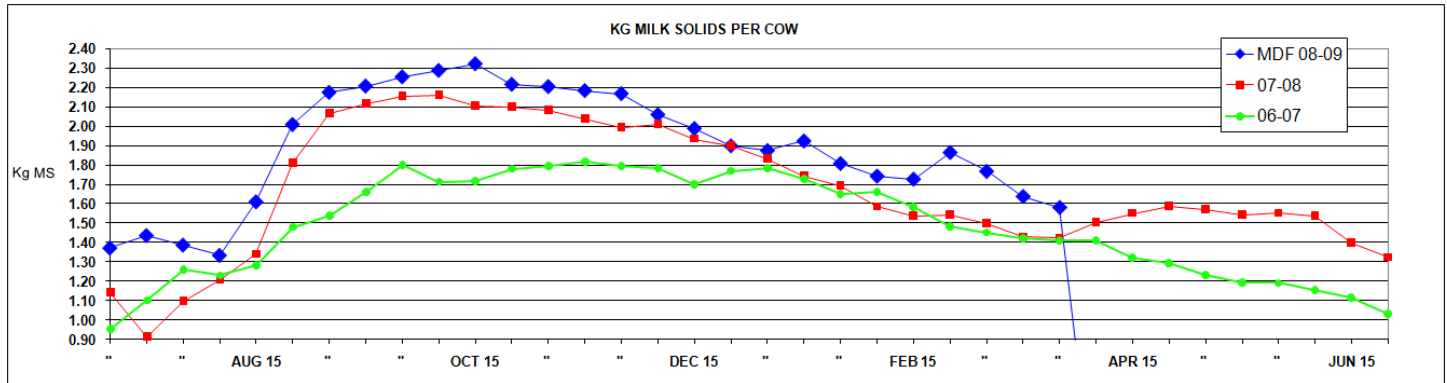
1. All farms are unique.
2. Efficiency - This means a farmer with an efficient irrigation system and a high value crop can afford a high price for water.
3. The price of the supplement to replace unirrigated pasture/crop.
4. The Sellers may wish to recoup some fixed costs, and if they are not going to use the water, selling and receiving some money is better than none.

5. Look at the long range forecast to identify the risk of rain.

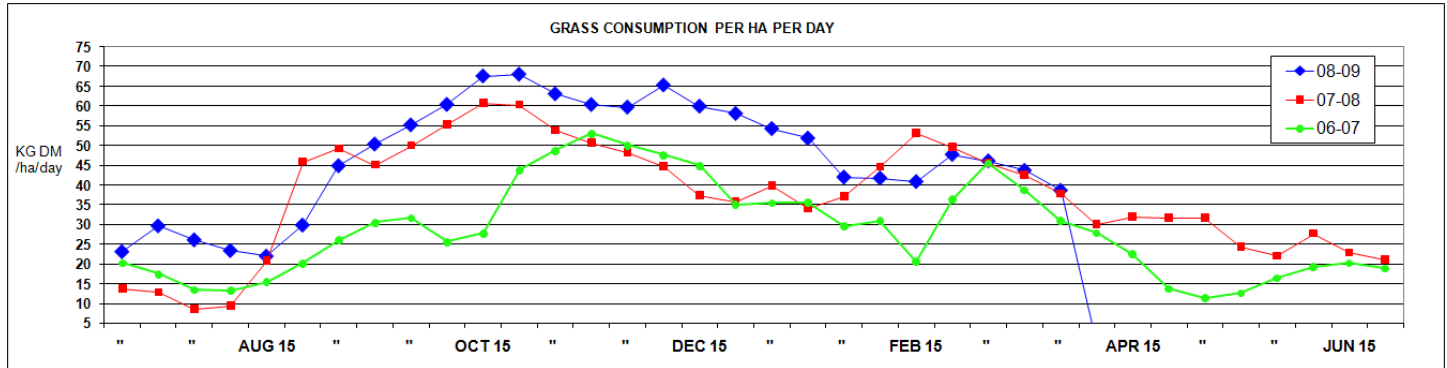
This does not give an answer. Do the sums yourself.

I would need some convincing to let good pasture go dry. Consider home grown feed like body condition on cows for the winter, pay back might not be straight away but worth it.

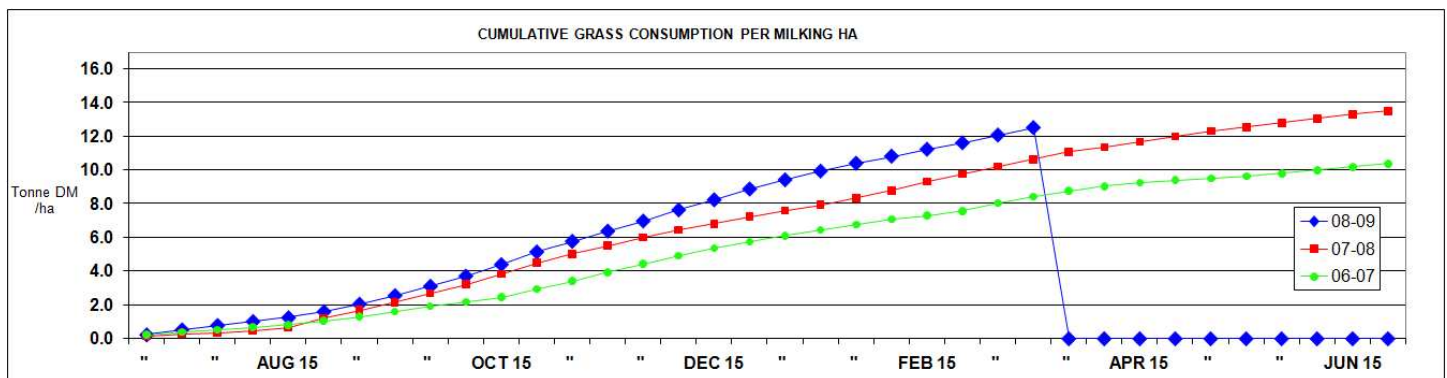
## Macalister Demonstration Farm Production and Profitability Graphs



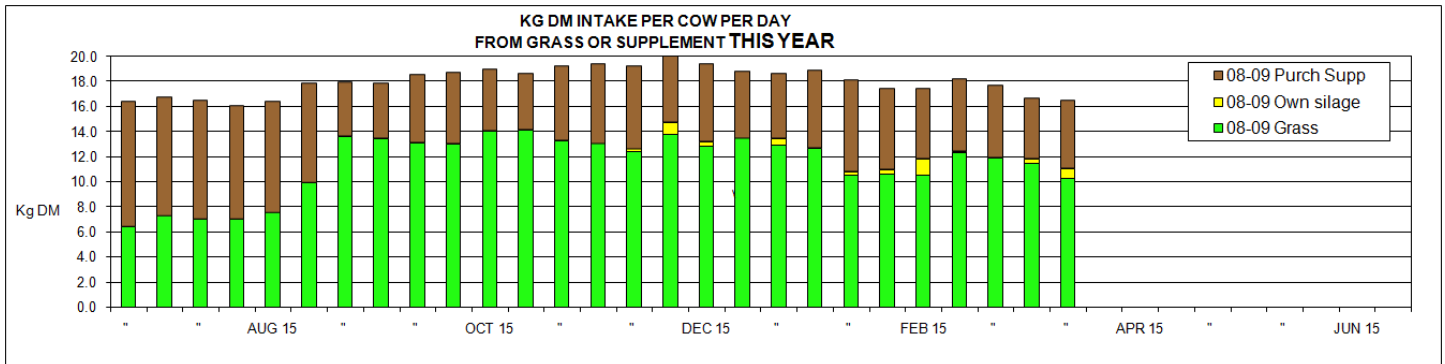
Milk production per cow is falling, a bit too fast. The cows recently grazed the sub-surface drip area. It is still growing a lot of lush ryegrass. Normally the cows have milked very well when they graze this area, but not this time. Their manure became very loose and quite dark, with some bubbling. The area was given its first dose of nitrogen fertiliser at the last grazing, and because it is growing so well this area is grazed at 25 days rest time, shorter than the average of 32 day for the whole farm. High nitrate levels are suspected.



Grass consumption per hectare is also falling, a bit too rapidly also. This is partly caused by extending the grazing rotation from 30 to 35. The grass is building up in front of the cows but currently they are not actually consuming it.

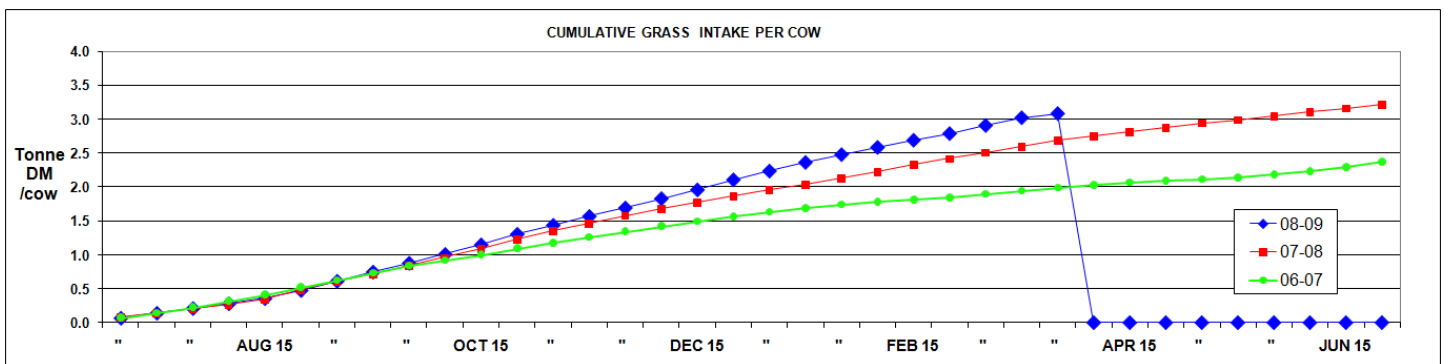
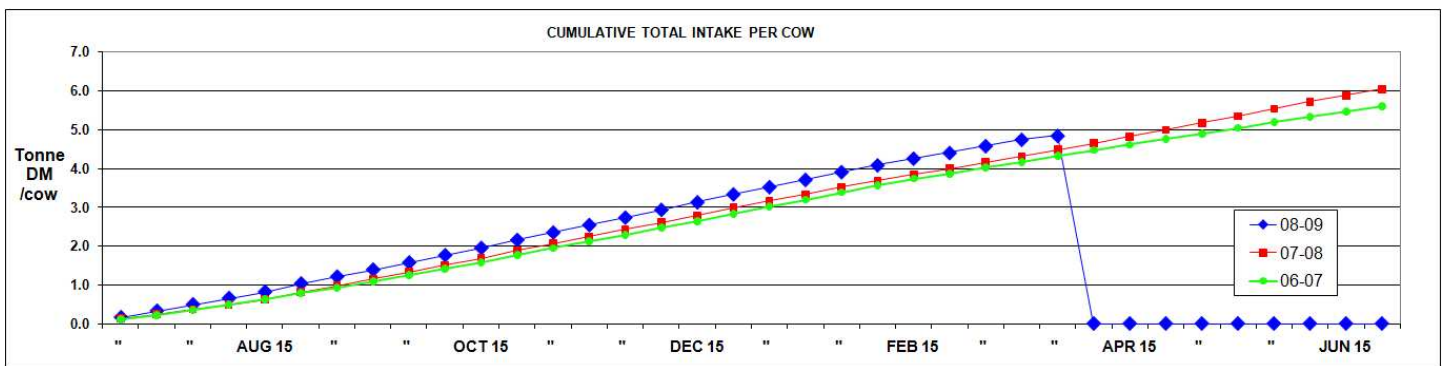


There are a myriad of methods used to calculate grass consumption. The method in the graph above calculates it every ten days for the current milkers on the current growing area. It is probably as good as any method. The common method is done at the end of a year, choosing a certain average number of cows milked for the year, and choosing a certain average grazed area. It is an adequate but rougher method. For example, it does not allow for areas temporarily being developed, or cows carried through winter and then culled early in lactation. The latter amounted to 60 cows this year on the MDF.



The cows are currently eating 10.2 kg DM grass, 0.8 kg silage and 5.4 kg DM of grain and PKE.

The recent Second Tuesday Session @ MDF discussed "Setting the Big Picture". The "Big picture" items included infrastructure, (e.g. dairy, irrigation system), stocking rate, people, capital fertiliser applications, body condition targets, and replacement target weights. The major issue was stocking rate. A spreadsheet calculator was used to explore many options. To arrive at a "best stocking rate" many judgements of future circumstances are necessary, all with their differing levels of importance and differing risk of getting the judgment wrong. The group estimated the level of importance for the following unknowns: milk price, 25%; purchased feed price, 25%; fertiliser price, 10%; interest rates, 10%; irrigation water supply, 20%; and weather, 10%. No matter how many options were tried, stocking rate comes down to a judgement of how much grass can a cow consume, and how much grass can be consumed from a hectare. The following two graphs show three years of total and grass intake per cow at the MDF.





**Eleusine indica - Goose Grass, Yard Grass**

This grass seems to be invading the pasture at the Macalister Demonstration Farm. It is summer growing. If anyone knows about it, if they have it, if it is known to become a problem, I would appreciate a call or email, - Frank.

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