

Macalister Demonstration Farm

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NEWSLETTER 60

Monday December 19th 2011



Extension projects at the MDF are funded by Dairy Australia, Sustainability Victoria and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, with support from GippsDairy.

GippsDairy To Start Four New Focus Farms

Four new Focus Farms will start across Gippsland over the next few months and GippsDairy is seeking expressions of interest from dairy farmers interested in being a Focus Farm.

GippsDairy chairman, John Versteden, said the new Focus Farms would continue to be active in the analysis and reporting of farm production, monitoring financials, considering environmental issues and integrating farm family needs. 'Ideally the Focus Farm farmers will also be aiming to increase the consumption of home grown feed by the herd in an effort to reduce costs', John said.

The new Focus Farms will operate over the next two years with funding provided by Dairy Australia and GippsDairy.

To learn more about becoming a Focus Farmer contact Danielle Auldish, Executive Officer, GippsDairy, before the 31st of January.

Email : executiveofficer@gippsdairy.com.au Phone : (03) 5624 3900

Yellow Rag Bit

Frank Mickan, Fodder Conservation Specialist, DPI Ellinbank & Bree Walshe, Dairy Advisor, DPI Maffra

Observations around the MID

Here we are less than a week until Christmas!

In the past week, virtually every farm has been irrigating to some capacity. Hasn't irrigation been a novelty this season, with constant showers / rain events? However, this rain often leads to untimely irrigations. In many cases the intervals have been stretched just that little too far, or the sky hasn't quite delivered the amount needed and growth has suffered. Despite the challenges rain brings to an irrigation district, moisture monitoring needs to occur. This will ensure our pastures and or crops are performing to the best of their abilities.

Pasture growth has been patchy. There are many farmers across the district who have had a ripper start to the season with early cuts of quality silage, good regrowth and plenty of feed on offer. A few missed out on moisture early or had too much and struggled to get going. Despite these early differences many are faced with a common issue at present, the transition from spring to summer. From afar pastures look plentiful, but as you walk through it, the density isn't there – it's just the remaining seedheads fooling your eye. It's time for a final clean up with the use of topping. This will allow light back into the base of the sward and promote tillering in the post reproductive phase. A round of nitrogen (N) and potentially some potassium (K) may also help boost those pastures looking a little dull, or even a dose of effluent. N & K are often required at this time of year, as they are very mobile. Therefore, they may have been depleted from the soil by conservation or waterlogging. It is timely to think about extending ryegrass dominant rotations to maximise summer growth before the onslaught of summer species. To get the most out of your grazing management join us for a Feeding Pastures For Profit program in 2012.

Crops – there are a mixture of crops floating about and their growth stages vary. To ensure you get the best value from these, ensure their moisture and fertility requirements are met. Monitor maize crops for pests and diseases, identify and treat timely to minimise yield impacts. When the time comes graze or harvest for greatest quality.

Facial Eczema (FE) – Dairy Australia’s (DA) steering group, has just realised a report ‘A review of Facial Eczema’ at a series of workshops. The review provides simple and comprehensive details of the disease. The history, causes and preventative measures are all highlighted. DA has funded a Sentinel Farm Surveillance Program for the 2012 FE season. Twenty-four farms across Gippsland will perform regular pasture spore counting with results posted on the website <http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/facialeczeema>. These results will give you an idea of conditions in your locality and a guide to commence pasture spore counting on your own property.

For more information or advice on options for your herd please contact your trusted veterinarian, nutritionist, agronomist, or a member of the Dairy Services Branch at DPI Maffra on 5147 0800

Macalister Demonstration Farm Profitability Project

The MDF reports each week in the Gippsland Times and on AusdairyL. The weekly report contains information on the current production and margins, but also discusses other happenings that may be of interest. Many people who receive this MDF newsletter every three weeks miss the weekly reports. So, some bits and pieces of the weekly stories are repeated here.

Nov 11, 2011

Throughout spring the MDF holds quite a long grazing rotation, in the high twenty days. One reason for this is to ensure that a high quantity of grass leaf is grown. We are heavily stocked and grass leaf quantity is crucial. The seed heads do get a chance to develop on the long rest time but so do the leaves. In most paddocks, at any one time, some ryegrass clumps are seed heading, while some are growing only leaves. The leaves are high quality, and the seed heads low. On a quick rotation the seed heads will still be present, although not as well developed, but on a quick rotation there will be less leaf. With plenty of leaf available the cows are not forced to eat all the seed heads.

Another big advantage of a longer rotation during October is that once the seed heads are waning in late November and mostly removed by silage making or topping, the really difficult process of lengthening the grazing rotation again is avoided.

However, to go for maximum grass leaf quantity may not be necessary, even not appropriate, with a low stocking rate.

Nov 18 2011

October was wetter than last year, 99 mm compared to 78 mm. This November has had 97 mm already; last November totalled 110 mm. Rain for the 12 months to date totals 858 mm (34 inches) and for the same 12 months last year totalled 613 mm (24 inches). Not much irrigation is happening.

To get the MDF’s pasture consumption into perspective, and to help understand how the district’s grass is performing, the Tracker analysis of twenty farms in the MID shows that the pasture consumption for the month to Nov 10 averaged 49.6 kg per hectare per day. A month ago the average was 43.8, and a year ago at this time was 48.5. The highest pasture consumption for the month to Nov 10 for the group was 61.4 kg, and the lowest was 38.2 DM per hectare per day. These numbers include any silage harvested. The monthly average stocking rate for the group averaged 4.1 cows per hectare, with a high rate of 6.4 and a low of 2.8. Pasture per cow averaged 12.1 kg DM per cow per day, with a high of 14.2 and a low of 6.1.

Nov 25, 2011

I notice some research from northern Victoria indicating that really short irrigation application time was only worthwhile on light soils. Heavy soils had such slow infiltration that not much water was wasted with slow irrigation. I am not sure where MID soils fit in their range of “light” or “heavy”, but the article stated that fast drainage of surface water after irrigation, was important on all soils. Wet patches in paddocks are not good for growing grass, not good for getting a low grazing residue with high grass intake per cow, and risk permanent pugging damage. These, and wet patches around troughs and in gateways, are not good for mastitis either.

Dec 2, 2011

The farm received two yearly awards this week: one from our milk company for premium milk and one from Dairy Australia for being in the top 5% for Bulk Milk Cell Count. The farm was also a finalist in the National Bank Agribusiness Environment and Energy Management awards.

Dec 9, 2011

Recently lime has been applied to some paddocks, the lighter, red soil, and more acidic ones, where the pH is in the low 5's. Many soil tests have been carried out over time and the pH does not seem to be getting lower. However, we use a lot of nitrogen, to grow a lot of grass, and this has the potential to increase acidity, that is, lower the pH. It is wise to manage acidity, to lift pH, before it becomes a problem too difficult to solve.

Supplementary concentrates include crushed wheat, and a wheat-canola-mineral mix totalling 6.1 kg DM per cow per day, at an average price of \$327 per DM tonne, and 0.5 kg DM of Palm Kernal.

Supplementary feed is much the same as last week, milk has dropped, so you would expect grass consumption per cow to have fallen more than it has. The reason why the kg DM of grass has not fallen much is because the grass quality rating, informed by a lot of pasture testing in 2009-10, has been lowered: more grass needs to be eaten to get the same amount of energy.

The Bulk Milk Cell Count has risen from 78,000 to 88,000. This time last year the BMCC was 146,000. The average BMCC for the period ending 30/11/2011 was 79,000, giving the farm a factory ranking of 7th out of 381 farms.

Dec 16, 2011

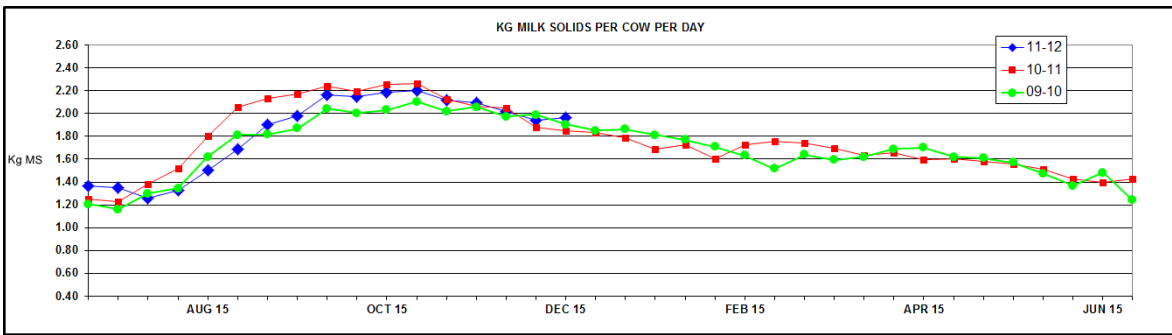
A mowing for silage, or topping to waste, in late spring is probably more valuable than at any other time of the year. It not only gets a uniform 5 cm residue, cleans up urine and manure clumps, and any high residue from past under-grazings, but it also removes seed heads, allowing leafy daughter tillers to flourish until next spring.

Paddock 7 has been topped; one patch prior to the cows grazing it, and the rest after the cows. The pre-topped patch had almost no topped material remaining after grazing, whereas the area topped after grazing had quite a bit. The cows seem to consume more of the pasture when topping occurs before grazing, probably not because the grass is dryer, but because it is so easy to harvest when piled into mown windrows.

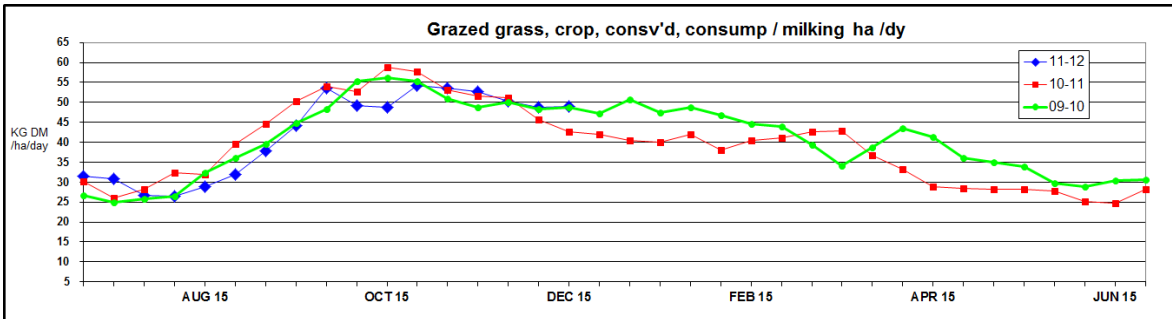
Performance table

10-Dec-2011	MDF	Tracker group Average
Stocking rate	4.3	4.0
mm irrigation water /ha/day	0.0	0.1
Kg N element applied /ha/day	1.2	0.4
Kg P element applied /ha/day	0.00	0.04
Kg K element applied /ha/day	0.02	0.09
Renovation (\$/ha/day)	\$0.19	\$0.13
Topping (\$/ha/day)	\$0.10	\$0.13
Grazing allocation rate	30	30
Average grazing rest time	30	28
Pasture consumption/ milk ha/dy	49	43
DMI grass /cow/dy	11.5	10.7
Daily spend / milking ha	\$2.12	\$1.23
Pasture price (\$/t DM)	\$43	\$27
Total supplements kg DM/cow/dy	6.6	6.3
ALL purch feed PRICE \$/t DM fed	\$324	\$371
Total DM Intake /cow/dy	17.9	16.7
Milkers Body Condition Change (Lwt /dy)	0.01	0.05
Litres /cow/dy (incl calf)	26.7	23.9
Milk Solids /cow/dy	1.94	1.75
Milk price (less levies) (\$/kg MS)	\$4.73	\$4.69
Anticipated Milk price (\$/litre)	\$0.34	\$0.35
Anticipated Milk income/cow	\$9.19	\$8.21
All feed cost/cow/day	\$2.64	\$2.53
Anticip Margin over all Feed/cow/day	\$6.55	\$5.68
Anticip MOAF /ha /day	\$27.87	\$22.40
Yr roll Milk Solids /cow	539	524
Yr roll Grass consumption DM/ milk ha	14.2	12.6
Yr roll MOAF per cow	\$2,026	\$1,967
Yr roll MOAF per hectare	\$9,261	\$8,352

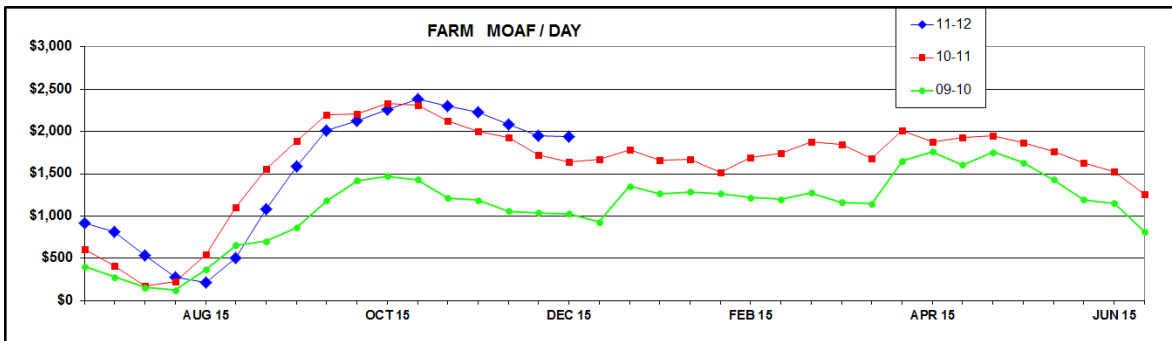
MDF Performance graphs



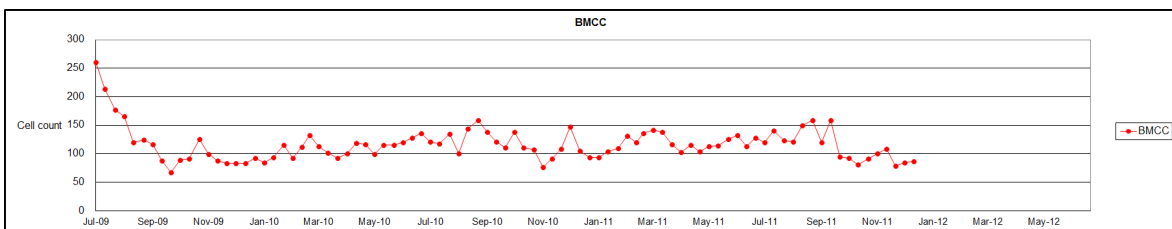
Milk per cow at the MDF is now a little above the previous two years.



Grass consumption is now tracking close to two years ago.



Margin over feed per day is currently doing well, catching up the slower start.



Cell count is being held down.

**HAVE YOU GOT A GOOD IDEA THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO INVESTIGATE?
A MACALISTER DEMONSTRATION FARM TRAVEL & LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP
MIGHT BE FOR YOU.**

The MDF has established an annual scholarship up to the value of \$10,000 for the recipient to undertake a study tour that will benefit the dairying community in the Macalister Irrigation Area.

The objectives of the program are to:

- Promote lifelong learning in dairying;
- Bring new ideas, new management systems and improved technologies into the MID, with an emphasis on a farmer perspective;
- Broaden industry networks to provide a conduit for new ideas to continue to flow into the district; and
- Support the personal and professional development of participants in the dairy industry to encourage them to take on leadership roles in the wider industry.

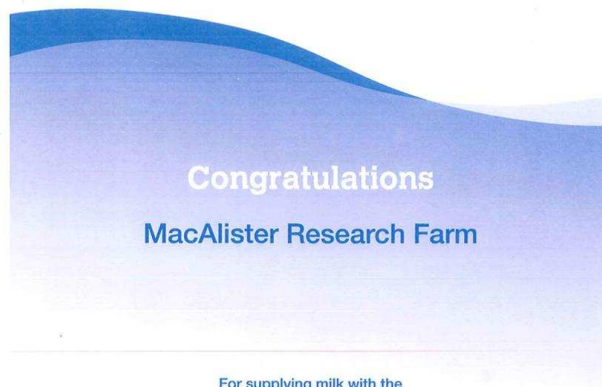
The scholarship is open to anyone of any age working in the dairy industry in the MID and the study tour is expected to be for a minimum of two weeks. Preference will be given to applications received from farmers within the Macalister Irrigation Area but will not be limited to farmers only if the proposed study will benefit the farmers of the Macalister Irrigation Area. The successful applicant will be assigned a mentor with experience in their nominated field of study to assist with developing study tour objectives and assist with network links and itinerary. It is expected that, upon return, the scholarship recipient will prepare a report for wider distribution and participate at least two events organised by the MDF to disperse their findings. MDF staff will assist with the preparation and planning of the study tour as well as follow up support for the preparation of presentations and the study tour report.

So start thinking about your great idea ready for the opening of applications on January 16th 2012. And we'd love you to talk about it with us after the New Year so we can help you have the best shot. Call Neil Baker on 0488 175 366 or email neilbaker@aapt.net.au.

HEY, HOW ABOUT THIS!!!



**2011 Countdown Downunder
Milk Quality Awards**

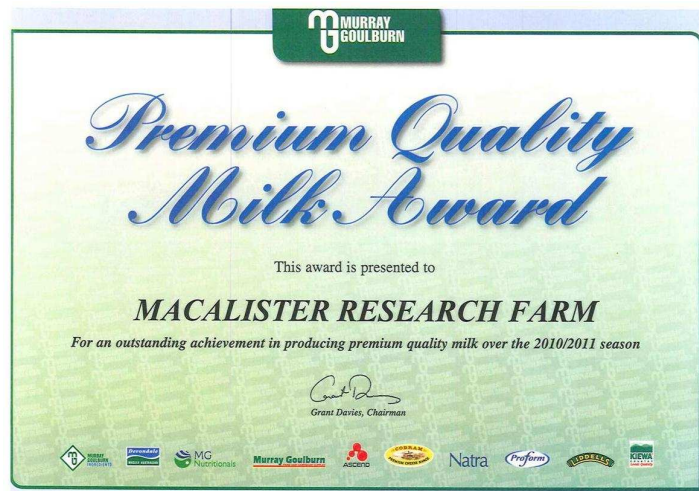


For supplying milk with the
Lowest 5% Bulk Milk Cell Count in Australia.

Ian Halliday, Managing Director
Dairy Australia

John Pong, Project Leader
Countdown Downunder

..... AND THIS!



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SENDER:



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MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR

The next issue of the MDF Newsletter will be published on January 9th 2012