

Macalister Demonstration Farm

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NEWSLETTER 61

Monday January 9th 2012



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Yellow Rag Bit

Bree Walshe, Dairy Advisor, DPI Maffra

The Year of the Farmer

Welcome to 2012! May the year be full of promising seasonal conditions, good milk prices and great health. Did you know that 2012 is also the year of the farmer? That's right, this year for the whole year, all your hard work and efforts will be recognised. As you and your family help feed the nation and the world fabulous dairy products!

"Australian Year of the Farmer is about celebrating and enriching the connections between rural and urban Australia." Visit the official website at www.yearofthefarmer.com.au for further information on the 'year', the concepts, photo competitions and what the year of the farmer is trying to achieve. There is also a great You Tube clip worth watching on the website!

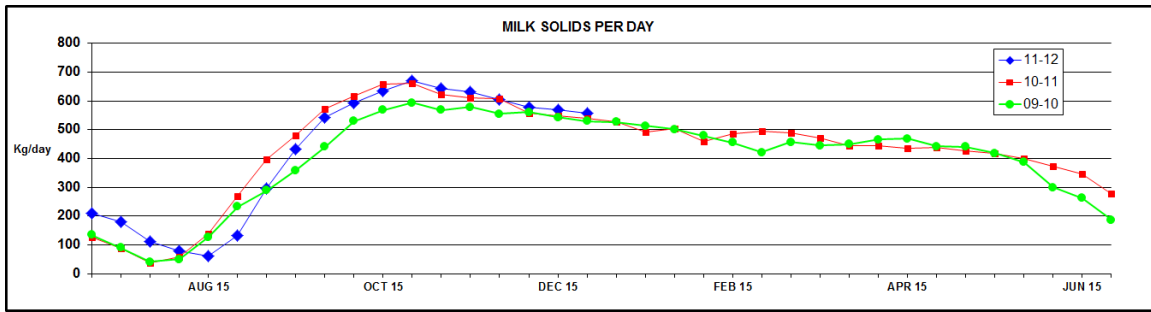
What else does 2012 have in store for us? Well unfortunately I do not have a crystal ball with the answers, but a few things to consider may be:

- Facial eczema (FE) – keep your eye on the Dairy Australia website <http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/facialeczeema> for the local spore counting in your area. Use this information to commence your own spore counts and FE prevention strategy – remembering your young stock. A comprehensive article is coming out in this month's How Now Gippy Cow.
- Irrigation / moisture – are you maintaining your soil moisture at the optimum level for growing grass or crops? Get onboard the weekly evapotranspiration updates by joining Ausdairy-L (ausdairy1@googlegroups.com) and checking out the local weather stations at www.agua.com.au/DPIVic.
- Climate – what will the 'drivers' have in store for us this year? Subscribe to the Milking the Weather newsletter to stay informed. Email milking.theweather@dpi.vic.gov.au for the quarterly newsletter and webinar updates. An Autumn edition is next on the cards.
- Pastures – they are the key to our dairy business. To find out more about 'Feeding Pastures For Profit' contact myself or Jason McAinch at DPI Maffra 5147 0800.
- Business – do you need to update your books and determine how you are tracking this season? Now may be a good time to enjoy the aircon and get your head around the numbers.
- Nutrition – how are your cows performing? Are the young stock growing well? Are the Spring drop calves growing out nicely and healthily? Up to date with vaccinations and drenches? The rising 2 year olds – are they gaining and growing the way you would like them to, to join the herd this year?
- How are you? Are you travelling well, firing on all cylinders – or is it time to take a few days off to put the feet up and enjoy a bit of the summer fun?

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

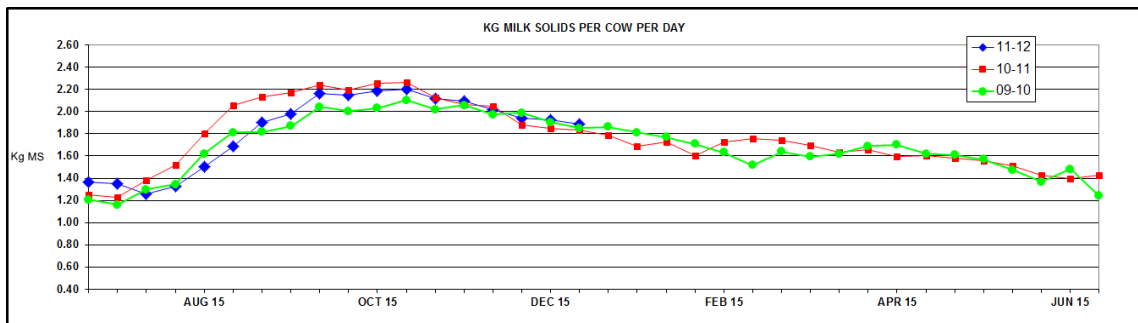
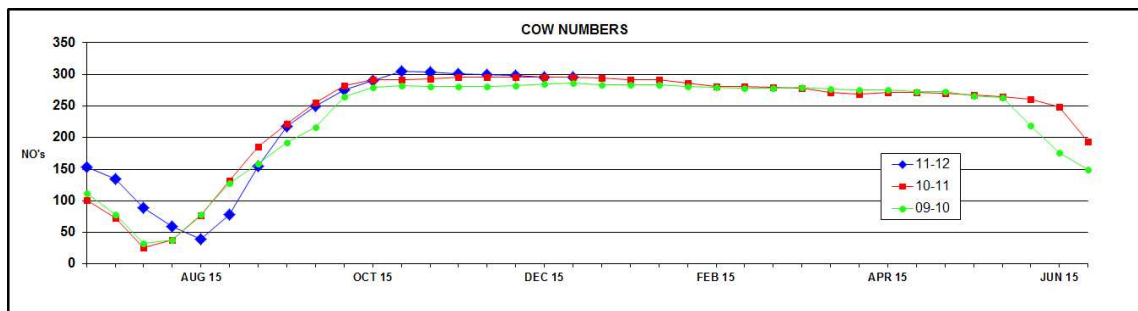
Macalister Demonstration Farm Profitability Project

Let's look at the **physical** aspects of feeding cows and producing milk, using the MDF's current performance graphs.

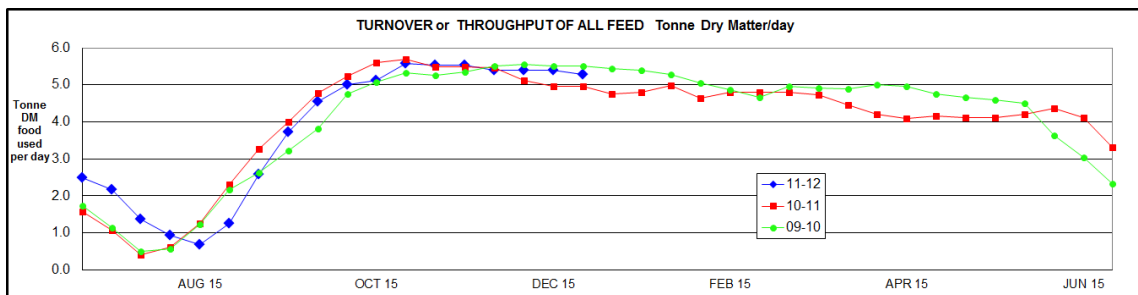


The more milk produced, the more income received. For the MDF, total milk is not much different from year to year. This year, the blue line, was ahead in July, and behind in August and September, because the calving date was 10 days later.

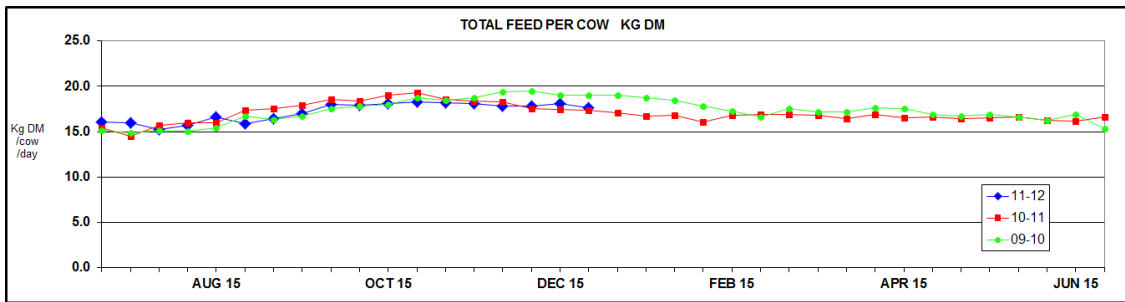
The total milk produced depends on the number of cows milked and the amount of milk produced per cow, shown in the next two graphs.



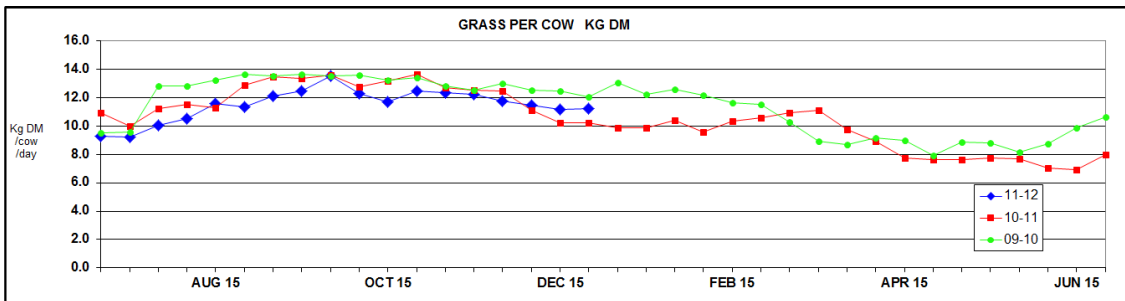
Maybe more milk could be produced if cow numbers were increased, and/or each cow could eat more food. The total amount of food used by the herd each day is shown in the graph below, illustrating the idea that a dairy farm is a factory that converts feed to milk so the more feed put through the factory the better.



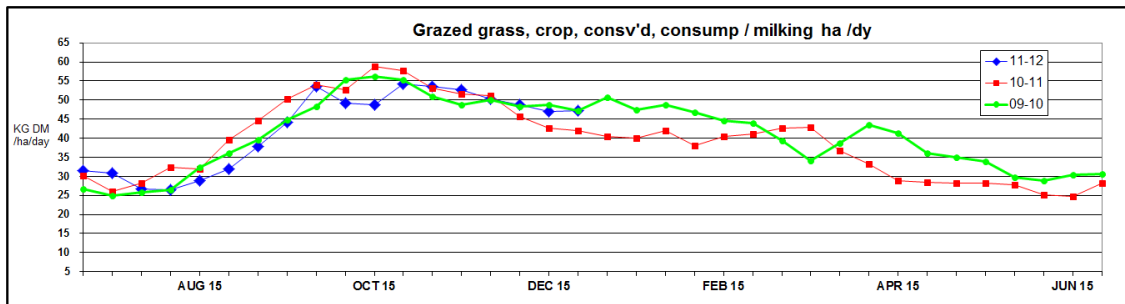
The next graph shows how much feed each cow is using each day. You would think that could be increased but maybe our cows cannot eat any more without, say, feeding some expensive special feed.



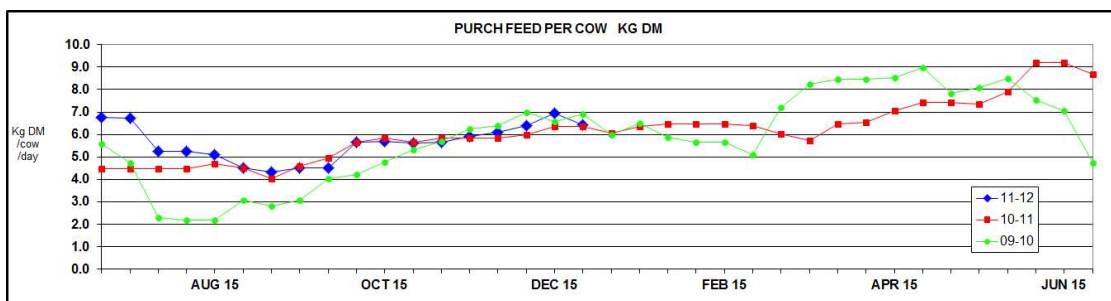
If they could eat more, the extra feed would have to come from either grass or purchased feed. Cows are known to be able eat up to 17 kg DM of grass, so the MDF cows should be able to eat more grass than that shown in the graph below.



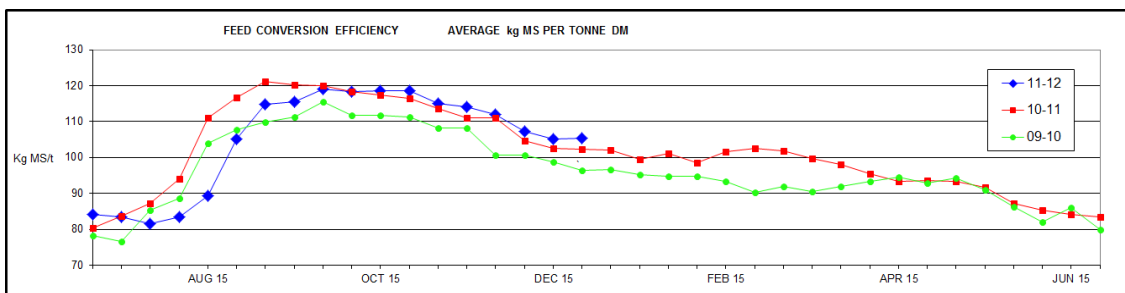
But to get that grass, more would have to be harvested from the farm than that shown in the next graph. Most of the time, the MDF is near the top of grass harvested in the Tracker group, but that doesn't mean it cannot be improved.



More purchased could be fed. It usually makes a margin, but not as much margin as grass. And the risk is that less grass is harvested.



And lastly, maybe more milk can be produced from the same amount of feed, that is, by better feed conversion efficiency (FCE).



The following factors affect feed conversion efficiency:

- **High feed intake** is a major driver of FCE because it swamps the maintenance amount of food a cows needs every day. Intake level has a multitude of factors affecting it, including cow size, stage of lactation (12 weeks after calving cows have high appetites), body condition at calving, milk production level (high milk drives high intake), quantity of feed on offer, ease of feed harvest, fibre and energy levels in the food, transitioning from dry cow to milking cow, etc.
- **Healthy cows.**
- High **feed quality** produces more milk per tonne.
- **A diet balanced for** energy, protein and fibre.
- A diet that remains **consistent** or changed only gradually.
- Less feed going to increasing **body condition**.
- **Feed not wasted**, e.g. not bogged into the ground.
- Less feed going to **pregnancy**.
- **Walking distance** not too great, nor muddy, nor steep.
- Benign weather.
- Entering the herd no older than 2 years old and having many lactations.

Getting more milk is one thing, but making a margin is another. In the next newsletter we will look at the **financial** aspects of making money from feeding cows, by introducing the prices of milk and feed.

SENDER:



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MDF Travel and Learning Scholarship 2012

Applications open January 16th and close on February 21st

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.

Suitable topics include, but are not limited to, alternative systems of dairy farm management (fertilizer management, irrigation practice, animal nutrition, breeding and genetics), sustainable farm practices (waste management, water use efficiency, energy use efficiency, nutrient use, carbon emissions reduction, integration of farming with the natural environment) and new technologies and innovations.

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 if the proposed study will benefit the farmers of the MIA.

Call or email Neil Baker on 0488 175 366 or neilbaker@aapt.net.au to discuss your great idea, for an application form and for help and advice in preparing your application.