

## Macalister Demonstration Farm

Projects on the farm are funded by Genetics Australia with support provided by GippsDairy

Macalister Demonstration Farm Update 384 (Week ending September 26th , 2014)

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

#### How hard do you chase for additional silage?

One of the questions being asked by some at this point in time on dairy farms across Gippsland is "how hard do you chase for additional silage?". There is no one simple answer to this question- if there was, it would be a boring world! But there is a set of questions that many people look at to help make that snap decision throughout spring. I will list some of these questions and variables, and explain what is panning out at the MDF.

Some of the questions that need to be considered are as follows:

- Stocking rate and residuals in the paddock;
- Feed rate in the bail and the impact on residuals in the pasture post-grazing;
- Pasture quality in front of cows;
- Are there just high residuals being left everywhere, or are paddocks being dropped out for silage? Ensuring that silage is chased into a corner and not scattered all over the farm!
- Cost of conservation- make your own or contractor?
- Availability of contractors;
- Use for the feed- are you going to need it?
- Cost of alternative feed sources.

All the above issues need to be carefully considered on your farm, with heavy consideration through October and then beyond into November being given to the quality of the silage being harvested, the pasture quality in front of the cows and the cost of the alternative feed sources being major issues.

A quick look at the cost of feed as the prices sit right now (not necessarily at the time the feed is being used) shows the following:

Feed type	\$/t as fed	\$/t dry matter	Average energy value (MJ ME/kg DM)	Protein %	NDF %	c/MJ ME
wheat	\$310	\$344	13	12	12	2.65
Wheat 6kg plus 18c additive	\$340	\$378	13	12	12	2.91
Typical grain mix	\$370	\$411	12.5	14	14	3.29
Barley	\$270	\$300	12	12	15	2.5
High quality pellets	\$385	\$428	12.5	12	15	3.34
Lucerne hay	\$295	\$347	10	20	45	3.47
Vetch hay	\$280	\$329	10.5	24	40	3.13
Home grown pasture hay	\$45/bale	\$157	8	14	55	1.96

Feed type	\$/t as fed	\$/t dry matter	Average energy value (MJ ME/kg DM)	Protein %	NDF %	c/MJ ME
Own-made good silage*	\$52/bale	\$208	10	18	50	2.08
Contractor made late silage**	\$70/bale	\$280	9.5	15	50	2.95

\*assumes true surplus so grass cost is \$70/tDM

\*\*assumes a contractor cost of \$35/bale on a standard size bale and grass cost including irrigation water of \$140/tDM

The above table is a guide only and may not represent actual prices that merchants will be selling feed for right at this point in time.

What this shows is that if the cost of contractors and the true cost of irrigated pasture is included (water, fertiliser, nitrogen, renovation etc), then making late silage in this manner may in some cases be false economy. However, it also shows that if it is being used as a means to keep pasture quality in front of cows, or to replace purchased fodder later in the season that may be a lot more expensive than the prices above, then it may be a good decision and worth making at the time.

At the MDF, there is a small additional surplus developing in front of the cows that may be able to be harvested in the coming weeks. This has been due to a slightly higher feed rate in the bale than many in the Focus Farm support group are comfortable with and some paddocks of dubious quality that may be better to get off and be fed to cows in late lactation than at peak lactation. This silage will replace purchased hay in late lactation, arguably at a higher price than what the table above shows.

So the decision has been not one of “chase silage at the expense of feeding it to cows”, but rather harvest a true surplus and push to get as much as possible through aggressive nitrogen use (1kgN/ha/day), high bale feed rates (6kg as fed) and is a means of keeping quality pasture in front of cows. I am happy for the MDF cows to be fed in late lactation silage made at 2.95c/MJ than purchased fodder possibly at greater than 3.47c/MJ!

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