

Macalister Demonstration Farm

Projects on the farm are funded by GippsDairy, HICO and Genetics Australia

Macalister Demonstration Farm Update 401 (Week ending May 8th , 2015)

What's been going on at the MDF?

As the season draws to a close, the MDF Focus Farm support group looked at making drying off decisions.

What are these decisions being based on?

- Production of individual cows;
- BMCC of individual cows;
- Expected calving date of individual cows;
- Feed costs of the herd compared to their production;
- Available feed on the farm for now and for building cover for next season.

With all this taken into consideration, Becky is making the dry off decisions based on all the above factors. Firstly, production needs to definitely cover the cost of supplementary feed (grain and pellets, hay and Almond Hulls) and should also cover the cost of the pasture the cow is eating, as feed that she eats will be feed that another cow cannot eat and go into production or reduced supplement. Given the cost of feeding a lactating cow this week is \$3.91/cow/day (see below) and milk price is \$6.52/kgMS or 60c/litre, then to cover the costs of the supplement each cow needs to produce $\$3.91/\$6.52 = 0.6\text{kgMS}$ minimum or $\$3.91/60\text{c} = 6.5$ litres. Then, she is eating 4kgDM pasture (see below) and if this valued at \$100/t DM or 10c/kgDM (non-irrigated pasture), then there is another 40c that needs to be covered, or $\$0.40/\$6.52 = 0.06\text{kgMS}$ or $40\text{c}/60\text{c} = 0.7$ litres, so the true cost is 0.66kgMS or 7litres. There are also the costs of labour, power, shed costs etc that should be considered, but ultimately are not high, so it is fair to say that a cow needs to produce 0.7kgMS or around 10 litres minimum to stay in the herd.

Given the figures above, the philosophy this season is as follows:

- Cows below 0.7kgMS/day are dried off;
- Cows with low production and high BMCC are dried off;
- Cows within 7-8 weeks of calving date will be dried off;
- Cows to be dried off will get drafted off, receive ad-lib hay, small strip grass and reduced grain for three days (maybe no grain);
- Cows that are too old to be induced and are late calving are considered for selling;

A long acting dry cow will be used (49 days) over the entire herd and blanket teat seal used as well. Heifers to calve will also be teat-sealed. They will be kept in a dry clean area for the first week or two after dry off, away from the dairy. The early and late calvers will remain on the farm, cleaning up waste areas and poor grass areas, and the middle "chunk" of around 130-140 will go on agistment. This has been sourced, and will be based on a 'weight gain' payment rate, to ensure cows return in good condition.

In pure economic terms, the cost of dry cow feed for any cows dried off early should be taken into consideration in the breakeven scenario above- that is, how much production is the cost of the dry cow feed worth? But, as this year's milk price is strong and the breakeven point quite low in terms of production, cows should not be retained in the herd below the production level mentioned above anyway, and so the cost of dry cow feeding is somewhat irrelevant. The fact that they will be initially cleaning up scrappy areas initially at no cost, also means that the cost can be ignored.

The round length is out to just short of 50 days, with a good pasture wedge developed. This will allow slightly more pasture for late lactation and hopefully a slight drop in concentrate levels, particularly the expensive pellet portion of the diet. A drop of 1kg will save \$900/week as long as there is no drop in production. The average cover last week was at 2000kgDM/ha.

Urea is being applied at 100kg/ha every 50 or so days. There currently is, and will still need to be a good pasture level through June and July, as it will be used to feed some late calving cows, some dry cows as well as to build a wedge for early lactation.

And a look at production, inputs and margins: 250 cows with 245 in the vat.

	Litres	Solids
Production	16.3	1.5
Components %	5.3%, 4.2%	5.3%, 4.2%
Milk price on current test	60c	\$6.52
Gross milk income less levies	\$9.78	\$9.78
Minus 5.5kg grain (\$335/t) and 2kg pellets (\$566/t), 1.7kg hay and 4kg Almond hulls (\$170/t)	\$3.91	\$3.91
IOSFC (\$/cow/day)	\$5.87	\$5.87
Minus irrigated grass (\$140/tDM)	\$0	\$0
Net IOSFC (\$/cow/day)	\$5.87	\$5.87
\$/herd/day		
Net production	9.8	0.9
Required Pasture intake	4kgDM	4kgDM

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