

## **Macalister Demonstration Farm**

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

**Macalister Demonstration Farm Update 405 (Week ending July 10th , 2015)**

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

The staffing changes are now in place for the start of the new season, prompted by the resignation of Becky to pursue some more overseas travel. Mahesh Singh has been appointed as manager and Tim Pattison as 2IC. This structure will allow some degree of flexibility around the key roles of calving, pasture management and then into irrigation, whilst keeping the staff hours under control. More will come in future articles around how this is being managed.

The 2014/15 budget has been completed for income received and expenses outlaid, and overall, despite the good milk price and very good season, it has to be said that the financials for the farm have been somewhat disappointing once again. The production for the farm was well up on the previous season, and it exceeded a fairly ambitious target set at the start of the season, however it came from more cows being milked than budgeted, resulting in higher feed costs, as well as feed prices that were higher than budgeted at the start of the season. Repairs and maintenance continue to plague the farm, as is highlighted below, but on top of that, the pasture harvest in the period from January to June was disappointing to say the least. It is fair to say, that the pasture was grown, but not harvested as well as it should have been, and that there were too many areas of the farm that performed poorly putting a lot of pressure on the areas that do grow well.

**In summary, the key points of the 14/15 season were as follows:**

**Total production** for the season of 138,700kgMS, or 490kgMS/cow, some 11,000kgMS up on last season. This is close to 1kgMS/kg liveweight, a key measure of production efficiency in my mind. The calving spread was tight, cows calved in better condition than the previous season and things got off to a flying start. The wet spell in early December caused a problem right through December and January, and this hit production and caused purchased feed levels to rise- concentrates increased to replace quality pasture and the Dec/Jan period cost us production and money. The cows held really well through autumn and into winter, albeit from slightly higher concentrate and supplement levels than ideal, once again giving production, but at a cost.

**Milk price paid:** \$5.75/kgMS under the Murray Goulburn Traditional payment system.

**Farm Working Expenses** (herd, shed, feed, overheads and paid labour) of \$5.61/kgMS, a high figure, and still high at \$4.51/kg MS when labour costs are removed. The focus for the season was to reduce this by \$2.00/kgMS from reduced costs and higher production. But did it work? The total farm working expenses last season were \$6.76/kgMS including total labour costs, and so a reduction of \$1.15/kgMS was achieved, but with an increase in labour for the farm, as well as the repairs and maintenance blow outs, the full savings were not achieved.

**Pasture consumed** was 11.1tDM/ha or 2.9tDM/cow, exactly the same as last season and well below what is achievable on this farm. The blame is attributed to not harvesting the grown pasture adequately. There are too many areas under-performing or out of the round from waterlogging and renovation, reducing the effective grazing area considerably over the year. The bikeshift laterals performed really well, and Neil

Baker has spent a lot of time and effort on fixing the sub-surface drip irrigation system, that now needs to be well-managed to reach its potential. The efforts will focus on getting pasture consumed back to 13tDM/ha and therefore reducing the fodder bill for the farm. This will be through improved drainage, spinner cuts, watering efficiently and trying to lift pasture harvest dramatically. The Focus Farm support group will be watching this closely!

### **Repairs and Maintenance:**

A 'blow out' in the budget occurred with repairs and maintenance, and this has cost the farm finances dearly. A lot of breakdowns happened in the dairy, costing significant dollars. Effort will be placed on preventative maintenance as much as possible, to stop breakdowns before they occur. This is particularly relevant to the feed system and dairy as well as tractor and other machinery.

### **Other changes:**

There will be a focus on doing things in a timelier manner. This is particularly relevant to nitrogen applications, where it will be spread by the staff rather than with the truck, aiming to have it on when the cows leave the paddocks. This should give us better nitrogen efficiency. Weeds will be sprayed in channels and drains in a timely manner to improve water delivery and management. Resowing will also be done in a timelier manner to reduce the time that paddocks are out of the rotation. We really want to get some great results, building on the great production gains and fertility gains that have been made in the last 12 months. We will be aiming for more efficiency of input use as well as reduced costs whilst trying to maintain a strong level of production, being a minimum 1kgMS/kg liveweight.

A summary of the key budget figures for 15/16 will be presented over the next report or two.

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