

Macalister Demonstration Farm

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

Macalister Demonstration Farm Update 409 (Week ending August 28th , 2015)

What's been going on at the MDF?

The current figures are as follows, bearing in mind that the number of cows in the vat is constantly increasing on a daily basis and so it is hard to determine the exact production figure.

	Litres	Solids
Production	23.7	1.89
Components %	4.3%, 3.7%	4.3%, 3.7%
Milk price on current test (Sept)	40.6	\$5.09
Gross milk income less levies	\$9.62	\$9.62
Minus 3kg grain (\$350/t)	\$1.05	\$1.05
IOSFC (\$/cow/day)	\$8.57	\$8.57
Net production	21.1 litres	1.68kgMS

There are quite a few feeding groups running around the farm at the moment, with an induced cow mob, a springer mob, a dry cow mob, a fresh cow mob and the milkers. This is manageable for the staff at the moment, but as pasture demand lifts, there will need to be some streamlining of the different mobs take place.

The grazing strategy has been to chase a lower residual and push available pasture hard whilst the conditions allow, and keep grain levels to a minimum. This has certainly served the purpose of harvesting pasture and using what has been grown well over the winter period. It is interesting to see from the table above though that it is leaving an income over supplementary feed cost of \$8.57/cow/day, pretty handy for spring, due mainly to the cheap ration (3kg wheat and no additive), but is this limiting the cows reaching their peak? My gut feel is yes, it is, but at what cost this year do we chase a higher peak, especially if pasture is being wasted in trying to achieve it.

The intention is that grain will lift this week to 4kg/cow/day and then possibly lift again in a week or two to 5kg, but this will involve the inclusion of an additive for safety, and also lead to a significant additional expense. It isn't that we believe that feeding additional grain and additives doesn't give a return, but rather is the additional income greater than the additional expense allowing more than 'just getting our money back' - we need the money back plus a premium, or why do it?

History has shown on the MDF that 13tDM/ha minimum pasture consumed is key to overall profitability given a moderate grain price and moderate milk price (possibly this year on both fronts), and the strategy of the previous two springs didn't give best-case outcome, where highest possible pasture intakes weren't achieved. And so it is necessary to try a slightly different tack without turning the whole system on its head. A definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome! So it is worth pushing harder this spring and seeing if we can get the system working a little harder.

Urea is being applied at 80kg/ha behind the cows with the available labour and farm spreader. This will give some greater N-efficiency and also some better pasture cover with the nitrogen being applied on time, straight after grazing. Pasture cover on 20th August was 1,940kgDM/ha, and with an eat rate on the farm of 50kgDM/ha/day, cover is eroding slightly. This has been the intention as we hit spring, with some very long cover in some areas. This has allowed a saving on dry cow hay, which can be used when the dries need to be locked down to save grass for milkers, or saved for next year.

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