

The Northern Dairyfarmer

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2010

QDO conference notches up another success in 70th year

KEY POINTS

- Processors given blunt message
- QDO celebrates 70th birthday

By Brian Tessmann
QDO president

THERE was barely a spare seat in the room at the Sunshine Coast convention centre in late August, such was the popularity of the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO)/Dairy Industry Association of Australia (DIAA) industry conference.

Given the talent and depth of the speakers, it is not surprising that more than 250 farmers, processors and other stakeholders gathered to hear the conference theme of Learning from the Past, Assessing the Present, and Preparing for the Future.

It was an apt theme given the state of play in the industry. Seasonal conditions are improved, but uncertainty surrounding milk prices has created questions for where others in the industry see themselves headed.

It was refreshing and welcome to hear frank presentations from Craig Garvin, from



The Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation State Council, James Geraghty, Wes Judd, Jenny Easlea, Brian Tessmann, Ross McInnes, Ben Fredrickson, John Saville and CEO Adrian Peake celebrate the 70th birthday of QDO at the annual QDO/DIAA conference last month.

Parmalat, and Keith Mentiplay, from National Foods, who outlined the issues they face as processors.

Not all of what they had to say was pleasant for farmers to hear, along with a blunt directive that we as a northern industry must have our costs no higher than the costs of bringing Victorian milk north.

However, we must remain the option of first choice for proces-

sors in meeting the growing needs of our market.

We as an industry understand the commercial realities and supply management pressures facing the processors, but at a farm-gate level we also need sustainable prices that reflect the higher costs of producing milk in a sub-tropical environment, the demand to produce milk to meet

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These Bulls meet ADHIS criteria for the Good Bulls Guide, August 2010

Rain only part of story

WHILE the wetter change in the weather in the past year, and particularly the last month, has generally given most farmers some optimism for the future from a feedbase point of view, some of the market changes will be more challenging.

As most dairyfarmers realise, we in Queensland are suppliers of the domestic market for liquid milk and some short-shelf life dairy products. Thankfully that market is growing with forecasts indicating that Queensland alone will need some 20 to 30% more milk annually in the next decade as our population grows. Two of the issues that farmers and farm organisations and processors need to consider as we look ahead is first that milk production in this region needs to match the market we supply and we need to consider the opportunities and limitations this delivers in planning our business future. In saying that, new opportunities in the market also need exploration. Second, we need to extract a viable competitive sustainable business return from the market. This starts at the retail outlets where milk in Queensland is sold much more cheaply than in southern states, particularly Victoria.

This seems to completely ignore the well-accepted fact that milk is more expensive to produce all year round and thus to source in the more northern states. Processors also need to be innovative in ensuring the highest value is achieved for milk in excess of local consumption.

In coming years farmers will also need to make sure they achieve the maximum contract-price for their milk and limit the amount of lower-priced milk that they regularly produce.

I believe that there is a considerable role for Dairy Australia in this process as farmers will need help in delivering a fairly consistent volume throughout the year and in achieving the best per unit production productivity they can in a variable environment. As the results of some of

the price negotiations come to light, it seems that a number of farmers will be in for some challenging times in the next year as margins are squeezed. This will come from not only lower average prices and contracted volumes but from increased input costs as well. Therefore, as farm managers we will need to know our farms' deficiencies and advantages if we are to find the opportunities and avoid the pitfalls the market may deliver for us in the future.

At the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation we will continue to prosecute the case for initiatives and changes to the trading environment to get a better result for farmers.



Brian Tessmann
President
Queensland Dairyfarmers'
Organisation

ecute the case for initiatives and changes to the trading environment to get a better result for farmers.



Time for AGM and forum

IT IS almost that time of the year again for the Subtropical Dairy annual general meeting (AGM). Thanks to our Northern Regional Team, we have selected the Atherton Tablelands to be our venue for 2010. The date of the AGM is October 18, which will include the election of new board members. The incoming board members will have been recommended by an independent committee, who are meeting on September 30, and subject to ratification at the AGM by regional group representatives. The AGM will be followed by our annual forum on Tuesday, October 19, at which there will be an array of speakers on a range of research, development, extension and education topics that will all be of interest to the northern dairy industry community.

On Wednesday morning October 20 we have arranged some farm visits that will provide all delegates to meet face-to-face with our northern dairyfarmers, who will be willing to discuss various aspects of their farm systems with their southern counterparts. The delegates will be departing the Tablelands that afternoon while the new Subtropical Dairy board will be meeting that afternoon and the following morning as one of our regular quarterly board meetings. At this meeting we will be reviewing the Northern Dairy Industry Strategic Plan and to ascertain how we, as a funder, can appropriately invest levy-payer funds to maximise the opportunities to ensure a sustainable and resilient industry.

Our executive officer, Neale Price and I have already visited Wondai, Biggenden, Monto, Rockhampton, Eungella and Malanda and will be undertaking further regional visits over the coming months. We will be seeking input into future investments priorities, opportunities for small regional projects and feedback on the development of National Centre for Dairy Education Australia (NCDEA) courses and educational opportunities. We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible over the coming months and remember, if you have a local

event where our presence would be beneficial please contact us and we will endeavour to attend your event.



Ross McInnes
Chair
Subtropical Dairy

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The Northern

Dairyfarmer

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market needs every day of the year, as well as the need for having fresh milk for a rapidly growing population.

The Federal Government can help in that regard, and this was one issue which I made a strong point of highlighting during media interviews surrounding the conference.

At the moment, farmers are again under pressure from the retail end of the milk supply chain, particularly when it comes to the major supermarkets placing downward pressure on milk prices, brought about by their own 'store-home' brand milk procurement and marketing strategies.

A government that is serious about a national food plan should be ensuring that farmers are receiving sustainable prices for their work, investment and risks taken.

A new government that is working with dairy industry to refine and implement the recom-

mendations from the Senate Inquiry into the milk supply chain would go a long way in helping to rebalance market power and ensuring that farmers are here in the future to supply the milk we all need.

This is just one issue that QDO, alongside other groups such as National Farmers Federation and Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF), will ensure remains on the 'must do' radar agenda as we take the first steps of a new political dynamic.

Despite these challenges, there is also cause for optimism.

Experts from Dairy Australia (DA) presented the latest trends in animal genomics and value chain innovation, both of which signal some exciting opportunities in the future.

DA industry analyst Michael Harvey perhaps summed up the situation in the domestic industry properly by saying the outlook is "bullish but cautious".

Other conference speakers included Pat Rowley, past QDO, ADF and Australian Dairy

Industry Council president; Kate Carnell, of the Australian Food and Grocery Council; Marcus Barber, strategic futurist; Ian Halliday, Isabell MacNeill and Mick Blake from DA; and Wes Judd from ADF. Their collective speeches covered the full spectrum of industry topics from past, present and future.

The conference also marked the 70th birthday of QDO, an organisation that has evolved along with the many changes and challenges that have occurred in the industry during that time. When QDO was formed, there were about 20,000 dairyfarmers in this State; today the number is closer to 600.

The premise of the organisation remains the same though; and that is to represent the interests of and supply services to Queensland dairyfarmers and the industry and seek to protect the sustainable profitability of dairy-farming and see that it is profitable and sustainable.

In addition, the conference once again held a gala dinner and

presented the recipients of the DIAA industry awards. Milla Milla, Qld, dairyfarmers Eddie and Janeene Wallwork were deserving recipients of the QDO Lindsay Volz service award.

QDO held its annual general meeting on the second day, and presentations followed on industry issues under management, current and planned industry programs and initiatives, the launch of the updated Northern Dairy Industry Strategic Plan, and technical presentations on water-use efficiency, fodder production and management assessment options for new pricing and supply conditions. This session also included a question-and-answer panel, which resulted in some in-depth discussion of industry issues.

On behalf of QDO, I would like to thank all those who attended, those who sponsored, the presenters, and the staff and volunteers that once again ensured this conference was a big success.

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Outlook 'bullish but cautious'

KEY POINTS

- World market increasingly volatile
- Downward pressure on supermarket prices
- Overseas countries rely on Australia for quality food

By Brad Pfeffer

THE OUTLOOK for dairy is bullish, but also cautious, according to Dairy Australia industry analyst Michael Harvey.

Mr Harvey told the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO)/Dairy Industry Association of Australia (DIAA) conference at Caloundra, Qld, global economic conditions were improving, although the growth was slower in areas such as the United States and Europe than in Asia and the Middle East.

He said Chinese demand would be a key driver. "We are confident that in the next 12 months they (China) will be

importing substantial volumes of whole milk powder," he said. "Almost all of it will be coming from New Zealand, but it will be absorbing the large volumes that they have there."

Given the wide range of growth predictions for New Zealand, it appears that any extra demand on their supplies would be welcome.

"Fonterra says 2-3% growth (for New Zealand) and the New Zealand government says 12-13% growth," Mr Harvey said.

He said while that latter prediction appeared ambitious, when released it did "scare the market a bit".

Moving into the year ahead, he said that the market would also see US milk production as critical. "They can turn the tap on quickly and flood the market," he said.

Ultimately, given the changes in the global situation he reinforced that the volatility of the market had increased.

This could be less the case on the domestic front, although he said "business and consumer confidence is confident yet fragile".

"There are still some constraints on spending," Mr Harvey said. "Consumers are eating dairy at home but are economising when they are going out, and that might mean missing out on a cheese platter.

"But where the economy is at, we would expect reasonable growth going forward."

Chief executive of the Australian Food and Grocery Council, Kate Carnell, outlined some predicted trends on consumption patterns that could create challenges for the dairy industry.

"Competition between retailers for the scarce consumer dollar will put downward pressure on supermarket prices," Ms Carnell said.

She said that the dairy industry needed to promote its positive messages. "Eighty-four per cent of teenage girls are consuming less calcium than they need," she said. "And consumers need to understand that when you run a marathon, milk will rehydrate you.

"And with a growing population, and an increased focus on



ADF president Wes Judd: The community has an expectation on the way everything is produced.

the environment, the future of Australian clean and green food is bright."

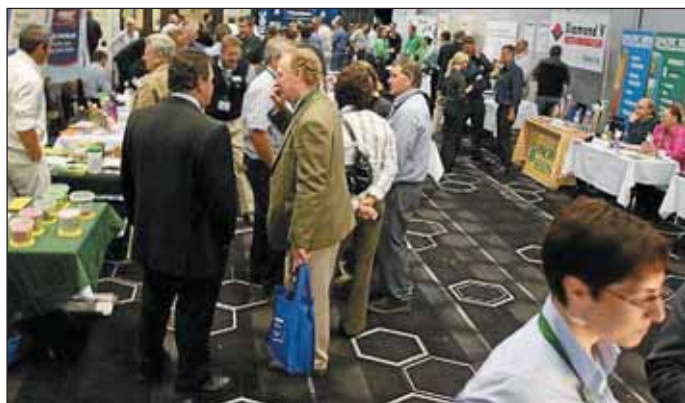
ADF president Wes Judd said that overseas countries relied on Australia for quality food.

"The community has an expectation on the way everything is produced," he said. "We can't dismiss that and aren't being proactive if we do."

Dairy toasts success at industry conference

THE Queensland dairy industry gathered at Caloundra for the annual Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation and Dairy Industry Association of Australia annual conference. The conference featured in-depth analysis of industry issues

from the past, present and future, and attracted a crowd of more than 250 people. The two-day event also featured an industry awards dinner and celebration, with *The Northern Dairyfarmer* there to cover the action (more pictures, p6).



The delegates enjoy catching up over the lunch break.



QDO president Brian Tessmann, Kingaroy, and Denise Volz, Peranga, Darling Downs, present Eddie Wallwork and Janeene Wallwork (not pictured) of Milla Milla with the Lindsay Volz service award.



ABOVE: Geoffrey and Ruth Chalk.

LEFT: QDO president Brian Tessmann cuts the cake to celebrate QDO's 70th birthday.



Aaron Clews, The Caves, catches up for a beer with Ben Frederickson, Eungella, and Dale Fortescue, Eungella.



Carlo Abbate, Steve Wregg and Nick Adami, all from Cleantec, Brisbane.



Rod Evans, from Tronics, Brisbane and Brad Campbell, Cleantec, Brisbane.



Kristine Manser and Rachael Heaton of the Dairy Industry Association of Australia, Melbourne.



Jason and Lisa Rozynski, Imbil.



Matthew and Michelle Trace, Kenilworth, having a good night out.



Ben Stephens, DHA Rural Sales, chatting with Stevie McMurtrie, Alltech, and Nat Temple, Agrig8.



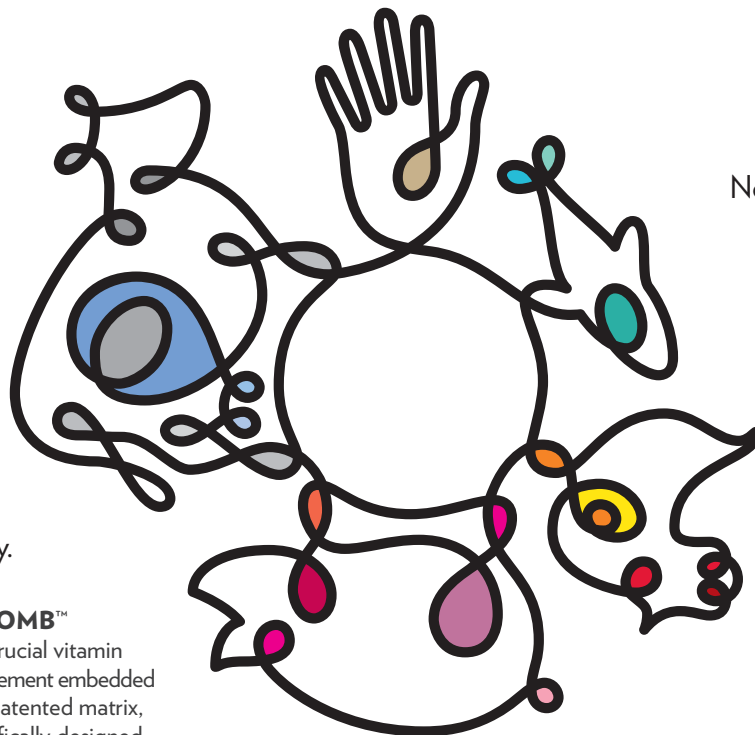
Conference delegates enjoying the dinner festivities.



Kylie Dennis, from QDO, catches up with Peter Perkins, from the Queensland Farmers' Federation.



Andrew Taylor from Parmalat Brisbane having a yarn with Charlie Ernst, Parmalat, Rockhampton.



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Cropping land policy discussions promising

KEY POINTS

- Govt moves to protect good farm land from mining
- Recognises farmland as long-term resource, minerals as short term
- Impact on coal seam gas wells unclear

By Gary Sansom
QFF president

THE State Government has released its policy framework for protecting strategic cropping land (SCL) from permanently destructive mining activities.

The Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, Stephen Robertson, is to be congratulated for striving for a policy that strikes a balance between the myriad planning issues surrounding mining development and agricultural production.

For the first time, we are embarking on a path that recognises that good farmland is rare and valuable.

We are a State rich in mineral resources; but these resources can be mined only once. By protecting our most productive farming country, we will ensure we have the ability to continue producing food and fibre (and wealth) long after the underground minerals are gone.

Conversely, destroying our best land by ripping up the ground and creating an open-cut coal mine would be irresponsible and short-sighted given the long timeframe of production that can be delivered from this land. This policy is an important step toward recognising that.

Looking at the maps, the SCL 'trigger area' is about 4% of Queensland. This is an increase from the original 2% put forward in the Government's first discussion paper.

The QFF looks forward to working constructively with the Government and its members on the finer details of the maps and surrounding policy. We know there will be challenges ahead as well.

While this policy appears to secure a good level of protection against strip-mining, it is less clear how much it would afford protection from other activities such as coal seam gas (CSG). The policy indicates 'alienation' of cropping land as an activity that results in farming being unable to occur for 50 years or more.

With CSG, individual wells are expected to exist for about 20 years, and the wells are small compared with open-cut coal mines.

Therefore, there is question mark over how SCL would be protected from gas-mining activities particularly any impact on water resources, and the debate

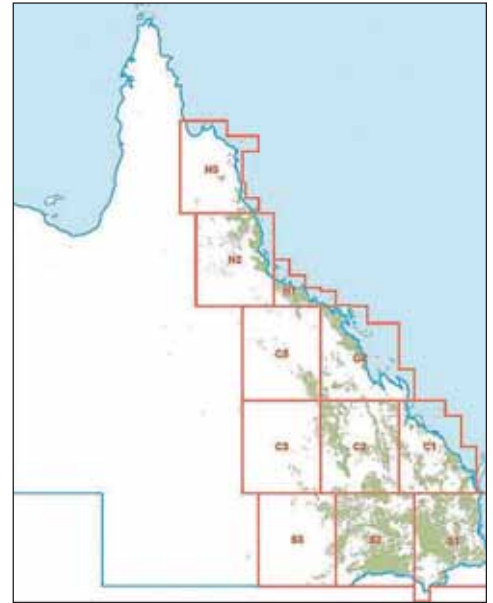
about what constitutes alienation will be complicated.

Nevertheless, the cumulative impact of tens of thousands wells and numerous projects and tenements across the Darling Downs could have disastrous impacts on the agricultural sector and to somehow mitigate these impacts through project design and condition will be important if the planning system cannot accommodate the complexity.

An individual gas well alone may not alienate a piece of land, even though it would add to the difficulty to farm the area around it.

However, 40,000 wells could have highly alienating impacts via the cumulative impact on property values, the potential impact on the underground water, and the sheer frustration of farmers as they attempt to navigate their machinery around a patchwork of gas wells.

This potentially will lead to an insidious and eventual alienation of cropping land and the farm sector that, if not balanced in the future, could be as devastating as an open-cut coal mine.



The draft strategic cropping land map.

On top of that, there are also question marks over the relationship between SCL and timber plantations and urban development needs.

QFF will be raising these issues and many others in the months ahead. In the long term, our goal is to ensure a balance between the interests of two of Queensland's most important industries: agriculture and mining.

Although it can be easy to be critical, the State Cabinet on this occasion has struck out on the right path by showing a clear intent to balance the ledger.

Both of these industries are crucial industries for the long-term prosperity of this State. That's why this policy framework is so important and why QFF will be working with the Government for an outcome that is acceptable for all stakeholders.



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Price review flags concern for Qld irrigators

KEY POINTS

- QCA SunWater review papers two months late
- Irrigators expected to pay for dam upgrades
- Dam upgrades benefit State and other industries

By Gary Sansom
QFF president

THE Queensland Competition Authority (QCA) has released a series of papers dealing with the issues of reviewing SunWater prices for irrigation schemes two months late. The delay, while frustrating, was anticipated given the complexity of the issues surrounding the 22 irrigation schemes in Queensland.

The challenge, however, will be dealing with the many issues presented in these papers, given that QCA is still expected to complete a final report by April 30 next year.

QFF and irrigator customer groups in each scheme have much work ahead dealing with issues that are important to the future of irrigation in Queensland.

The foremost concerns are:

- the Government seeking a rate of return from dams and infrastructure;
- the assessment of irrigators' capacity to pay increased prices; and

• irrigators being looked at to fund large-scale dam upgrades.

Irrigators also need to be convinced that prices will be based on the efficient costs of SunWater schemes.

For example, irrigators are already questioning why they should shoulder the costs of upgrading dam spillways to withstand the force of a one-in-100,000-year flood event.

The State Government is already proceeding with these high cost upgrades of a number of dam spillways to protect against loss of life if one of these unlikely massive floods occurs. The Emerald flood of 2008 is an example of the flood mitigation benefit to the community provided by large dams.

The State also benefited by seeing business (including large coal mines) return to production much faster than would have otherwise been the case, and therefore returning their contributions of taxes and royalties.

With a one-in-100,000-year event, which would be far larger than that seen at Emerald, the State would be the significant beneficiary in terms of securing against liability for loss of life and significant financial and economic losses as a result of flooding.

Likewise, irrigators are opposed to being the cash cow that would deliver a rate of return on publicly funded dams built in decades past to secure much-needed regional development and

improved export performance. If these issues and many of the others being raised are followed through to what might appear to be a rational economic conclusion, then the Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) has real concerns for what this would mean for the viability of most of the irrigation schemes in Queensland.

If this price review process makes irrigators uncompetitive and they cannot afford the increased prices, then there is a real risk that they will stop irrigating, let alone see any benefit in investing to modernise schemes and farm infrastructure.

As I have outlined in recent columns, an impact on local irrigators would quickly translate into a severely negative impact on regional communities.

In addition, the economics of squeezing irrigators until they bleed doesn't stack up given the contributions they make to the economy.

If all State-owned assets were looked at as revenue machines, then Queensland would be in economic ruin.

Earlier this year, *The Courier Mail* reported that most Brisbane train journeys are subsidised by taxpayers by about \$10. A policy change to recoup those funds would clog the roads, stall the productive capacity of Brisbane, and affect property values in central city locations or near train lines.

Yet while irrigators are now facing a comparable scenario and



Irrigators are questioning why they should meet the cost of upgrading dams spillways to protect against a 1-in-100,000-year flood.

are being looked at for a rate of return from the public good benefit of dams, the difference for irrigators is even starker, as many of them have a strong case that they have already paid for the SunWater infrastructure through water and land sales conducted as part of the schemes' establishment.

In some of these discussions, it has also been suggested that high water prices are needed to make irrigators use water efficiently.

Any irrigator in Queensland who battled drought in recent years has a right to be insulted by such a remark, particularly when it is considered that many irrigation schemes shut down during the extended drought to ensure limited water supplies were secured for urban, mining and industrial use.

We operate on the driest inhabited continent in an extremely competitive global environment, and irrigators continue to invest in improving their water-use efficiency. However, if the Government continues to make it harder for them to be profitable, then it will be increasingly difficult for them to continue operating, let alone reinvest in their enterprises and improve water-use efficiency.

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Workplace safety laws amended

RECENT amendments have been made to workplace health and safety legislation that are relevant to rural industries.

The changes extend the rural exemption to the appointment of a Workplace Health and Safety Officer (WHSO) until the new model health and safety laws are enacted in Queensland. This proposal takes into account that WHSOs will not feature in the model health and safety laws when enacted in Queensland at the end of 2011.

It is considered burdensome to enforce this requirement on the rural industry for less than 15 months before this legislative requirement disappears when the proposed model Workplace Health and Safety laws

start. But this proposal does not prevent rural workplaces from voluntarily appointing WHSOs.

In September other new work safety rules were applied to farmers and rural industries with the phasing out of legislated occupational health and safety exemptions for rural Queensland.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland executive director, Dr Simon Blackwood, said the phasing out program, which started in 1990, required all rural property workers to be aware of, and comply with, the Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008.

"The phasing out of these exemptions is

part of a staged removal to bring the rural industry in line with other Queensland industries," Dr Blackwood said. "This staged removal ensures rural workers can get appropriate training, education, certification and licensing where required."

The exemptions revoked in 2009 involved rural activities in demolition, construction work and the use of hazardous substances. Exemptions removed from September regarded registrable plant design, confined spaces and atmospheric contaminants.

A new rural chemicals guide is available to rural workplaces containing information on herbicides, pesticides, hazardous substances, dangerous goods, flammable liquids, and agricultural and veterinary medicines.

Dr Blackwood said the changes that took effect from September 1 did not apply to rural workers being exempt from the requirement to hold a licence to perform high risk work (e.g. forklift, tower crane, scaffolding).

"The rural exemption for this part of the regulation has been extended indefinitely until the new national model health and safety laws are enacted in Queensland," he said.

"However, it should be noted that forklift licensing is an excellent means of meeting the requirements of the current WHS legislation to provide a safe workplace. Rural businesses that use forklifts are urged to have operators of forklifts trained and licensed, particularly those who are regularly required to operate forklifts."

Forklift (and other classes of high-risk work) licensing is expected to be required under the nationally harmonised legislation from January 1, 2012.

Contact: Website <www.worksafe.qld.gov.au> or Workplace Health and Safety Infoline, phone 1300 369 915.

WA drought reform pilot progressing

THE Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) has participated in a comprehensive briefing conducted by Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia project manager, Kay Bodman, to outline exactly what is being "trialled" in the important step towards National Drought Policy reform.

The WA Pilot Project aims to "test" seven program initiatives within an overall three-way Drought Preparedness Project aimed at helping farmers, families and communities develop preparedness plans and strategies to cope with variable climate and drought.

The WA Pilot Program officially began on July 1 and is to conclude in 12 months. They have already trained 80 facilitators to help complete 400 Farm and Business Adaptation plans that will be developed through hands-on farm family planning sessions.

A five-module plan approach is being overseen by Curtin University, which is just completing the 53 prototype farms in four of the 67 regions of the pilot study area. The Federal Government has sent over a specialist project team which includes professional councillors with Centrelink in a mobile office (the for-



A trial is underway in WA of new drought policy reforms.

mer 'drought buses' familiar to anyone in current or former Exceptional Circumstances areas). They are also trialling an online counselling services for young people program.

Details of the pilot and its progress can be found at website <www.agric.wa.gov.au>.

— Peter Perkins, QFF drought policy officer



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NDF1129115

Workshops look at two-tier price options

KEY POINTS

- Assess impact of new prices on farm's financial situation
- Look at short and long-term strategies

By Dave Barber*

A SERIES of Dairy In Action workshops aimed to help dairyfarmers develop strategies to deal with the reduction in milk price and the demand for a flat annual milk supply. The workshops were held across south-east Queensland and north Queensland in August and September.

The workshops looked at the potential financial impact of the two-tier pricing system in each of the regions compared with the average Queensland Dairy Accounting Scheme (QDAS) farm for 2009 within each region. The impact for each of the feeding systems (grazing, partial mixed ration [PMR] or total mixed ration [TMR]) within a region was also discussed.

An average price of 48 cents a litre for Tier 1 milk and 28 cents a litre for Tier 2 milk was used in the south-east Queensland regions, with 47 cents/litre and 33 cents/litre, used for north Queensland. A split of 70% into tier 1 and 30% into tier 2 milk from 2009 production figures was used in the analysis.

The expected reduction in income on Darling Downs farms ranged from \$83,863 for the QDAS grazing farm through to \$235,826 for the QDAS TMR farm.

The important thing to remember is that these figures are an average from QDAS and includes financial data from farms across all factory payment systems. Individual farmers should look at their own financial situation and assess the potential impact on their farm according to their income and costs.

A number of short-term strategies were discussed for farmers to try to minimise the potential impact on profitability and included:

- Do nothing – what will be the impact?
- Cut costs – but be aware that this may also cut income.
- Reduce cow numbers – will that be a good option long-term in terms of milk supply on the farm?
- Reduce production per cow (PPC) – be aware of flow-on negative effects on body condition score and reproduction.
- Increase cow numbers – this needs to fit the



Changing the feeding system by moving towards a PMR or TMR system may be an option for some farmers to better manage under two-tier pricing.



The expected reduction in income varied between the different farm types.

feedbase area and infrastructure and feed resources available.

- Reduce cow numbers and increase PPC – how long will it take to achieve the increased PPC and will be dependent on extra feed being available to the remaining cows?
- Increase efficiency of production (litres/day and litres/lactation) – increase PPC with current numbers; does the farm the feed resources, how long will it take and will the cost of production be less than the Tier 2 price?
- Increase milk composition, particularly milk protein – need to factor in the extra cost to achieve this.

There are a number of the strategies listed above that will potentially minimise the impact of the reduction in income, which will be dependant on the farm's milk production, cost structure, current PPC and feedbase. The type and efficiency of the feeding system also had an effect on the impact.

Some of these strategies will take time to implement and the full benefit may only be realised in the medium to long-term.

In terms of dealing with the flat annual milk supply, a few long-term strategies were discussed. The main options that were looked at to deal with the demand for a flat supply of milk across the year included:

- Alter calving pattern – try to shift the excess milk in spring to the trough in autumn; could increase feed-related costs in autumn and heat stress in early lactation will need to be managed.
- Change feeding system – move towards a PMR or TMR system; does the environment suit this system, what extra resources and infrastructure are needed and what will be the cost?
- Ride the price waves – improve the efficiency of the farm and feeding system to allow it to optimise profit if milk price increases.

The important take-home messages from the workshops were to:

- Assess the farm's financial situation and the level of impact on the farm, and;
- Look at the short and long-term strategies and what impact they will have on the bottom line of the business.

Farmers who need further assistance or who are having trouble paying the bills should consider seeing a farm financial counsellor (but don't leave it too late). To access this free and confidential service phone 13 25 23 and ask to be put in touch with the closest farm financial counsellor. Farmers who don't know their costs could consider taking part in QDAS this year and should contact Ray Murphy, phone (07) 4688 1094.

**Dave Barber is senior research scientist – dairy nutrition with Agri-Science Queensland, a service of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation.*

MORE INFO

Financial counsellors

Phone: 13 25 23

QDAS

Phone: (07) 4688 1094

CSG threat to Condamine alluvium

KEY POINTS

- New report on coal-seam gas
- Condamine alluvium under threat
- Moratorium needed

By Brian Tessmann
QDO president

THE findings of a new scientific report that Queensland's largest freshwater aquifer is under threat from coal-seam gas (CSG) extraction has once again exposed the State Government's lack of due care in regulating extractive industries.

The report by independent hydro-geologist John Hillier confirmed that the Condamine alluvium is hydraulically connected to the Walloon coal measures, which the State Government has given its approval to be de-watered as part of the region's CSG production industry expansion.

According to the report, the Condamine alluvium is incised into the Walloon coal measures and water transfer is occurring between the two systems.

This needs more investigation to determine the extent to which this is happening.

This research should have

been done before the State Government gave approval to a project that could drain the alluvium from the bottom.

Once again, the Government's double standard between the restrictions placed on agriculture as opposed to mining has been exposed. Groundwater irrigators in the region have endured large reductions in their water allocations in what they believed was an effort to make the resource more sustainable.

Now State Government actions could negate those efforts and put the resource at risk, all in the continuing effort to give mining companies whatever they want.

It should not be up to rural resource and lobby groups or concerned citizen groups to have to uncover this type of information; it should be done before a project receives Governmental approval to start a trial.

In this project and in other gas extraction projects in Queensland such as the underground coal gasification (UCG) project in the South Burnett, it seems the government has not fulfilled its duty of care to the residents and primary producers of Queensland.

It is too late to eventually realise a resource is under threat after it has been depleted or polluted and then leave it up to



Irrigation from the Condamine alluvium could be threatened by coal-seam gas extraction.

locals to take legal action against the company involved.

The Government must be responsible for the projects it allows to start. Further, do the people who buy shares in companies involved in these unproven or experimental processes understand the threat the practices the companies they own pose to the state's rural industries and the environment.

Like the Government, they need to look past the often sanitised and selective information coming out of the mining companies and investigate the cold hard facts around their investments from other, more reliable sources.

The reason many people are calling for a moratorium on further CSG projects and an end to UCG trials in Queensland is that the Government does not understand the present or future ramifications of these technologies.

It is reluctant to take responsibility for the monitoring, control, testing and regulating of these industries and cleaning up the resulting problems.

Instead, it prefers to leave it up to the affected locals to take legal action against the companies involved if a problem occurs, if by that time they still exist, instead of the Government guaranteeing the processes that it allows to proceed in this State.

QDO receives Moreton Bay funding

THE Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) has welcomed the Federal Government's commitment to the dairy industry and the environmental area of Moreton Bay through the Caring for Our Country program.

During the election, the then Member for Forde, Brett Raguse, and the Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water, Penny Wong, announced that QDO was among two successful grant recipients for projects that will improve water quality in Moreton Bay Catchments.

The funding is for \$299,500 for three years for Cows on the Coast – Dairying Better 'N Better for Moreton Bay and will assist farmers in managing soil and nutrients as well as preventing erosion in local rivers and creeks.

QDO president Brian Tessmann said the aim of the project was to improve water quality in waterways, with the mutual benefit of developing farm practices and benefiting the Moreton Bay catchment environment.

"We know that Moreton Bay and its catchments are sensitive

environments," Mr Tessmann said. "We also know the catchments are important farming regions for fresh produce for the increasing population in south-east Queensland.

"The priority catchments extend through the Logan and Albert rivers, and up through the Bremer and Lockyer valleys. These areas are important dairying regions for Queensland, so this project will work with farmers in the region to implement practices that improve water quality that would eventually flow toward Moreton Bay.

"Dairyfarmers are already good environmental stewards. This funding will help farmers lift the bar even higher."

The funding announcement also committed \$1.5 million for two years to South East Queensland Catchments Ltd for Targeted Works to Reduce Sediment Export to Waterways Entering Moreton Bay.

The \$1.8 million investment is already included in the Budget in the Caring for our Country program's 2010-11 budget and work is expected to be completed by June 30, 2013.

Dairy industry to work with the new Government

By Brian Tessmann
QDO president

THE Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) and our cross-commodity body the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) are keen to restart our working relationship with the recently elected Gillard minority government and to get on the job of solving problems and pursuing initiatives for Queensland agricultural industries.

After the weeks of delay while we waited for alliances to be finalised, we now know that Labor will form government with the support of regional independent Members of Parliament Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott. This situation will become even more interesting in the middle of next year when the new Senate takes its place with the Greens holding the balance of power.

While all this may mean new approaches, involving more consultation and negotiation to get legislation through the two houses, the main thing now is for the Government to get on with the job of fulfilling its election promises and running the country efficiently.

First, the new Government needs to implement the reason-

able and sensible policies it announced during its campaign and revisit some others that need improvement, in consultation with industry organisations, so that we can obtain the best outcomes for the rural sector and regional Australia.

The QDO is looking forward to working with all sectors of the political spectrum in the new parliament including the Government, the Opposition, the Greens and the independents to deliver good policy outcomes for the rural and regional Queensland.

One of the first issues that will come up will be the Government's promise to buy water for the Murray Darling Basin from willing sellers.

There is a pressing need for the Government to support agricultural industries to adapt to the new water allocation and management environment and to protect rural communities from the real threat of massive socio-economic impacts of permanently removing irrigators' water entitlement.

We will also be looking for leadership on improving research and development for agricultural industries and the development of a national food policy and strategy to enable Australia to meet both domestic

and global challenges of future population growth.

The Federal Government also needs to play its part in protecting quality farmland and the surface and underground water that supports it from the destructive resource development that threatens its future.

We also have high on our agenda the need to develop the recommendations of the Senate Economics Committee Inquiry into the Australian Dairy Industry to pursue initiatives that would gain a better balance of power in the domestic market and obtain improved and sustainable returns for processors and dairyfarmers from the major supermarkets.

We will also be looking for sensible implementation of drought reform and climate change policy and increased funding for biosecurity.

We will also be keeping a close watch on the promise to invest more into rural and regional infrastructure, health and education.

These issues I have highlighted are vital to our futures and it is important that the Gillard Government implement a positive agenda for farming and rural industry and not use its slim majority as an excuse to shy away from the tough decisions.

Milk sales dip

DAIRY Australia (DA) has updated its milk sales data for the month of July, showing a slight drop in sales in year-to-date data and for the same month last year. DA reported that the shift to reduced fat/no fat milk from full cream continues. Month-on-month full-cream milk sales dropped 1.5%, while reduced-fat milk sales increased 5.1% and no-fat milk sales increased 1.4%.

Fresh flavoured milk continues to bounce back with a 3.3% gain month on month. UHT saw a drop of 27% but this should recover in the August figures.

In Queensland, sales volume for July 2010 was 42.7 million litres, down 4% from 2009 sales of 44.4 million litres. National sales were 194.1 million litres, down 2% from 2009 sales of 198.1 million litres.

On the export front, DA reports that year-to-date exports for July 2010 decreased 12.2% in volume terms but increased 17.6% in value terms. All dairy products except for mixtures, other cheese, other dairy products and milk reported dips in volumes exported year-to-date July 2010, with these products reporting increases of 48.6%, 22.8%, 5.4% and 3.9% respectively.

Export values showed a differing trend. Most products recorded increases in value exported for year-to-date July 2010, the largest rises being for mixtures, other cheese, other dairy products and whey products.

QDO welcomes new IDO

THE Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO), Subtropical Dairy and Natural Resource Management (NRM) team has welcomed Anna-Louise Cross to its NRM team in the position of industry development officer (IDO).

Some producers may have already met Ms Cross at the QDO-Dairy Industry Association of Australia conference in August, and others will have the opportunity as she hits the ground running with numerous

on-farm visits in the months ahead.

A large part of her role will be encouraging and assisting farmers to participate in industry-run NRM programs such as Dairying Better 'n Better for the Reef, Q2 Coasts and Country and others.

She is studying agricultural science and law through the University of New England (UNE) and has a farming background at Goondiwindi. She has also worked as a grower services officer for Queensland Cotton at Emerald and with the

UNE school of environmental and rural science. "Working in Central Queensland really reinforced for me that I want to pursue a career working directly with farmers," she said. "I look forward to working with farmers at a grass roots level to help implement positive change in the dairy industry. "I certainly have a big interest in seeing Australian agriculture grow, and this role will allow me to do that."

The Dairy NRM program is a partnership between QDO and Subtropical Dairy.



Anna-Louise Cross: wants to implement positive change in the dairy industry.



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Issues raised at regional forums

KEY POINTS

- Farmers concerned about ticks, mastitis and other issues
- Lack of extension staff to help

By Brian Tessmann
QDO president

QUEENSLAND Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) and Subtropical Dairy have conducted dairyfarmer meetings on a comprehensive tour of many dairy areas from the Burnett to Malanda in Far North Queensland. This tour included six meetings through the Burnett, Central Queensland and the Atherton Tableland.

The purpose of the trip was foremost to deliver to farmers the latest update of the *Northern Dairy Situation and Outlook* report and inform farmers about progress and happenings on a number of important industry issues.

Further to this though was the desire to get feedback from dairyfarmers as to what are the major problems and needs that their farm enterprises have in maximising their farm profit, efficiency and sustainability.

Naturally the hot topic on the minds of many farmers at the moment was price and supply conditions, and this was discussed at length including international and domestic market pricing movements.

When the meeting delved into the actual on-farm issues a little more control over a number of common problems were evident across most regions.

The most commonly raised issue of significance was cattle ticks, in terms of both maintaining a secure tick-free area while avoiding the rejections at the clearance centre and controlling the ticks in the infected area.

Farmers were concerned at the State Government's apparent desire to reduce funding in this area while many also testified to the considerable production loss

they sustain because of tick infestation on the cattle at certain times of the year. Farmers were further concerned at the lack of tick treatments for lactating cows that are either available or in the pipeline of development.

Many producers also presented that they required more nutritional and feed management information particularly around producing more milk from their tropical grasses and making a flatter milk supply pattern work.

Mastitis was again raised as an ongoing problem on many farms, particularly those that received the wetter times this season.

In the southern regions of the area the issue of mining and other extractive industries encroaching onto good dairy country and the threat to water supplies from various processes was also a major concern. I know from talking to producers on the Darling Downs that in that region it is an even higher concern.

Another issue that had a common theme was the shortage of extension personnel to help

farmers address the type of on-farm issues that we were discussing at these meetings.

While this was a common theme there was particular concern in North Queensland regarding where the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) was heading with the delays in filling extension places in that region. The responses we received will give considerable guidance to QDO, Subtropical Dairy and through us to Dairy Australia to be used to develop extension programs in the future. It will also assist QDO with its advocacy work.

The common thread running through these issues though is that much of this work should or could be carried out now by the State Government, which has the primary responsibility to protect farmers' and the State's resources while providing the research, development and extension resources to enable farmers to continue a sustainable industry into the future.

Qld farmer confidence falls

WHILE most Australian dairyfarmers remain confident about the industry despite continuing uncertainty around grain and dairy prices, there are significant regional differences, according to Dairy Australia's September *Situation and Outlook Update* report.

Analysis undertaken by Dairy Australia as part of the update has also revealed that international commodity prices have

stabilised, with China's increasing milk powder imports a driving force behind the continuing demand for dairy products.

Overall, confidence has improved from 67% to 73% since February when farmers participated in the National Dairy Farmer Survey. Confidence in the national industry is higher among Victorian regions and South Australia, but

lower in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. Most notable is the 30% rise in positivity in Murray Dairy to 74%. In the Murray Dairy region, better prices, good winter rain and early season water allocations have boosted confidence.

On the other hand, WA farmers are coping with dry conditions, and in Queensland and

NSW with lower prices and rising grain and fertiliser costs.

Dairy Australia's manager strategy and knowledge Jo Bills said 340 farmers who participated in the February National Dairy Farmer Survey were re-contacted in August to update any changes and outlook.

The full report can be accessed from website <www.dairyaustralia.com.au>.

Northern industry tackles strategic plan

THE Northern Dairy Industry (NDI) strategic plan was developed by a range of NDI value chain stakeholders in 2005, including the farm sector, processors, industry and government organisations. The new plan for 2010-2015 builds on that initial plan.

The major thrust of this plan is to highlight the future priorities for the dairy industry in the

production and market regions of the NDI, defined for these purposes as all of Queensland and Northern NSW. The plan aims to provide the industry with direction on areas for collective investment effort by conveying credible views of the future prospects for the dairy industry across these regions of the industry.

The future shape of the indus-

try in the medium term largely hinges upon the ability of its participants to continue to successfully manage the current realities and the future outlook. The success of the plan will depend upon a willingness of NDI stakeholders to work together towards its stated objectives. The plan provides an outline of:

- the expected future demand for milk in fresh dairy products;

- the expected future supply of milk from dairy farms in the two states;
- the expected determinants of the value of milk at farm-gate in the regions; and
- the factors affecting milk production and the relative attractiveness of milk production regions and sub-regions.

The plan can be viewed at website <www.dairyinfo.biz>.

Motorists starved for choice at petrol pump

KEY POINTS

- 5% ethanol mandate to lift fuel costs
- Grain prices will also increase
- Will lead to higher food prices or tighter margins for farmers

By **Brian Tessmann**
QDO president

WITH service stations in south-east Queensland dismantling their unleaded petrol bowsers to replace them with ethanol-blend pumps, the ability for motorists to choose their fuel is eroding.

This will only worsen at the end of the year when the State Government's 5% ethanol mandate comes into force, meaning that many more service stations – especially in south-east Queensland – will have to sell as much E10 as possible to “make quota”. That will make it harder to find a petrol pump that dispenses regular unleaded.

Ultimately, this has serious implications for motorists, especially given that although an ethanol-blend sells at a discount, it is consumed faster and gives less mileage per litre, which is likely to mean higher fuel bills overall.

The people of Queensland

may not yet fully realise this impact on their fuel bill, and at this stage they almost certainly would not realise the potential impact on their grocery bills and the impact upon farmers.

If this 5% ethanol mandate diverts food production to fuel production, the intensive livestock sector will be caught in the cross-fire of a Government mandate.

The Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) has estimated that an increase in the grain price of \$50 per tonne would create an extra cost of \$13,000-\$14,000 per annum for an average farmer. This is based on a cow consuming about 1.5 tonnes of grain per year, meaning an extra \$75 per cow. That works back to about 1.5 cents per litre extra cost.

Given the slim margins in the industry, this is a cost the dairy industry can ill afford. Likewise, given the pressure on the farm sector from the rest of the value chain, it is unlikely that the processors or the supermarkets would happily accommodate these extra costs.

The same is true for the Government ethanol mandate causing rising costs in the chicken, pork and grainfed beef industries and others, all of which will need to pay higher prices for grain that has been drawn away from food production.

In Australia, the impact of an ethanol mandate will be most acute in dry years.

A dry summer, like many of this past decade, inevitably sees grain prices rise, according to supply and demand. However, if the government is stoking demand for ethanol through legislation, then this will have a distortionary and unwelcome impact on the grain market.

There is evidence to suggest that the global grain price spike in 2008 had ethanol production as one of the root causes. A consequence then was sharp food price inflation and riots in poorer countries.

In Australia, we are fortunate to be far removed from food shortages. But there are serious questions about the flow-on effects to poor countries if wealthy countries such as Australia use resources to create fuel for our vehicles rather than food.

Ethanol can be an alternative fuel option if the approach is right. The direction for ethanol production should be on an internationally competitive basis and for it to be produced from new generation raw resources such as sugarcane, wood or banana waste, which does not compete with food production industries and farmers, nor does it have undesirable implications for food supply.



Petrol bowsers selling regular unleaded will be much harder to find once the State Government's 5% ethanol mandate is enforced in December.

The State Government must sober up and look carefully at the potential negative side-effects that will be created if it continues to stumble down a path high on the political green fumes leading them to prop up the ethanol industry at the expense of other Queensland industries and consumers.

ADIC to lead Basin plan response

THE Australian Dairy Industry Council (ADIC) – the dairy industry peak body – is leading the response to the Murray Darling Basin Plan on behalf of the industry to ensure the best possible outcome.

As *The Northern Dairyfarmer* goes to print this month, the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is due to release the *Guide to the Draft Basin Plan* on October 8 while the Draft Basin Plan will be delivered in late 2010.

The guide will enable the dairy industry to gain an understanding of the intentions of the MDBA and allow feedback before the release of the plan.

The ADIC is continuing to communicate through all dairy industry, media and political channels that the dairy industry is here for the long-term. ADIC is actively promoting the message that the industry is 'Working for a Better Basin'.

Mary resource plan released

THE Department of Environment and Resource Management has released the draft Mary resource operations plans (ROP), requesting submissions by October 22.

The ROP was plagued by delay with the investigations into the now-defunct Traveston Dam. The Mary Basin Water Resource Plan area covers the Mary River, Burrum River and Sunshine Coast catchments, and the draft plan ROP includes rules for protecting water users' entitlements and the water needs of

the environment in accordance with the water resource plan.

The ROP also converts irrigator licences to tradable water allocations and outlines arrangements for water trading across the catchments. Arrangements for licences for various water providers to operate their supply facilities are also included in the draft plan. The Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) and Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) will be providing submissions on the ROP. The plan can be accessed

at <http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/wrp/mary.html>.

The QDO is also seeking expressions of interest from dairyfarmers wishing to be part of a dairy industry irrigation committee for the Mary Basin to meet and consider the plan and assist in providing feedback to the QDO to develop a response submission to the draft plan.

Given the short time frames involved, anyone interested should quickly contact QDO, phone (07) 3236 2955.

Picasso cows promote health message

TWO schools in the Subtropical Dairy area have taken out regional awards in the Picasso Cows program. Rukenvale Public School took the title of Casino, NSW, best cow-painters, while Drayton State School took the Toowoomba, Qld, award, with both winning a \$250 cash prize.

Four primary schools competed in the Casino competition and five in the Toowoomba competition for Dairy Australia's Picasso Cows national curriculum program, a multi-layered educational experience that aims to educate students, teachers and parents about the importance of dairy health and nutrition and the industry itself.

Students and teachers from all of the participating schools attended presentation days in their area in September and proudly showed-off their brightly painted cow. They also presented their learning journals, which described their six-week journey and newly found dairy knowledge. All of the schools thoroughly enjoyed the experience, praising this creative approach to learning about dairy nutrition.

Rukenvale Public School principal, Kathy Johnston, said Dairy Australia, through the Picasso Cows project, provided a wonderful opportunity for students to learn about the dairy industry and dairy nutrition and

allowed students to display their creativity and co-operative skills throughout the learning process.

Dale Klease, from Drayton State School, said the Picasso Cow at Drayton State School had been a successful project that had involved parents and students. "It has enhanced our understanding of nutrition and the need to maintain dairy foods in our diet for life," she said.

"It has got the children to work co-operatively in groups and has extended the learning of all the students involved. Even the lower level students have taken on the task and voluntarily carried out extra research and activities.

"The level of independent work has been astounding and of a very high standard. I would like to thank Dairy Australia for providing such motivation and making my job so much easier."

Dairy Australia marketing manager Gale McLardie said the program sought to address a worrying issue highlighted in the recent Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey. "The research showed that as children move through their school years, calcium is the nutrient they are most likely to be missing out on," she said.

"Dairy foods are the biggest source of calcium in the Australian diet. So we all need to make a greater effort to ensure



The winning team from Drayton State School.



Rukenvale Public School team with its winning entry.

children are including at least three serves of dairy foods in their diet every day for their long-term bone health."

The cows, art and curriculum materials for the Picasso Cows program are supplied by Dairy Australia to participating schools free of charge.

The participating schools in

the Casino region were Casino West Public School, Rukenvale Public School, Barkers Vale Public School and Afterlee Public School and in the Toowoomba region were Crows Nest State School, Drayton State School, Charlton State School, Harristown State School and Toowoomba State School.

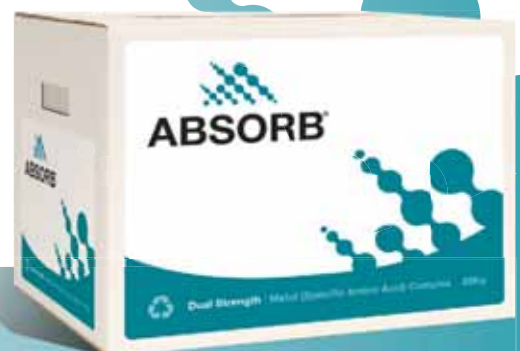
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ACCC supports Premium Milk group

THE Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has made a draft decision to re-authorise collective negotiation arrangements proposed by Premium Milk Ltd on behalf of its dairyfarmer members. The proposed arrangement allows present and future Premium members in south-east Queensland and northern New South Wales to collectively negotiate farm-gate milk prices and milk standards with Parmalat.

"The ACCC considers that the collective bargaining

arrangements are likely to continue to be of benefit, particularly through providing the opportunity for increased dairyfarmer input into contracts," ACCC chairman Graeme Samuel said.

Participation in the collective negotiations is voluntary for Premium's dairyfarmer members and Parmalat. The authorisation does not extend to a collective decision by dairyfarmers to boycott Parmalat if it refused to participate in collective negotiation or for other reasons including a failure to reach a collective agreement.

Premium's members have been collectively negotiating contracts with Parmalat under an ACCC authorisation, and with Parmalat's support, since 2001.

The ACCC proposes to re-authorise the arrangements for a further 10 years.

The Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) supported Premium's application to seek re-authorisation as a collective bargaining group and to expand its geographic coverage to be able to include producers in northern NSW.

QDO chief executive Adrian Peake said the draft decision from ACCC was a step in the right direction. It supported one of the important issues QDO raised during the recent Senate inquiry, he said. This was that collective bargaining groups needed to be able to expand their geographic coverage and membership to ensure a balance is maintained with the processing sector, which is continuing to rationalise with fewer processors having larger geographic regions and more suppliers.

Malanda part of Nat Foods cheese review

NATIONAL Foods has announced an extensive review of its cheese manufacturing operations across Australia. The sites include several in southern States as well as Malanda in Queensland.

Far North Queensland dairyfarmers have reacted positively to the review, noting that cheese production at Malanda is critical to absorb milk production above National Foods's requirements for the fresh milk market.

This follows news earlier in the year that National Foods had lost the contract for Woolworths private label milk. Speaking to the ABC Country Hour, Atherton Tableland dairyfarmer Lyn O'Connor said the northern processing plant was set to reopen after it was closed in 2009. The milk produced for cheese making will be sold at

the lower, second tier price but the news was still positive.

"The Malanda plant, while it is part of the review of those assets, there's no threats to it, and it's actually coming back in line for production at the moment," she said.

Ms O'Connor said many Tablelands farmers had lost trust in National Foods after it lost the contract to supply Woolworths earlier this year, but said this would go some way to repairing the relationship.

"I've certainly had a stern chat with National Foods about trust," she said. "We've got a long way to go there in building a relationship. With any new business partner trust is really important and it takes time, you can't fake trust."

National Foods said its cheese-manufacturing business

had evolved through brand and site acquisitions during the past 10 years and to ensure it remains a leading producer of everyday and specialty cheeses, a capital investment would be required.

The review would the duplication in the National Foods network, the long-term viability and sustainability of the sites and would look at innovation, technology and current and future environmental requirements.

"For now, it is very much business as usual at all of the sites under review," National Foods said in a statement. "Our people, product quality and safety remain our key focus now and in the future."

"We expect that the review will be finalised in February 2011 although some improvement opportunities may be identified and implemented in the meantime."

Candidates nominated for DA board

A FARMER, a scientist and a dairy manufacturing leader have been nominated to the Dairy Australia board for the company's 2010 annual general meeting.

Current directors Len Stephens and Stephen O'Rourke will not seek re-election at the forthcoming annual general meeting. Current chairman Max Roberts will stand for re-election and two new nominees for board selection are Dr Alan Grant and Bruce Donnison.

Dr Grant, retires as senior vice president research and development for Kraft International in Chicago and returns to Australia in late 2010.

Mr Donnison, managing director ingredients for Fonterra Australia, has more than 20 years in the sector.

Tablelands farmers discuss price

ATHERTON Tablelands dairyfarmers met at Malanda, Queensland, to discuss their new pricing contracts offered by National Foods, the ABC has reported recently.

The report said that seven families in the region would be opting out of the industry all together. Ravenshoe, Qld, farmer Lyn O'Connor said the meeting didn't dramatically change things but was focused on clarifying the

new pricing structure for the Tablelands farmers so they were completely informed before they made decisions about their future.

"I'm still struggling to understand all the bits of it but the main thing is there's staff on hand and people you can go in and do income estimates with," she said. Ms O'Connor said farmers should all still be producing milk as normal despite a

lower requirement for milk overall for next year.

"There is no limit on people's production," she said. "What we've been limited to is the amount of milk that we will be paid for at Tier 1 (about 47 cents per litre), which is for a higher price, but there is no limit and people can still produce as much as they like. But the rest will be paid at Tier 2 (about 28 cents per litre)."

Ms O'Connor milks about 220 head of cattle at Ravenshoe and said she would remain in the industry for the long term.

"Certainly my husband could confirm that it's a stressful time," she said. "The stress is very real but you either want a future in this industry or you don't. We are between 40 and 50 years of age and we'll be here for a bit longer."

Call goes out for leading women

KEY POINTS

- Award for rural women
- Provides \$10,000 bursary to help develop skills and rural industry

WOMEN with ideas, enthusiasm and commitment have the chance to be recognised for their contribution to Queensland's primary industries sector. Applications for the annual Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation's (RIRDC) Rural Women's Award are now open.

Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) award co-ordinator Natalie Schultz encouraged women from all rural industries to apply. "If you are passionate about making a difference to your industry or rural community then you should apply," she said.

"The award process provides

women with an important leadership and capacity-building opportunity. There will be four finalists, from which the state winner will be chosen.

"Finalists have the opportunity to participate in a range of skill-building workshops and meet the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland, Tim Mulherin, and senior DEEDI leaders."

The winner will receive a \$10,000 bursary aimed at assisting them to develop their skills and contribute to profitable and sustainable primary industries in Queensland.

The bursary can be used for different purposes including international study tours, training and website development.

Past winners and finalists have been proactive in the feedlot industry, conservation, horticulture, sheep and cattle producing, wool growing, sugar and kangaroo industries.

This year's winner, partner in a macropod harvesting enterprise in south-west Queensland Sharyn Garrett, is using her bursary to develop a business strategy for the Maranoa Kangaroo Harvesters and Growers Co-operative.

"Sharyn's project will review current operations and provide recommendations to assist the co-operative to become an even more efficient and sustainable operation," Ms Shultz said. "The success of the co-operative will enable more effective kangaroo management at a cross-property level, ensuring that production objectives are met and that total grazing pressure is alleviated."

Queensland 2010 runner-up Jane Milburn said the award process was a useful way to refine how to present one's self and ideas. She said her project aimed to create a fresh image for agriculture through writing about sustainable food production in Australia and developing a web

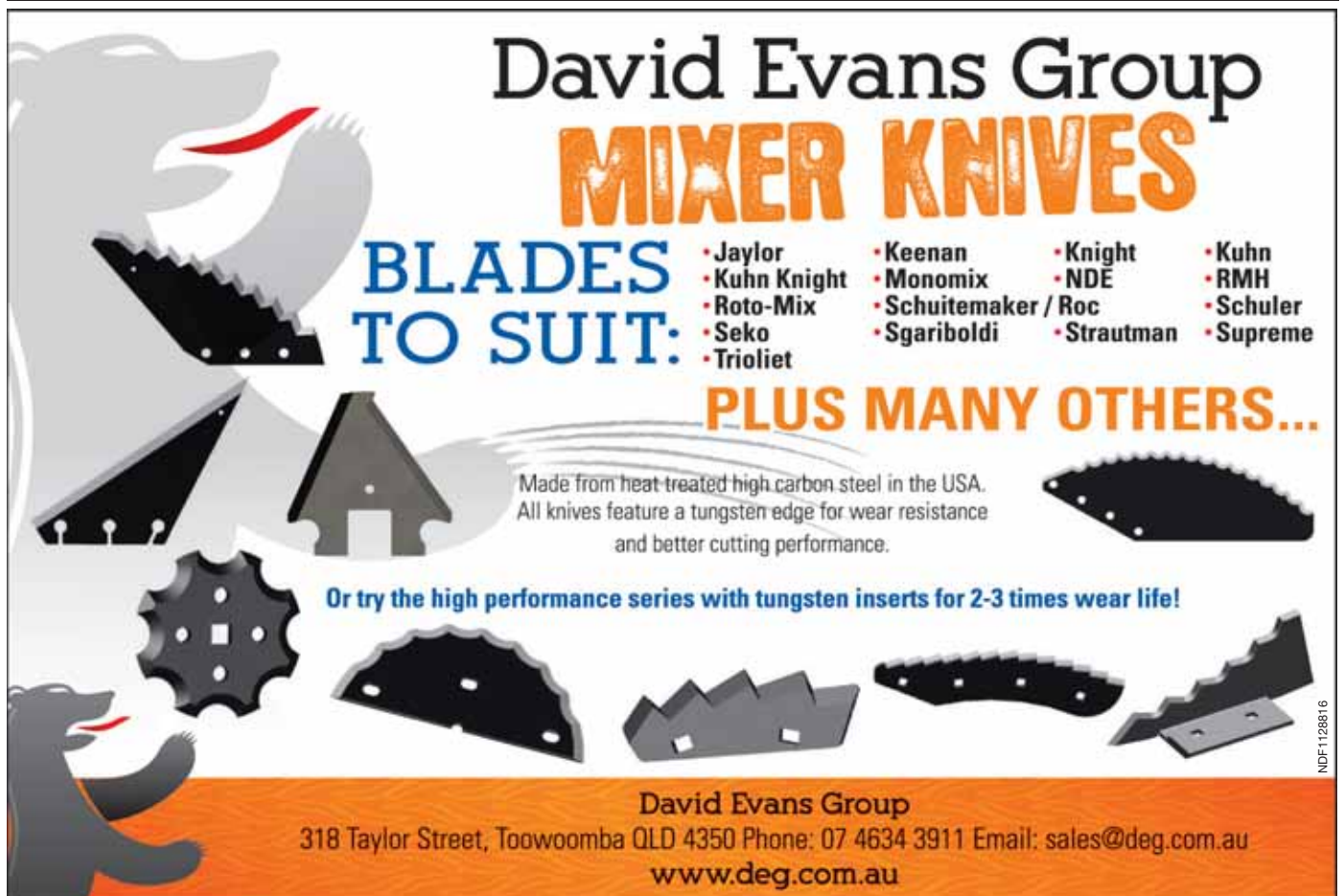
platform linking existing food and industry information.

"There's a need to extend the customer interest supported by shows such as *MasterChef*, to knowing more about the master producers who grow the fresh, safe and sustainable food we all eat every day and tend to take for granted," she said.

"The award also comes with an Australian Institute of Company Directors training week in Canberra, which is a fabulous learning opportunity."

Applications for the 2011 Rural Women's Award, sponsored by DEEDI, close on October 15 – World Rural Women's Day.

More info
Natalie Schultz,
Phone: (07) 3239 3515
Email: <wiriu@deedi.qld.gov.au>
Web: <www.ruralwomensaward.gov.au>



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QFF welcomes geothermal bill amendments

KEY POINTS

- New laws improve farmers negotiating rights
- Compensation to be paid up front

THE Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) has welcomed amendments to mining legislation contained in the Geothermal Energy Bill 2010, passed through the Queensland Parliament in August.

QFF chief executive Dan Galligan said the new laws would improve the ability for farmers to negotiate with exploration companies as they sought

resources such as coal seam gas.

"QFF and AgForce have been lobbying for two years to improve the legislation surrounding resources exploration on agricultural land," Mr Galligan said. "This legislation takes positive steps to improving the relationship between the agricultural sector and the expanding resources sector in Queensland."

"Given that the resources industry is projecting to build about 40,000 coal seam gas wells in the Surat Basin alone, these changes are absolutely critical for the agricultural and mining industry to coexist through a challenging period."

Mr Galligan said this legislation would support at the minimum an opportunity for a better relationship between farmers and resource companies. "The power remains with the resource company to gain access to farmers' land with no right to veto from the landholder," he said. "However, these laws should ensure that exploration companies are doing the right thing once they get inside the farm gate."

"The law will require the companies to behave fairly, respect the land and the farmers living and working there, and to provide compensation up front. QFF is of the view that this is a



There are high hopes that amendments to the Geothermal Energy Bill will improve landholder rights.

positive start from the government to addressing a host of problems in this area. This is a fundamental improvement that must be swiftly implemented to have absolute affect."

Outrage at increase in State land rents

THE Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) along with other agricultural groups is outraged by the Queensland Government's newest cash-grabbing exercise – up to 400% increases on road licences and leases on Crown land – without warning to land holders, without transparency and without any real option for farmers to terminate the lease arrangements.

While the Government has since announced some concessions in that minimum rents will reduce from \$370 to \$200, farmers have found themselves in a no win, no consultation, no choice situation where their

farm is unfortunate enough to include a State easement or land parcel reserved for some future use. Farmers currently pay for the privilege of managing these small parcels of Government reserves; they must pay in advance, must pay an application fee to withdraw from the lease and in most cases must continue to manage weeds and infestations even if able to be released from the one-sided lease arrangement.

After receiving their road licence bills from the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) last month, producers across

Queensland were shocked to find the minimum rental on agricultural land has increased from \$75 to \$370, apparently due to a change in regulations. Producers have found out about the increase when they received their bill in the mail.

The cost increase appears to be a mechanism to raise funds for the State Government and does not reflect costs of administration.

It is not geared to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or movement in property value and the charges are remarkably similar, irrespective of land size, location or condition.

QDO meets with Anna Bligh

QUEENSLAND Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) president Brian Tessmann and chief executive officer Adrian Peake were among representatives from the Queensland Farmers' Federation and member organisations to meet with Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, the Minister for Primary Industries, Tim Mulherin, and senior government staff last month at a luncheon industry briefing.

The opportunity was taken to raise issues including:

- the roll out of the various policies and legislation changes affecting the relationship between mining and agriculture;
- land rent increases;
- water pricing and water planning;
- concerns about impacts from the Murray Darling Basin planning process;
- need for whole government commitment to biosecurity and to maintain resources for management of existing pests includes cattle ticks;
- divestment and reinvestment in primary industry research and development; and
- implementation issues with reef regulations.

NLIS agrees to a faulty tag trial

A TWO-YEAR trial of National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) tags will aim to work out why some may be faulty, the ABC Country Hour has reported.

Industry has been pushing for the trial because they believe graziers are being unfairly penalised for something that is not in their control and now NLIS Limited has agreed. Lifetime traceability for cattle was introduced in 1999 to meet

European Union requirements for cattle exports. By 2004 it became compulsory that every beast moved off a property had to have a tag in their ear to allow the animals to be tracked if there was a biosecurity concern.

Penalties for non-compliance are mixed but it can cost up to \$40 a beast if a NLIS tag does not work at a saleyard or abattoir.

The manager of NLIS Limited, Jo Quigley, said the trial would be run on three properties to ascertain why some people were having higher than expected problems with tags. Ms Quigley said there were also discussions around doing research into re-using tags. Currently graziers buy tags for about \$3.50 each but once the animal is slaughtered the tags are discarded.



Five steps to better farm biosecurity

KEY POINTS

- Identify risks of bringing disease or pests onto farm
- Five key areas for animal owners: purchased livestock, stray animals, people, vehicles, feed and water

PRODUCERS are advised to follow good on-farm biosecurity measures to protect their livestock and crops from the constant threat of pests and diseases.

Biosecurity Queensland principal veterinary officer Janet Berry said being aware of biosecurity meant keeping animals safe from disease and ensuring continued market access for produce. "Straightforward measures built into everyday practice will go a long way toward protecting your farm and your future," she said.

"Animal owners should

assess the risks to their animals and act to reduce the risks."

The five main risks are:

1. Purchased livestock

The movement of new animals onto a property represents the highest risk of introducing disease into a herd or flock. Inspect the animals carefully for disease before buying them.

Always request the history and supporting paperwork, such as the vendor declaration or national health statement, before buying the animals. Isolate new animals to make sure they are disease and weed free before mixing with other stock.

2. Stray animals

Poor fencing can allow stray livestock and wild or feral animals to mix with stock and introduce disease. Keep all gates shut and check fences regularly.

3. People

People can carry animal pests and diseases. Ask all visitors where they have been previously; whether they've had contact with other animals, or been abroad

and possibly brought diseases home. Keep a register of all visitors.

Restrict visitor access to the property and make sure they don't go near animals unless they have clean clothes and have disinfected hands and footwear.

4. Vehicles and equipment

Vehicles and equipment can carry pests and diseases. Control the entry of vehicles onto the property and ensure they stay in a designated vehicle area. Use the farm's vehicles to transport visitors or material around the farm.

Maintain clean and disinfected equipment and do not share with other animal owners.

5. Feed and water

Feed and water can contain pests and diseases. Always request a commodity vendor declaration with purchased feed. Keep feed in a clean dry storage area and ensure it does not become mouldy. Make sure that water sources are not contaminated by wild or feral animals or birds.

Dr Berry said there were major outcomes of having farm biosecurity plans in place. "Outcomes include improved profitability through the reduction of diseases, less need for expensive chemical treatments or vaccinations and improved animal production," she said.

"Farm biosecurity plans can reduce the risk of introducing pests and diseases onto a property that are already present on your neighbour's farm or elsewhere in Queensland. Good planning now will also reduce the impact of the next disease emergency.

"The rapid and wide geographical spread of emergency diseases can be controlled more easily if all livestock owners begin to practice farm biosecurity now."

MORE INFO

Website:

<www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au>

Phone: 13 25 23

Robotic rotary a world first

THE world's first robotic milking rotary, developed by DeLaval in collaboration with Australia's FutureDairy project, will be unveiled later this year.

This revolutionary automatic milking solution was developed to suit various types of dairy systems starting with Australia's large herd and pasture-based systems.

However, it is flexible enough to operate in a variety of dairy farms including free-stalls and

loose housing typical of overseas industries.

FutureDairy's collaboration involved Dairy Australia, the University of Sydney, Industry & Investment NSW and DeLaval.

FutureDairy chairman Shirley Harlock said the robotic rotary is one of the most exciting recent developments for Australian dairyfarmers.

"Automatic milking technology makes significant changes to the daily routine on the dairy

farm," she said. "Although it won't suit all dairyfarmers, the robotic rotary offers considerable benefits in terms of enabling more flexible working conditions and improved lifestyle."

The flexible working conditions allow farmers to spend more time on their high priorities. Automatic milking systems have been available and widely adopted overseas for more than a decade.

"We know from research conducted by the FutureDairy team at Camden that automatic milking works under Australian, pasture-based systems," she said. "The existing AMS technology will still be a good option for smaller herds."

The robotic rotary offers a better solution for larger Australian herds in terms of cost and capacity. "In the long term, this is the beginning of a com-



pletely new way of milking cows and running a dairy business," Mrs Harlock said.

DeLaval will unveil the robotic rotary in November under the brand name DeLaval AMR (Automatic Milking Rotary) at Camden, NSW, and at the EuroTier 2010 show in Germany.

FutureDairy is an example of your dairy service levy at work. For more information about the Dairy Australia levy go to website <www.dairyaustralia.com.au>.

Contact: Dr Kendra Kerrisk, email <kendra.kerrisk@sydney.edu.au>

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New study seeks C-score of milk

KEY POINTS

- Dairy Australia study to calculate average carbon footprint of a litre of milk
- Four different farm systems to be studied
- To meet overseas customer demands

A NEW Dairy Australia study is measuring the carbon (C) emissions of milk – Australia’s part in a global agreement to track milk’s C footprint.

Milk production and total exports off-farm will be measured on 200 to 300 farms. Results of the study will be used to reinforce Australian dairying’s ‘green-cred’ with consumers in Australia and overseas.

Dairy Australia program manager of resource management and technology, Neil van Buuren, explained the six- to 12-month study. “We are calculating the average C footprint of a litre of milk ex-farm across four different production systems,” he said. “These vary the balance of pasture and supplementary feeds, ranging from pasture-only to low feed, high feed and total feed only.”

Mr van Buuren discussed the study with a group of farmers in

south-west Victoria in June. It will be discussed with other farmer groups elsewhere around Australia in coming months.

The study was developed mid-last year when Australia, among the world’s major dairy-producing nations, agreed to work with the International Dairy Federation to develop a methodology to measure milk-processing C outputs with standardised methods and measurements.

Dairy Australia was Australia’s representative at that agreement and has since secured an agreement in principle from milk processors to collect the data on their energy inputs into processing the milk.

“Of course, processing that milk into different sorts of foods would result in different energy needs,” Mr van Buuren said. “We are still to decide the number of products we will examine but it’s likely to include cheese, milk powder, fresh milk and butter.

“We’ll account for transport and measure how far the milk travels, what each processor does with the waste and the by-products, and eventually where the products go.”

Ingredient products destined for export will be measured to the port of departure – mostly Melbourne, with a small quantity through Fremantle, Western Australia. The C accounting finishes when the goods leave



A new study will calculate the average C footprint of a litre of milk ex-farm across four different production systems.

Australia. The industry has opted for a generic figure rather than an individual factory-specific total.

This will be the figure – expressed in kilograms of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalents) – used to satisfy marketing criteria both domestically and with overseas buyers.

“As ingredients suppliers, our milk-processing companies will need that information to give to overseas buyers who have to calculate the C footprint of their products,” Mr van Buuren said.

Japan, Korea, France and Sweden have already legislated for C labelling on foodstuffs. United States and United

Kingdom supermarket chains Walmart and Tesco are requiring independent C labelling and Marks and Spencers has instituted its own C-score system.

“The US has just completed its study and Canada has just started its,” Mr van Buuren said. “New Zealand has done it and has released the data ex-farm. This study allows us to measure the benchmarks so that we can credibly claim improvement over time.

“A bonus for the farmer will be that we’ll be able to tell them which systems have the lowest C content and they can use this information to develop their own business strategy to lower their farm’s carbon emissions.”

Q2 backs Dairying Better and Better

THE Queensland Dairyfarmers’ Organisation (QDO), on behalf of the Dairy Natural Resource Management (NRM) Program, has secured funding through the Queensland Government to expand the Dairying Better ‘n Better for Tomorrow (DBnB).

The funding, which is a part of the Queensland Government initiative, Q2 Coasts & Country, is supported by NRM bodies Burnett Mary Regional Group, Fitzroy Basin Association, NQ Dry Tropics, Reef Catchments and Terrain.

The project will provide resources for the delivery of

DBnB across dairy reef catchments to improve management practices on farm that enhance the sustainable and efficient management of natural resources, while at the same time reducing risks to water quality.

The funding will provide dairyfarmers with the opportunity to apply for incentives funds to implement technology and management practices on farm, and to access soil and nutrient management planning services, training and one-on-one technical assistance.

This project also provides the opportunity for participating farm-

ers to have property farm maps developed for their enterprise.

More than one third of Queensland dairyfarmers are now involved with the Dairying Better ‘n Better program and during the past six years the program has assisted hundreds of farmers to assess and implement management practices to enhance the sustainability of their farms.

QDO recognises the support provided through the Department of Environment and Resource Management and the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Kate Jones.

Support for this project has also been provided through the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, through the secondment of industry development officer Sarah Childs.

The Dairy NRM program is a partnership between QDO and Subtropical Dairy.

Applications from dairyfarmers for incentives close on October 29.

Farmers who are interested in applying for assistance should contact a member of the Dairy NRM team, phone (07) 3236 2955.



Use feedpads to reduce tick treatments

KEY POINTS

- Ticks can't survive in hostile environment
- Feedpads are tick hostile
- Dairy cows kept on feedpads at night had fewer ticks

By Lex Turner*

MANAGEMENT strategies to assist cattle tick control are commonly practised in the beef industry but most dairyfarmers cannot utilise paddock spelling and rotation to aid in tick control.

A recent Subtropical Dairy (SD) survey considered the possibility of strategically utilising feedpads to assist in controlling tick numbers on dairy farms.

Cattle ticks grow slowly then engorge rapidly one day and drop off the cattle early the next morning. Housing the cattle on an environment that is hostile to the engorged ticks at this time will mean that these engorged ticks will perish and will not lay eggs for the next generation of ticks.

Cattle permanently on a tick-hostile environment should not have any ticks and a small trial done in 1994 demonstrated that ticks do not survive in normal feedlot conditions. Cattle infested with ticks were introduced to a feedlot and the female cattle ticks engorged and dropped off the cattle but did not survive to reinfest the cattle or subsequent cattle in that pen.

But most farmers do not want their dairy cattle under feedlot conditions for long periods of time so maybe the strategic use of feedlot conditions could be useful in greatly reducing tick numbers.

A survey was conducted to examine dairyfarmers using feedpads at night in cattle tick areas and comparing their tick treatment needs with other farm-



Strategic use of feedpads may help dairyfarmers better control ticks.

ers in the district or with their previous tick control requirement. Each of these comparisons was considered as a separate case study and results of five of these case studies from various areas in Queensland are presented here.

This was not a designed trial but a brief investigation to see if there may be some useful information for the industry.

The expected result was that farms that provided a hostile environment for the ticks when the engorged female ticks were dropping off the cattle early in the morning should have the least problem with ticks.

Case study 1

This farmer used a feedpad every night throughout the year but the feedpad was open to a large tropical pasture paddock and the cows were never confined. As the cows were not usually hungry after the night feed on the feedpad, most stayed on the denuded area around the feedpad until the morning milking.

The milkers were not treated during the season and this is compared with the heifers that were not using a feedpad and that were treated 3-4 times. This result could also be compared with previous years when the

milkers were often dipped. The dry times may have some effect but the result appears promising.

This farm was compared to a nearby farm that also used a feedpad but only occasionally. This comparison farm has plenty of ticks and treated the milkers, dry cows and heifers five times though the season. This was reported as a normal number of treatments for this farm. Young cattle housed in the small paddocks (with no grass) around the dairy did not get ticks.

Case study 2

This farmer used a feedpad every night throughout the year and kept the cattle in the feedpad area 24 hours a day during the summer. The cattle did have access to a lounging area but this area did not have any pasture and there was no grass along the fence lines.

The milkers, dry cows and heifers did not get treated for ticks under this system. Beef cattle on this farm were kept in separate paddocks with separate facilities and became heavily ticked during the season. Four treatments were applied to the beef cattle this season, and this was considered normal for the beef herd. These were *Bos indicus* cattle and should be more

tick resistant than the milking herd of Friesians.

This farm was compared with a nearby farm who was a semi feedpad user where the milkers were fed every night on a feedpad in a grassy paddock. The milkers were not treated this season and the heifers were only treated once.

Case study 3

This farmer used feedpads but they were open to other areas. The feedpads were used after the evening milking and after both milkings for the fresh cows. The milkers have hardly been treated for years. The heifers are treated about three times/year and the dry cattle about two times/year.

The comparison farmer also used a feedpad but mostly during the day. The milkers were treated once but there have not been many ticks on the milkers in the past few years as they spend more time in the yards. Many come back to the feedpad at night to finish the silage and then remain there until the morning milking. The heifers and dry cows get more ticks and were treated two times/year and spend most of their time grazing.

Case study 4

This farmer used a feedpad every

day and the feedpad area was fenced off and no pasture was in the feedpad area. Night use of the feedpad was variable. Cows were treated 3-4 times and the heifers and dry cows were treated 3-4 times. The heifers and dry cows did not have access to any feedpad. The young heifers were in a total feedpad situation and did not get ticks.

Case study 5

This farmer fed the cows every night on the feedpad but the feedpad was part of a 20-hectare paddock. The cows were treated four times and the heifers and dry cows were also treated four times during the season and both groups were in separate paddocks.

The comparison farmer used a feedpad every day but the cattle spent the nights in night paddocks after an evening feed. The cows were treated twice last season.

Summary

It appears that feedpads could be used to help control cattle tick numbers. The cattle need to be confined to an area when most of

Research for natural tick treatment

NEW Queensland research may prove that a naturally occurring fungus could be used as a non-chemical way for beef and dairy producers to treat cattle ticks. The fungus known as *Metarhizium* is a natural enemy of cattle ticks.

While there are chemical pesticides or acaricides on the market to control cattle ticks, there have been no non-chemical or organic options until now.

Scientists from the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) and the University of Queensland want to develop *Metarhizium* into a commercial biopesticide. The

biopesticide would be easy to store, easy to apply and research shows certain strains of *Metarhizium* to be extremely virulent against ticks.

Laboratory investigations have shown this particular fungus can kill 100% of engorged adult female ticks within 48 hours. Further trials will ensure any new formulation will be effective against all tick stages, particularly during the warmer times of year when they are most common.

Agri-Science Queensland senior scientist Dr Diana Leemon said the current trials involved applying fungal spores to the ticks in a similar way to conventional pesticides. "Once

the trials finish in November this year, we hope to attract a commercial partner interested in commencing registration procedures next year, taking us one step closer to commercialisation," she said. "At the moment there are 24 fungal biopesticide products available worldwide, with four registered in Australia. They treat pasture and cane grubs as well as locusts and grasshoppers and don't deal with cattle ticks."

Dr Leemon said the 2010 trials were part of a joint partnership between DEEDI and Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), which is co-funding the \$414,500 project.

the engorged ticks detach during the early morning period and this area needs to be where most detached ticks become squashed. The best example is total tick reduction in total feedlot conditions.

**Lex Turner is with the Animal Research Institute, Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, part of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation.*

MORE INFO
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 New grant, provides a 12 month loan of scheduling equipment to eligible producers to increase performance on their low pressure system. The scheme also provides producers with a demonstration on how to use the equipment. The equipment will assist producers to irrigate pastures & crops effectively.

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Summer forage options

KEY POINTS

- Summer forages have potential for high yields in subtropics/tropics
- Must be part of balanced diet - often high in fibre
- Consider water availability for season before planting

WITH recent rain along with increasing temperature and day length, it is timely for dairyfarmers to consider summer forage options.

The advantage of growing summer forages in the subtropics and tropics is the high potential for dry matter yield. Recent studies conducted within the Forage Plus project showed that kikuyu pasture oversown with annual ryegrass can yield in excess of 20 tonnes dry matter(DM)/hectare/year while triple cropping maize and barley produced 40 tonnes DM/ha/year as a 'cut and carry' system.

While summer forages are efficient at maximising forage production from available water and nutrients, they are typically high in structural fibre content (neutral detergent fibre) and low in crude protein content. It is important that summer forages are fed as part of a well-balanced diet to ensure dry matter intake and milk output remains high.

Farmers are confronted with many different species of summer grasses, legumes, crops and mixtures and they are often uncertain as to which combination of species will best meet their requirements. The main factors to consider are the topography of the farm, the amount of available water and the type of farm system and herd requirements.

To assist in the selection process this article provides a summary of the agronomic characteristics of a range of commonly grown warm-season forages.



More dairyfarmers are using maize silage to reduce the impact of seasonal deficits in home-grown forage.

However, before deciding on the type and proportion of pasture or crops to plant, farmers should first assess the stored soil water available, and the amount, reliability and expected duration of irrigation supply, and climate outlook.

Determining soil water content

Before selecting the most appropriate forage, determine whether there is sufficient soil moisture to establish and grow a forage crop at this time of year. Estimate whether there is soil water down to a depth of 50 centimetres (equivalent to 100 millimetres of plant-available water for a heavy cracking-clay soil). If not, then forage growth will rely predominantly on rainfall or irrigation water if available.

Soil water depth can be measured quickly using either a 'push-rod', by pushing it into soil by hand, or a 'soil-corer', by hammering it into the ground to remove a core sample for inspection of soil moisture. As a guide, soil water content can be estimated by assuming that 20% of rainfall falling onto fallow heavy-cracking clay soil is stored as soil water – for example 20mm of soil water will be stored from 100mm of rainfall fallow.

Agronomic characteristics of forages

In many instances pure swards are the most efficient at converting water and nutrients into dry matter yield. Similarly crops are more water-use efficient compared with grasses and legumes.

Grasses

Kikuyu: This perennial pasture species performs best under high rainfall (more than 1000 mm/annum) or supplemented with irrigation. Kikuyu can be highly water-use efficient and can produce dry matter yields up to 24 tonnes/ha/year when oversown with annual ryegrass.

It withstands heavy and frequent grazing and when managed well to stimulate the production of higher quality leaf, neutral detergent fibre values are less than 60% and crude protein content 20%.

Kikuyu provides ground cover throughout the year and effectively prevents soil erosion that may occur during periods of fallow in cropping systems. Kikuyu responds well to nitrogen (N) fertiliser and prefers high fertility soils.

Setaria: Setaria is a hardy perennial pasture species that is palatable to livestock and can withstand heavy grazing. It is typically grown along the coast and on the Atherton Tablelands where annual rainfall exceeds 1000mm and tolerates water logging during high rainfall events. Well-managed setaria is capable of producing up to 18 tonnes DM/ha.

Rhodes grass, Gatton panic and Pangola grass: These deep-rooted perennial pasture grasses require a minimum of 500mm of rainfall per annum. Varieties such as Callide Rhodes grass have shown to be highly productive, palatable and persistent during drought at Muttapilly Research Station.



Maize uses water, nutrients and sunlight more efficiently than pastures to give high yields.

Quality of the diet is higher when animals voluntarily select and graze leaf and not stem. However, even with different grazing management strategies and levels of N fertiliser application, milk yield from Friesian cows grazing pure swards of tropical grass without supplements did not exceed 12 litres/cow/day.

Gatton panic and pangola grass are also fast growing and maturing tropical grasses with high fibre content. As dairy farm systems intensify, tropical pastures such as these are less likely to have a role with the milking herd. They are better suited as a feed source for dry cows and heifers.



Lucerne swards are persistent and respond quickly to rainfall and irrigation.

Legumes

While legumes do not produce as much dry matter yield as grasses and crops, they are important in crop rotations to improve soil N, break disease cycles and increase the quality of the diet.

Soybean: Annual legume suited to medium rainfall zones. Grazed soybean is highly digestible with a low fibre content, though regrowth is relatively poor after grazing. When harvested for silage, yields of up to 8-10 tonnes DM/ha are possible with irrigation. The comparatively high crude protein content of soybean complements the diet with crops such as maize that contains high levels of starch.

Lablab: Lablab is a summer annual or short-lived perennial with good tolerance to high temperatures and drought conditions with growth observed with less than 500mm of rainfall per annum. Lablab responds well to water, temperature and day length with a maximum dry matter yield of 14 tonnes/ha recorded.

It provides palatable, high quality feed with low fibre content. Lablab is a valuable forage crop that can be used to improve the quality of diets based on tropical grasses and forage crops such as sorghum. Lablab responds well to strip grazing and will provide up to three grazings per season if managed not to graze too severely.

Lucerne: Perennial legume adapted to Australian soils and climate with a minimum annual rainfall requirement of 550mm. It is tolerant to periods of drought and can be successfully established as a dryland forage.

Lucerne swards are persistent and respond quickly to rainfall and irrigation. Lucerne is a palatable, high quality, high yielding legume that can be grazed or conserved as silage or hay.

Yields as high as 15 to 20 tonnes DM/ha/year are readily achieved under irrigation. Highly winter active cultivars are available that produce feed during the cool and warm seasons. The performance of lucerne is more influenced by the success of the establishment processes and by environmental conditions, pest and disease incidence and management factors.

Arachis pintoi – cultivar Amarillo peanut: The big advantage the creeping forage peanut has compared with the twining legumes glycine and siratro is that it can withstand heavy grazing. This leafy legume is high quality, palatable and highly digestible.

It is typically suited to annual rainfall of 1000mm and will remain dormant during dry seasons. Its niche is as a mixture with rain-grown pastures for milking cows, dry cows and heifers.

Yields in the subtropics of 6 to 7 tonnes DM/ha/year have been recorded as pure stands. The seeding cultivars bury their seed underground while many cultivars spread by rhizomes.

Crops

The most commonly grown summer crops are maize, sorghum, and millet. Ten years ago, these crops were predominantly grown in the lower rainfall zone (less than 1000mm per annum) of the Darling Downs where low DM

yield/ha could be overcome by cropping much larger areas. In recent years, many farms across Queensland have begun to trial maize or sorghum either to increase total DM production or at least to maintain production within an extended period of drought when rainfall and irrigation water were low.

Sorghum: Forage sorghum is one of the most commonly grown annual summer forage crops because it is capable of producing high yields quickly on a wide range of soil types and under variable seasonal conditions. It is relatively drought tolerant and has the potential to access deep stored soil water.

The main species of forage sorghum are Sudan grass, sorghum x Sudan hybrids and sweet sorghums. Sudan grass is fast to establish, yielding up to 4 to 6 tonnes DM/ha eight weeks after planting. However, the Sudan grass types of forage sorghum are also fast maturing and high in structural fibre.

The sorghum hybrids and sweet sorghums were developed specifically to improve forage quality by delaying the onset of flowering, increasing the sugar content, or developed to contain less lignin. The yield of hybrid sorghum is responsive to N fertiliser.

They are well suited to grazing and ensiling with maximum yields at Mutdapilly Research Station of 17 tonnes DM/ha. Sorghum is ideally grazed at 1m to optimise quality and minimise risk of prussic acid poisoning.

Maize: Maize uses water, nutrients and sunlight more efficiently than pastures to give high yields, in excess of 24 tonnes DM/ha when harvested for silage at Mutdapilly Research Station. The yield and quality of maize silage harvested is influenced by variety with later-maturing varieties producing higher yields but usually having lower grain content and hence quality compared with early to mid-maturing varieties.

When the crop approaches physiological maturity, grain to stover (stalk) ratio is about 50:50 of the total DM and it is generally harvested as silage. If more starch is required by the milkers, the grain content of the feed can

be increased to 70 or 80% of the total DM by harvesting only the cobs or by leaving much of the stover during harvest.

Ineffective crop management including poor plant density, weeds or inadequate water and nutrients are the most common factors limiting yield.

More dairyfarmers are using maize silage to reduce the impact of seasonal deficits in home-grown forage and to increase the overall energy density of the diet to increase milk production per cow.

For maize silage to be used effectively in a dairy farm system, it needs to be incorporated into a whole feedbase system that is properly balanced according to the dietary intake requirements of the herd. Given the associated infrastructure and operating cost and labour associated with feeding maize silage as a partial or total mixed ration, it is better suited to PMR or TMR production systems.

Millet: Millet provides a quick, safe and high quality feed that can be used to fill feed gaps in both autumn and spring. This crop can be established in a range of soil types and is tolerant of drought conditions.

Optimal height for grazing is between 25 to 40 centimetres when the quality of the crop is highest. Varieties such as Pearl millet or newer hybrid varieties have longer growing seasons providing up to three grazings under irrigated conditions.

Millet is suitable to be grazed or conserved. It is palatable and does not contain prussic acid. Typical yields are lower than those from forage sorghum, but when well managed yields in excess of seven tonnes DM/ha can be achieved.

This information is supplied for Queensland dairyfarmers by Agri-Science Queensland, part of the Department of Employment, Economics Development and Innovation.

MORE INFO
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- October:
18-20:** **Subtropical Dairy AGM and annual forum**
Far North Queensland
Contact: Neale Price
Phone: (07) 3396 6229
Fax: (07) 3396 6628
Email: <neale@dairyinfo.biz>
- November:
8-11:** **International Dairy Federation (IDF) World Dairy Summit**
Auckland, New Zealand
Contact: The Conference Company
Phone: +64 9 360 1240
Fax: +64 9 360 1242
Email: <wds2010@tcc.co.nz>
- November:
12:** **FutureDairy AMS new concept launch**
Camden, NSW
Contact: Michelle Heward
Phone: (02) 9351 1631
Contact: Dr Kendra Kerrisk
Mobile: 0428 101 372
- November
23-26:** **DFMC National Convention**
Maroochydore
Phone: (02) 8732 5206
Email: <info@dfmc.org.au>
Website: <www.dfmc.org.a>
- November
26:** **Dairy Australia annual general meeting**
- Melbourne, Vic**
Contact: Dairy Australia
Phone: (03) 9694 3777
Website: <www.dairyaustralia.com.au>
- 2011**
- January
3-7:** **National All Breeds Dairy Youth Camp**
Melbourne, Vic
Contact: National Centre for Dairy Education Australia
Phone: 1300 062 332
Email <kabraham@gotafe.vic.edu.au >
Website <www.ncdea.edu.au>
- January
16-21:** **International Dairy Week**
Tatura, Vic
Contact: Robyn Barber
Phone: 0459 324 235
Email:
<info@internationaldairyweek.com.au>
Website:
<www.internationaldairyweek.com.au>

DIARY DATES

To have an event included in the diary dates, send information to **Carlene and Alastair Dowie**
Phone/fax: (03) 5464 1542 Email:
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