



HOTLINE

Newsletter of the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria

August 2010

President's Report



It is great to be back on the job with renewed energy and vigour for all things dairy related, after taking a short break last month. During my time off, I took a drive up to see Lake Eyre in flood, which was a magnificent sight. I was amazed at the distances we travelled as we camped throughout North-western Victoria, South Australia, and Eastern New South Wales, and was reminded again of how vast this country really is.

The huge scale of this great country of ours can at times have its down side, as these vast distances are set to pose a significant challenge over the coming months as we gear up to tackle the impending locust plague.

The VFF/UDV have been keeping in regular contact with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) on the locust situation. The most recent estimates point to over 2.4 million hectares of infested land, with potential for damage on 9.6 million hectares if untreated.

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Nearly 75 percent of the infested area is privately owned land, so farmers will play a vital role in controlling the locust population by participating in the spring spray program.

The UDV, along with the VFF policy group and other commodity groups, is working with DPI to ensure that its communication program provides farmers with all the information they need to tackle this locust plague. Essential parts of the communication plan will include a full list of all approved chemicals, their with-holding periods, and the documentation that farmers will need to provide to access their rebate.

It is important to note that rebates will be given on the amount of chemical used, not the amount purchased, meaning detailed spray records will need to be kept by farmers when spraying for locusts. Spray record sheets can be sourced from DPI if you do not already have any.

The DPI will be holding information meetings for farmers in locust-affected regions during August. Make sure you check out the dates and locations when circulated in local newspapers, or online at www.dpi.vic.gov.au.

There are a number of locust fact sheets for different commodity farms on the DPI website as well, and I recommend having a look at the dairy farm fact sheet. Some Branches or DCs may like to have a DPI representative come and speak to their local meetings on the topic of locusts – please ring the UDV office on 1300 882 833 if you would like to organise this.

On a lighter note, I recently attended a dinner in honour of Dugald Graham, who retired as CEO of Rural Finance last month after 40 years of service. The dinner brought together people

from the agricultural industry, government and the community to acknowledge the great contribution Dugald has made to Rural Finance and to the wider community over his long career. The UDV wishes Dugald all the best for his retirement and the next phase of his life, and we thank Rural Finance for its fantastic support of dairy farmers and of the UDV over many years.



Chris Griffin
President
United Dairyfarmers of Victoria



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Biosecurity on farms

By Kerry Callow
UDV Central Councillor DC 10

Biosecurity is an issue that is now starting to appear on the radar for many farmers. To some it may sound like an intimidating concept – but in reality, it is not so daunting. In fact, many of us are already applying key biosecurity principles in our every day farm management practices and NLIS and milk factory QA programs. This is why the UDV, Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) and Dairy Australia is making our industry's biosecurity work program a high priority.

Biosecurity is the term used to describe a range of preventative measures that aim to reduce the risk of transmitting infectious diseases among animals and plants, and spreading pest species. Therefore, any measures you may already take to help prevent diseases in your herd are in fact biosecurity measures.

The major biosecurity elements for dairy farms have been identified by the dairy industry as:

- Managing stock movements
- Managing entry and movement of people and vehicles
- Managing the introduction of farm inputs such as stockfeed, water and other inputs
- Managing risks from adjoining land and neighbours
- Managing animals to prevent occurrence and spread of disease
- Prompt and safe removal of dead animals
- Managing shed effluent and other farm waste

A good example of biosecurity on dairy farms is the Victorian Test and Control Program for Bovine Johne's Disease (BJD), which is currently being used by a number of dairy farmers. As part of this program, existing livestock industry documentation, such as NLIS tags and National Vendor Declarations, is used to track any declared incidence of known BJD. Through the Johne's Disease Calf Accreditation Program, calf hygiene is used to prevent the spread of infection, and the program uses a scoring system to describe the level of risk associated with a particular herd.

As well as animal health, biosecurity also covers plant diseases and pests. In the future, this may affect how harvesting equipment is brought on and off the farm, so that traces of weeds or plant diseases are not spread across regions during an outbreak.

Another key component of successful biosecurity practice is record-keeping and investigation. It is vital that disease outbreaks can be identified and traced through documentation, so that in the event of an outbreak, a potential source can be quickly identified and isolated. It is hoped that biosecurity requirements can be incorporated into existing QA programs, such as the milk factory program, so that record keeping is simple and not too time consuming.

In many cases, farmers will already be meeting many biosecurity requirements, but they may not be recording what they do. On the other hand, some farmers may not realise that a practice that they have been using since the year dot is actually posing a threat to biosecurity on their farm.

ADF and Dairy Australia have developed biosecurity information for dairy farmers, which has also been provided to Animal Health Australia for the development of a manual of biosecurity standards and guidelines for grazing and livestock farms. These materials will provide useful strategies and procedures to help farmers minimize risks on their farms. It is expected that this manual will be completed later this year.

This issue's emergence has similarities to when the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) issues started to appear on the radar, years ago, before it became the well-known and legislated concept that it is today. Farming had been as much a lifestyle as a business to many of us, and to suddenly have to deal with OHS issues that most other businesses had been managing for years came to some as bit of a culture shock. However, the benefits to farmers and to industry were significant, and well worth the effort.

By getting on board with biosecurity early and making ourselves aware of the basics elements, we will be well prepared to implement good biosecurity practices that protect the health of our herds, and the security of our markets. More information on farm biosecurity can be found at <http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au>.

Achieving farm business success in a risky world

The VFF is pleased to present a new two-day training course for farmers on the topic of "Planning to succeed".

We all know that farming is subject to a number of risks, including climate and seasonal variability, economic fluctuations, fire, disease and more – but how do we identify and plan for these risks, and make the most of the opportunities that come our way?

Our new training course will help farmers to:

- Understand their financial position and capacity to service debt or make new investments
- Decide the best path for building their farm business
- Assess the capacity of their farm to support both the older and younger generations
- Assess the rewards and risks associated with new opportunities
- Prepare a business plan to take to lenders
- Use the "Farm Business Planner", that is supplied with their training, to plan their business

The course and accompanying software is provided by Alan Blackburn & Associates Farm Management Consultants. The course is registered with the Australian Government's FarmReady training scheme, which provides training fee reimbursements for eligible primary producers and their immediate family.

Training courses will be offered at a number of locations around Victoria, so contact Alan Blackburn & Associates on 5229 6296 to find out more about this great opportunity.

"The computer program "Farm Business Planner" is a great tool for analysing our current situation as well as opportunities we are considering. It has enabled us to create a very detailed plan, and we now have the ability to easily re-plan as situations change. The plans generated provide a good reference, especially when talking with financial institutions."

Colin and Kath Mirtchin, VFF members

Powerful Member Benefits with Utilacor and Origin Energy

The VFF has developed a special electricity buying scheme for its members. Through Utilacor and Origin Energy, UDV/VFF members can make significant savings on their electricity costs, with rates locked in for three years.

In addition to electricity pricing, there is also a number of energy management and auditing services available which have the potential to save you even more.

Already over 200 VFF members have taken advantage of this opportunity. Below are some of the success stories to date.

Origin Energy (for annual costs under \$25,000)

Dairy farmer

Origin identified potential for a saving of over \$700 on one quarterly bill alone.

Horticulturalist

An Executive Director estimates she will now be saving around \$1,000 a year.

Utilacor (for annual costs of \$25,000 and over)

Audit (Level 1)

Dairy farmer: After completing an analysis of their current billing, metering set up and performing a level 1 energy audit through their proprietary KWatch systems, this dairy farmer was able to implement changes which reduced their yearly bill by up to \$24,000 per annum.

Error Identification

Vegetable grower: A network charge (distribution) had been incorrectly implemented and gone unrecognised since 2006. Once rectified, this farmer was credited with \$80,000. A further \$15,000 worth of savings was identified going forward.

Invoicing Error

Dairy Farmer: Utilacor recently identified a simple decimal point error that had been ongoing for three years. On a monthly basis this was a small error and easily missed. After analysis the error was rectified and \$23,000 successfully recovered.

Expansion Poultry Farmer: A major business wanted to connect power to a new site. Utilacor achieved nearly a 50 percent reduction on connection costs from that of the distribution company (poles and wires).

New Construction

A large agribusiness needed to expand its on-farm electricity infrastructure. Utilacor was able to save them over \$400,000 from the quote submitted by the distributors.

To find out more about this scheme, contact the Origin VFF hotline on **1300 138 149**, or Utilacor on **1800 26 18 26**. It doesn't matter if your account is already with Origin.

If they are busy, leave your details on their answering service – messages are checked throughout the day and your call will be returned. It helps if you have a copy of a previous invoice available for reference, as the staff member will need certain information from the invoice to undertake their analysis.

Call Origin or Utilacor today to take advantage of this powerful UDV/VFF member benefit!

Not a UDV member? Join today, and get access to this fantastic energy deal, plus a range of other member benefits! Call the UDV on **1300 882 833** to sign up.

Diary dates

18th August

DC9 Smart Meter Dinner Forum – Cobden Golf Club, 6:30pm. Guest speakers include David Stanford from the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre. All farmers are invited to come along and find out more about smart meters, the installation process and the costs. RSVP to Simone and Nick Renyard on **03 5598 3789, 0419 316 850** or email n_renyard@bigpond.com.

Municipal rates target farming families

The recent increase in municipal rates by most local councils is a major issue for the VFF/UDV, and has the potential to affect thousands of members across Victoria. Draft budgets for the 2010/11 financial year have been released by most councils, and in many cases have already been adopted.

While some councils have adopted budgets that are looking to fix the inequity of the current system, unfortunately others are suggesting an increase in municipal rates by as much as 20 percent for farmers.

In many shires, we now have farm families contributing three times (or more) than that of their residential counterparts. This poses a huge financial burden on farmers. Not only is it a major concern for the VFF and its members across all commodities, but it is also an unsustainable approach for funding local governments.

The VFF/UDV is battling this issue on two fronts. At the local level, many of our members are working with their councils to look at ways to reduce the rates burden on farm land. In addition, we have requested that councils develop a plan to increase the farm rate differential over the next few years to reduce the amount of rates paid by farmers.

At the state level, we are lobbying for an increase in funding from the Federal Government to address lack of funds for rural councils. The VFF wants to see the amount of funding to local governments increase, and a larger proportion of that funding directed to rural councils that have a limited capacity to raise revenue.

Funding of regional local councils is a key issue in the VFF's state election policy platform, and we will continue to lobby on this issue, as well as other key election policies, in the months leading up to a state election late in 2010.



Which farm systems have the lowest carbon emissions?

Dairy employers are being reminded to ensure pay rates comply with changes to the Pastoral Award which apply from the first full pay period after 1 July 2010.

Dr Pauline Brightling who manages Dairy Australia's The People in Dairy program said the two main changes are increases in the minimum wage for each classification and the phasing in of transitional provisions.

"From the first of July, the minimum wage for each classification in the Pastoral Award increases by \$26.00 per week. If you are already paying more than \$26 per week above the award rate for the particular classification you do not have to pay the increase," said Dr Brightling.

In addition, transitional provisions begin to apply for the phasing in of pay rates, loadings and penalty rates.

"The transitional provisions in the award provide for the phasing in of increases over five years until 2014 at a rate of 20 percent per year."

"Transitional pay rates vary depending on the dairy business structure, the state in which the

business is located and previous award coverage. A simple way to work out which rates apply to your employees is to visit The People in Dairy website and click on the 'changes to pay rates 1 July 2010' on the home page," concluded Dr Brightling.

The People in Dairy is a Dairy Australia program designed to assist farmers as they improve how they attract, deploy, retain and develop the people they need to achieve the strategic visions of their businesses.

The program is based around the knowledge that people are the core to success on dairy farms. The program initiates project which aim to:

1. design farm systems to fit people, rather than trying to find people to fit the systems;
2. increase efficiency and productivity by ensuring the right people do the right jobs at the right times; and
3. place great value on having effective working relationships.

The program has gone from strength to strength, even winning an international web award in

2009 for www.thepeopleindairy.org.au. The website features a range of interactive templates to help farmers manage people and get started on things like position descriptions, performance appraisals, contracts and more.

The People in Dairy is one of many examples of your levy at work. Visit www.dairyaustralia.com.au for more information on your levy investment.



Young Dairy Development Program

Understanding whole farm planning – traditionally and online

The value of whole farm planning has become more and more apparent over recent years and an event in the South West on August 31 2010 will help YDDP members and other farmers adopt the popular practice on their properties.

Project facilitator for the DPI, Peter Wearne, will lead the workshops at the NCDEA based at WestVic Dairy, Terang. The sessions are free and lunch will be provided.

Mr Wearne advised that whole farm planning aims to get people thinking about their farms in a holistic way.

"We get people to look at all aspects of their farming operation, from land management right through to their personal goals," Mr Wearne said.

The sessions include land mapping and land classing, which help farmers understand the various capabilities of different parts of their farms, and to treat sensitive areas differently.

The sessions also help people consider risk management for things such as securing ongoing water supplies and fire protection.

The morning session will focus on traditional hand-written whole farm planning, based around a supplied aerial photo of their property. The afternoon session will concentrate on internet-based farm mapping tools.

People wanting to attend should register as soon as possible to allow time for an aerial photo to be obtained of their farms. The DPI supplies the photos for free. Please contact Holly at WestVic Dairy on (03) 55922477 for further information or to reserve your place.

Contact details of YDDP Coordinators:

Northern Region Coordinator:

Gemma Monk 03 5833 5928, 0427 538 778, gemmam@murraydairy.com.au.

Gippsland Regional Coordinator:

Kylie Barry 03 5624 3904, 0428 889 337, yddpgipps@dcsi.net.au.

South West Regional Coordinator:

Liza Fahey 03 5592 2477, 0408 141 820, yddp@westvic.com.au.

State Coordinator:

Bill Dullard 0448 969 337, yddpsc@gippsdairy.com.au

See www.yddp.org.au for event information.

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