



HOTLINE

Newsletter of the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria

February 2011

From the President



Traditionally we try to slow down over the Christmas and New Year period. Whilst that may have been the case for some, for others Mother Nature caused unprecedented havoc.

Record rains resulted in record flooding events in the Rochester, Dingee, Calivil area travelling as a slow moving sea north to Kerang and onto Swan Hill - leaving a trail of destruction and contamination in its path. An area around Allansford and Panmure in the south west was also impacted by this rain event.

Immediate issues for dairy farmers of these areas have been mastitis, lameness, fence and pasture damage, and fodder loss.

The UDV has been chairing twice-weekly teleconferences with all industry stakeholders, including Dairy Australia, Department of Primary Industries, Dairy Food Safety Victoria (DFSV), Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF), Geoffrey Gardiner Foundation and dairy companies. The purpose of these teleconferences is to receive up-to-date information on the situation on the ground and to minimise duplication of effort. As the information is collated we are able to work through the best strategy to provide assistance to the affected farmers, this work will be continue for as long as necessary.

The UDV is very appreciative of the received donations into the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Disaster Relief Fund of \$50,000 from Fonterra, Warrnambool Cheese and Butter and Geoffrey Gardiner Foundation to assist with the recovery programs in the dairy areas that have been devastated by these floods, Burra Foods has also contributed and at the time of writing Murray Goulburn advised that they were meeting within the next few days to discuss how they could best assist their farmers.

On top of the ten years of drought, and now this devastating flood event, the Coles supermarket chain announced that their two litre generic branded milk would be sold for just \$2 per litre. This is well below the cost of production and something we cannot allow to continue as we expect other dairy products will be discounted.

Around 10 percent of Victoria's production services the fresh milk market so the exposure to our major manufacturers is limited. The recent announcements of step ups is a strong indication that companies are reasonably confident of achieving the predictions made when opening prices were announced at the start of the season.

As this milk pricing matter is a national issue ADF is taking the lead. ADF has generated plenty of publicity, requested a meeting with Coles to discuss this issue and pushing for an Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) inquiry. We will all continue to strongly argue the case for sustainable returns for all sections of the supply chain, especially farmers!

I have recently attended a function in recognition of Anne Astin who after 10 years is moving on from DFSV. On behalf of the UDV I would like to take this opportunity to thank Anne for her contributions to DFSV and her efforts in building a highly reputable dairy food safety organisation for the Victorian dairy industry.

Some of you would have been involved in the Sustainable Farm Families project some years ago. This group has received some Gardiner Foundation funding to follow up on participants to gain an understanding of their current health status some years on from the previous study. I would encourage all those involved previously to take up this opportunity. There is more information about this elsewhere in this edition of Hotline. I would encourage all participants to become involved in these one off follow up events as they are rolled out around the state.



Chris Griffin
President
United Dairyfarmers of Victoria

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Coles Milk Price Cut

Coles supermarket outraged dairy farmers across the country with the decision to cut the price of Coles Brand fresh milk down to \$2.00 for a two litre container.

Coles have stated their intention to hold the price down. They also claim that dairy farmers will not receive lower prices. The dairy industry has been very active nationally in response. The concern is that other manufactured dairy products will also be discounted this way.

The ADF immediately responded to Coles' move with a media release that argued that Coles is selling milk at an unsustainable price. ADF also said 'the impact of this pricing decision will ultimately flow on to hit dairy farmers at a time when they are struggling to respond financially to years of drought and now floods'.

There has been significant media generated in city and regional newspapers as well as many radio and television interviews. ADF is heavily engaged in maintaining the momentum to try and turn around this unsustainable marketing tactic of Coles.

ADF is working to build a strong, bipartisan political agenda on this issue and has met with several key political stakeholders. The industry is seeking an ACCC inquiry into this matter and is lobbying Federal Minister for Agriculture Joe Ludwig, Shadow Minister for Agriculture John Cobb MP, Senator Christine Milne and Senator Nick Xenophon to collectively support the establishment of an ACCC inquiry.

ADF is also seeking meetings with all supermarkets involved in the price cuts to reverse their decisions and give dairy farmers a reasonable return.

Bobby Calves

The UDV participated in the review of the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock with support for the proposal contained in the draft standard amendment defining a maximum time off-feed for bobby calves.

Identified as Option B in the draft, it would require bobby calves between five and 30 days old travelling without mothers must be slaughtered or fed within 30 hours from last feed.

Pressure has come from groups like Animals Australia for the time off-feed to be shortened. One option calls for the maximum allowable time off-feed to be just 18 hours.

The Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) included in the documentation noted that this option:

- is science-based and addresses the physiological stresses calves are subjected to during transport.
- sets an maximum enforceable limit that will adequately manage risks to the calves' welfare.
- is achievable and is consistent with the common once-daily feeding practices of the industry for both sale calves and replacement heifers.



Victorian dairy farmers understand that the welfare of bobby calves is important. The UDV has been active in working to improve the handling of calves and efficiency of transport from farm to slaughter in order to consistently meet current and proposed transport recommendations.

2011 Victorian Dairy Industry Flood Summary

Size of the Problem

Two weeks after the first properties were damaged in northern Victoria, the massive flood waters continue to seep through the state changing the lives of many in its path. A number of properties in the south west were also damaged.

The flood surprised many and some dairy farms at the start of the flood were unprepared. The damage to homes, farm property, community buildings, infrastructure and livestock caught in the waters way has been substantial. Fortunately no lives have been lost. Some had the benefit of time to make what preparations they could.

Because the flood continues, the extent of the damage is still not confirmed. For the dairy industry it is estimated that between 150 and 200 farms have been impacted.

Stock

Stock losses directly attributed to the initial flooding were minimal. Some stock are still listed as missing. Mastitis has provided an immediate challenge as many cows spent time in water or walking through water for milking. Some stock losses post flood are attributed to mastitis but the real cost will be measured only when the culling process is completed. Already judgements have been made about some previously productive cows. Many are still under review. In all, the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Victoria lists more than 450 head of dairy cattle as dead or missing.

Feet problems are also an issue. Some are soft from standing in waterlogged paddocks or tender from being restricted to the concrete of the dairy for a few days. The result is similar. Farmers are also alert for signs of salmonella.

Dairy Australia has provided some very helpful animal welfare and animal nutrition information that has assisted dairy farmers manage these challenges. The material was developed after previous experiences and updated after the Queensland floods of late last year. The information packs were distributed via the tanker drops but are available from the DA website www.dairyaustralia.com.au.

Milking

It is estimated that about 30-35 herds are currently, or were, 'parked'. Some of these arrangements are short term. Some are looking for a longer term solution to their situation. The UDV has developed an agreement for use in these circumstances.

A number of dairies have been reactivated. The milk companies report that at various times they were unable to collect milk. Sometimes this was just the one pick up, but more likely it was for a few days as tankers sought alternative routes to avoid washed out roads, culverts or just too much water over the road.

Fodder

The flood destroyed much fodder, especially bales of hay and silage produced through the last year's wonderful spring. It is hoped that some farmers pit silage may be ok. This will obviously depend on how well the pit was sealed and how long the water was around the pit.

To date, demand for donated fodder has been limited. Farmers have been able to use some of their own fodder in the period immediately after the flood before it becomes rank. Some still have enough for now. Some farmers, concerned that donated fodder may be of limited nutritional value for their stressed herd, have turned down offers of donated fodder and purchased replacement supplies.

Two weeks after being flooded some farms are also still too wet to accept donated fodder. That is a key difference between a flood and a fire or drought where the animals have immediate needs and fodder can be delivered to the property.

The challenge for the flooded farmers will be to access quality fodder, suitable for milking cows, through the autumn and winter months. A number of Feed Test kits are available for use if needed to confirm donated fodder quality.

How to help?

1. **Money.** Money is the most valuable support that can be provided. It is flexible, portable and can very quickly be used to fix an identified need. The VFF Disaster Relief Fund is being used for this purpose and donations can be made via www.vff.org.au or by calling 1300 882 833.
2. **People power.** There is much to be done on these farms. Support will be needed for many months with tasks like cleaning, clearing and replacing fences. Paddocks need clearing of debris, cultivated and pastures sown. And cows need to be milked. And much, much more.
3. **Machinery.** Tractors with front end loaders, post hole diggers and drivers, grader blades, sprayers, etc.
4. **Stock.** Some farmers may be looking for paddocks for young stock and cows not being milked. The strong preference would be for paddocks close to the flooded areas.
5. **Replacement fodder.** Farmers will need to access fodder with nutritional value suitable for milking cows for many months to come as they wait for their resown pastures to grow.
6. **Be patient.** These farmers will need support well into 2011.
7. **Pray.** The challenges of an Australian summer are still in front of us.



Going back to the Future: Sustainable Dairy Farm Families Future Directions

The team that brought the award winning Sustainable Dairy Farm Families workshops to dairy farmers across the ten major dairy regions in Victoria in 2005-07 will be returning in 2011 to revisit and catch up with the original participants. These workshops will be held during March - June, with the first being in Melbourne on 3 March 2011.

The first workshops held in 2005, 2006 and 2007 and the subsequent follow-up in 2011 are a tangible, industry-leading example set by agricultural producers to get the crucial message of the importance of farm family health, well-being and safety to a successful dairy business.

Dairy farm families participating in the program have made real progress in improving their health, well-being and safety. One of the strengths of the SDDF program is the way farmers worked together to not only improve their own health, well-being and safety but also to support other farm families in this process.

As previous participants put it; 'you need your health; without it you have not balance, no stability, no life,' and importantly 'without good health you are not good to your family or farm productivity. You and your health is the most important aspect to your farm business and only you can improve it.'

The 2011 workshops will include sessions on agricultural chemicals and respiratory health in addition to the famous health assessments. A practical workshop where questions on health, well-being and safety can be asked and answered, ensures the unique demands of the dairying lifestyle and work environment can be successfully managed.

The SDDF Future Directions is funded through the Gardiner Foundation Community and People Development Program, Colac Community Enterprise and is an initiative of Western District Health Service, National Centre for Farmer Health, Hamilton.

Further Information:

Contact: Susan Brumby, 03 5551 8460



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Young Dairy Development Program

The getting of wisdom!

Young Dairy Development Program (YDDP) recently conducted a South West Victoria Tour over three days covering nine different farms and a range of service providers from Heywood in the far west through to Birregurra, east of Colac. Participants came from South Australia, northern Victoria and Gippsland and were joined on all events with local members of YDDP.

On the second night a progressive dinner was held at Camperdown where Tim and Tanya Fleming spoke about their journey from farm apprenticeship days to farm ownership with the support of Rural Finance along the way.

Question time followed and an exchange of ideas on a huge range of topics was enjoyed by all. The participants included people working on small dairy

farms right through to those experienced with herds of 1200 head, university students on work experience, employees of Rural Finance, Warrnambool Cheese and Butter and Dairy Australia, and young farmers and experienced farmers. With all present joining in the discussion, questions and answers flowed on topics covering cow lameness, laneway construction and materials, relief milkers, lucerne management, hot weather management for cows, borrowing money, pellet feeding, managing large herds and many more.

The night was a great success and went to the very heart of what YDDP is all about - the opportunity to network and share ideas with a range of people in a friendly open manner, to help young people develop their knowledge and skills for a successful future in dairy.

The great news is that this type of scenario occurs around 50 times a year throughout the state when young people gather together to advance their futures.

YDDP events are organized by young people but are open to all ages. We value and respect the input of all people.

We invite you to contact the coordinators below and get yourself into the flow of information with newsletters and event flyers for your region. Our website www.yddp.org.au is another source of event information.

Bill Dullard
YDDP State Coordinator

Gippsland Regional Coordinator:
Kylie Barry 03 5624 3904, 0428 889 337

South West Regional Coordinator:
Liza Fahey 03 5592 2477, 0408 141 820

Northern Region Coordinator:
Melissa Dorsett 03 5833 5928, 0417 988 000

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