



HOTLINE

Newsletter of the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria

September 2010

President's Report



As we enter September I am hoping that we soon see a bit of spring sunshine to warm us up and to partner with the current moisture levels to produce excellent growth rates that would enable us to not only feed our cows well, but also conserve adequate amounts of silage and hay for future use.

One issue with the return to a more "normal" season is that some farmers are commenting that their laneways are not coping as well and lameness may result because of this. I urge farmers to read the Dairy Australia article in this issue for more information on managing in wet conditions.

August was certainly a very busy time of the year for most dairy farmers, with calving time drawing to a close and very little time for relaxation. Yes, even I did a bit of work on weekends!

Many of the UDV's active members will be in the same boat. And while we all know the demands of dairy farming at the best of times, let alone during spring calving, taking on further responsibilities within the UDV or the wider community can make for some challenging times.

However, it can also be extremely rewarding to take on a role outside the farm, and I would encourage dairy farmers to consider further opportunities for involvement and influence within the dairy industry beyond the farm gate.

A few weeks ago we ran a UDV membership drive down in our DC 10 region of South-west Victoria, and I am pleased to report that we signed up over 40 lapsed members and a number of brand new members too.

It was interesting to meet with dairy farmers on a one-on-one basis, and hear about the issues that are important to them. I also found it really encouraging to hear that so many farmers see the value of the UDV's lobbying and advocacy activities.

If you are not currently involved in the UDV, now is definitely the time to join us, with a State Election coming up in November. Contact the UDV/VFF office on 1300 882 833 to find out how you can add your voice to our collective influence, and help us try to leverage vital support for dairy farming from Victoria's current and future politicians.

Last month's Hotline featured an article on the VFF/UDV's election policy on increases to municipal rates, and inside this month's issue we explore another important election issue that affects dairy farmers: the VFF's policy on increased resourcing for rural crime prevention.

September also brings us the annual South Gippsland Dairy Expo, to be held from 29 - 30 September at Poowong in West Gippsland. The 2010 Expo promises to be as informative and entertaining as it has been in previous years. The UDV/VFF will be there to talk with dairy farmers about how a UDV membership can benefit your business. In particular we will have plenty of information on the exclusive electricity deal that is now available to our members through Origin Energy and Utilacor.

Be sure to stop by and visit the Dairy Australia/GippsDairy tent if you are heading to Poowong for the annual Expo!



Chris Griffin
President
United Dairyfarmers of Victoria

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An exclusive energy offer for Victorian Farmers.
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Increased resourcing for rural crime prevention

All Victorians deserve an equal level of protection and service from law enforcement services. To achieve this, rural communities need an increase in police resourcing and the placement of officers with specialised skills to deal with farm business focused rural crime, specifically focusing on livestock theft.

Livestock theft can be considered one of the oldest and most widely known crimes in Australia. Victoria currently has no dedicated police resourcing to livestock theft. In other state jurisdictions dedicated livestock theft squads are in operation as has been the case in Victoria in the past.

While apathy sees livestock theft often go unreported the cost of this crime is high. Based on reported incidents stock theft has cost the rural sector \$871,692 in 2003-04, and \$542,784 in 2006-07. As fluctuations in livestock prices make up a large amount of this variation, due to the current record high livestock prices the 2009-10 the VFF estimate the cost to industry to be greater than \$1 million.

The VFF believes that the key needs to address livestock theft include:

- Increased police resourcing with specialised training. Reinstating the Stock Theft Squad.
- Increased penalties for convictions of stock theft.
- Widen convictions to include enablers of stock theft. Any accessories to the crime (i.e. stock agents or meat processors) found to assist in the trading of stolen livestock should face the same penalty as the original thief.

The reintroduction of the Stock Theft Squad there would also be an opportunity for this group to focus on other rural crimes such as theft from farms.

Murray Darling Basin Plan

The dairy industry in the north of the state is waiting with some trepidation for the release of the Guide to the Murray Darling Basin Plan. The time of writing is pre-election so many factors are at play in determining when the Guide will be released.

If the Labor Government retains power at the Federal Election, the VFF/UDV would expect the Guide to the Murray Darling Basin Plan to be issued in either late September or early October. However other factors could still influence this timeline; a cabinet shuffle or a treasury review of the additional expenditure that may be needed to fund the 'closing the gap by water purchases' commitment made during the election.

If the Coalition wins the election they have made a commitment to release the Draft Basin Plan within two weeks of the election, although the VFF/UDV believes this would place considerable pressure on finalising the draft plan.

Based on what we do know at the moment, the Guide will be released in spring to be followed by a four week consultation period. While the initial advice was that only two meetings would be held by the MBDA in Victoria, the VFF/UDV has argued that this is inadequate and at least 5 briefing session must be held. These meetings are likely to be in Shepparton, Mildura, Echuca, Horsham and Wodonga.

The VFF with, input from the UDV, will prepare a response to the Guide and conduct up to ten meetings with members after the MBDA briefings are held to obtain feedback and direction from members. The suggested locations are:

- Mildura
- Echuca
- Cobram
- Tallangatta
- Bendigo
- Kerang
- Shepparton
- Wangarratta
- Myrtleford
- Warracknabeal

These meetings are not guaranteed as the ability to hold sessions at all of these locations will depend on whether sufficient time is available prior to the close of the consultation period. Also, choice of location for these sessions may be determined by the level of impacts for a particular area with the high impact areas being a higher priority.

The VFF has established arrangements with other organisations to ensure that a rapid and thorough assessment of the impacts of any reductions in sustainable diversion limits contained within the Guide can be prepared and communicated to members. These assessments will look at the short and long term impacts on farms, industry sectors, irrigation systems and local and regional communities. The VFF/UDV forums will be used to inform members of the assessed impacts, the initial VFF response and obtain feedback from members.

VFF members benefit with Utilacor and Origin Energy

The VFF has in place a special electricity buying scheme for its members available through Utilacor and Origin Energy. Significant savings on electricity costs with rates locked in for three years can be achieved solely by VFF members. 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. Currently over 200 VFF members have taken advantage of this opportunity.

To find out the benefits of 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.

Dairy share farming toolkit

Don't forget the UDV/VFF Dairy Share Farming Toolkit is now available for members to purchase. The toolkit contains up-to-date and valuable information resources, including contractual templates that meet Victorian legal requirements and was developed with financial support from the Gardiner Foundation. To find out more, or order a Toolkit, contact the VFF Workplace Relations department on **1300 882 833**.

New VFF website!!!

A new and much improved VFF website has been developed and is now available for members to review. The new website can be found at www.vff.org.au.

The new website is a vast improvement to our existing site, and will give the VFF the opportunity to better position itself as the leading lobby group for farming in Australia. It will provide enhanced features for members and easy access to all VFF and industry specific communication material.

Feel free to explore the new site and if you have any questions, suggestions or concerns please contact VFF Executive Manager Business Development and Communication, Michael Poore, via mpoore@vff.org.au.

Smart meter update

The smart meter rollout is proving to be one of the core concerns facing farmers (and dairy farmers in particular) at the moment. While the benefits of smart meters may be worthwhile in a metropolitan or suburban context, their appropriateness in rural areas is debatable. At the UDV/VFF this is an area we are continuing to work on with the appropriate government representatives. Some of the work undertaken thus far has included:

- working with the Community Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) to make sure they are aware of our concerns. The CUAC is an independent consumer advocacy organisation which aims to represent Victorian consumers in policy and regulatory debates on electricity, gas and water, with one focus group being rural and regional consumers; and
- having CUAC and DPI attend some UDV meetings to discuss smart meters and answer members' questions.

Dairy farmers' concerns about smart meters stem from the likely increase in usage costs, possible requirement for upgrades and what is thought to be a substantial cost to update a meter on a facility that may be used quite infrequently. Farm buildings can be spread out over a wide area, unlike other businesses, with a variety of electrical supply points. Many of these buildings, even if only used intermittently or infrequently are still a necessity to the overall operation of the farm. A charging regime for the smart meters seems to make the cost increase on farm businesses excessive.

Incomplete or lacking information may be at the heart of some concerns leading to a lack of understanding of the overall project. This is why the UDV/VFF is working with CUAC to address some of these issues.

Some of the recurring questions that are being raised by UDV/VFF members include:

Installation and use

- Will the installation interrupt power to my business and therefore can I organise an installation time that suits my business?
- If the wiring/supply cables do not meet current standards will an upgrade be required?
- Do distributors have the ability to remotely switch off power through the smart meter/s without first consulting/advising the farm owner/manager?

- Farmers are unsure about the suitability of the remote connectivity function of the smart meter to be able to operate effectively. It doesn't seem that remote connectivity has been tested in much of the rural areas. Many members do not have mobile access so will the smart meters be installed if they cannot be read remotely? And if they are not installed, will there be additional charges for meter reading or will some other arrangement be adopted?

Costs

- What is the cost per meter? Is it annual in perpetuity cost; is it per meter or per bill cost? How does this compare with current supply charges and what will be the overall impact per meter in charging?
- Time-of-use tariffs: many agricultural industries have very little scope to change to alter demand times. This is particularly the case with a dairy operation where the cows largely dictate peaks and troughs of power usage. Will tariffs reflect that some industries do not have flexibility to move usage?
- Has there been any modelling undertaken on the impact of costs for farm businesses from the proposed tariff regime and the smart meter costs?
- It appears that costs will increase over coming years – the AER approved increase only applies to 2010. What mechanism/process will manage the approval of consumer cost increases?
- Will the benefits of the smart meters and new tariffs equal or outweigh the additional costs on farm businesses?

Additional concerns

- Are any smart meters bi-directional? On farm renewable energy generation with the ability to feed back into the grid excess generated energy needs to be a function able to be handled by the smart meter. Installing meters that are not capable of feeding back into the grid is very short sighted.

As there have not been many smart meter installations occurring in rural areas to date the frequency and potential for problems are unknown at this point. It will be important to monitor the rural installations to see if concerns are unfounded or if there are any additional problems. But the UDV/VFF will be insisting that the DPI keeps farmers fully informed, and that they listen to and address their concerns in a timely manner.

Diary dates

UDV Branch meetings

Lockington Branch General Meeting: Tuesday 7 September, 8:00pm, Bush Nursing Centre, Lockington. Guest Speaker: Grant Davies – Chairman of Murray Goulburn. **RSVP:** Branch Secretary Jim Rorke on **03 5488 2220**.

Sow it, Grow it, Feed it! Pastures for profit (Heritage Seeds) Field Days

- Monday September 6th, 2010 10am – 3pm: Lardner Park Warragul, Victoria (lunch provided)
- Tuesday September 7th, 2010 10am – 3pm: Glenormiston Agricultural College, Glenormiston, Southern Victoria (lunch provided)
- Thursday & Friday September 9 & 10, 2010, 10am – 3pm: Heritage Seeds Research Farm, Riverina Highway, Howlong NSW (lunch provided).

FREECALL: 1800 727 007 for more information and to register your attendance.

South Gippsland Dairy Expo, Poowong

The South Gippsland Dairy Expo, organised by the Strzelecki Lions Club, will take place on Wednesday 29th and Thursday 30th September 2010, Poowong Recreation Reserve, Poowong.

This year the Expo Committee will commemorate eleven years of providing the local dairying community with an event that showcases the latest in innovation, products and services available to the dairy industry. During the past 10 years, the Strzelecki Lions Club has distributed over \$200,000 back to the community from this event.

For further information please contact the South Gippsland Dairy Expo, Project Secretary, Deanne Kennedy on **03 5659 4219**.

Keep 13 October free!

If you are a young person (40 and below) and involved in any aspect of agriculture and agribusiness (farmers, farm consultants, engineers, ag-bankers, R&D personnel, food processing employees, logistics staff or educators) then you are a YAP... a Young Agribusiness Professional.

DAFF is helping Agribusiness Gippsland to run a special day-long-forum at the Cardinia Cultural Centre. The free day will feature mind-stretching speakers, lunch and a brilliant chance to network with YAPs from across Victoria.

We are organising for students from Geelong's Marcus Oldham College to attend, alongside some from LaTrobe University's agriculture faculty and hope to see some YDDP and NCDEA students as well.

E-mail your details to: ptarmigan2@internode.on.net to stay in the loop for more news. Just type 'YAPday' in the subject line. You can also keep an eye on our website and blogsite – <http://agribusinessgippsland.com.au> or aginc.wordpress.com.

Managing in wet conditions

A la Nina weather pattern, a predictor of extensive rain, appears to be developing in the Pacific Ocean. For farmers already enjoying the wettest winter for years, this presents some challenges for animal health and welfare pasture management.

Dairy Australia has developed a range of information sheets to help you manage your farm in wet conditions, which are available on the Dairy Australia website at www.dairyaustralia.com.au/Managing-In-Wet-Conditions. The information sheets cover managing animal health and welfare in wet conditions, feeding and milking in wet conditions, managing lameness in wet conditions and planning for recovery from wet conditions.

Maintaining adequate dry matter intakes for cattle is one of the biggest issues in managing wet conditions. The aim should be to minimise the loss of body condition, so that the animals can maintain their physiological status, ready to take advantage of conditions as they improve. Use supplements early in wet conditions as a tool to help maintain a slow rotation. The true value of supplementing during wet periods is in getting another day in the round, rather than just another litre in the vat.

Milking cows generally have enough condition to withstand short periods of feed deprivation (2-3 days). However, if body condition score (BCS) is less than 3.5 (out of 8), or feed has been short for a few weeks,

every effort should be made to provide the cows with at least their maintenance energy requirements daily. A typical Holstein, which weighs about 550kg requires about 59 MJ a day, while a Jersey weighing about 400kg requires 45 MJ a day.

Maintaining laneways and ensuring the herd doesn't have to walk too far in the wet to the dairy will help prevent lameness in wet conditions. Topping the last 50m of track closest to dairy with 200-300mm depth of sawdust or wood chips and fencing off bad areas of the laneway will help.

The presence of water and mud increases the number of bacteria leading to an increased incidence of mastitis. Mastitis prevention hinges on maintaining teat condition and reducing the number of bacteria at the teat end. Teat dipping or spraying using a good quality teat disinfectant with added emollient maintains teat skin health. Holding the cows quietly on the concrete for 20 minutes after milking can also ensure the teats canals are closed before being exposed to the mud again.

Dairy Australia-funded research has also found cheap, simple ways to protect your pasture from pugging and prevent ongoing damage to soils.

Aim for pasture cover of 2200-2400 kg DM/ha. If pasture is short (<1800kg/ha) then severe pugging damage can be expected. Try 'on-off' grazing. Limit

grazing to a short period (usually two to three hours) and then move cows off the pasture to a stand off area.

Another tip is to allocate day and night feeds separately. By allocating about 2/3 of the feed during the day and 1/3 at night, there is less contamination of the night feed. Cows walk less and rest more.

Shift the fence two to three times during the day and backfence as often as possible, especially when cows graze a paddock for more than a day. Or slow the rotation so the cows are on longer grass, it protects the soil and cows do not need to walk so far to eat their pasture requirement.

In preparation for recovery, developing a plan and sticking to it helps to prioritise and organise the activities undertaken on the farm.

These resources are just one of many examples of the dairy services levy at work. For more information on this project and other levy investments visit www.dairyaustralia.com.au.



Young Dairy Development Program

WestVic Dairy Inc. Annual General Meeting

The Chairman and Board of WestVic Dairy Inc. invite dairy farmers and other interested community members to its AGM to be held on Friday September 17th, 2010 at the Wannon Rooms in Warrnambool at 12.30pm.

The AGM will take place during the lunch break at the WestVic Dairy "Cow Fertility Forums" which will commence at 11 am and continue till 2.30pm.

AGM questions will be taken on notice and should be submitted in writing to:

The Chairman, WestVic Dairy Inc, PO Box 67, Terang 3264, or email info@westvicdairy.com.au by COB on Tuesday August 25th 2009.

For more information and to RSVP please contact WestVic Dairy on 03 5592 2477.

Genetics Australia's Heritability of Traits

Guest Speaker Peter Thurn from Genetics Australia will be talking about heritability of traits and breeding goals. This event was developed by YDDP but all are welcome!

Wednesday 22nd September at Maffra, 7:30pm

(Includes a subsidised dinner at a cost of \$12 per person)

Please RSVP Kylie Barry by Monday 20th September 2010:

Office: 03 5624 3900

Mobile: 0428 889 337

Email: yddpgipps@gippsdairy.com.au

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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