



June 2026

NORTHERN HORIZONS

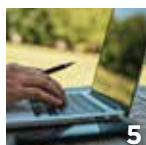


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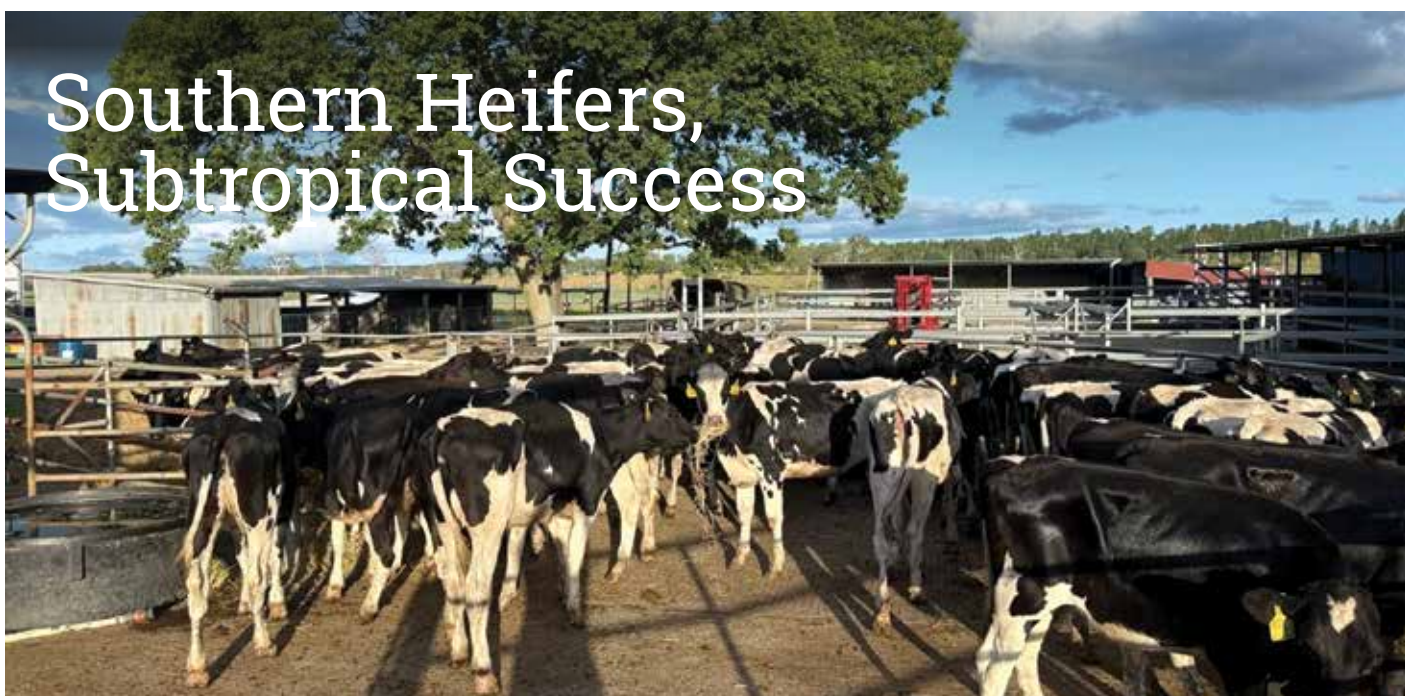


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Southern Heifers, Subtropical Success



Roslyn D'Addona

Dairy Extension Officer
Department of Primary Industries, Queensland



While they can keep their beer, milk price and football code – not sorry, AFL supporters – there are times when the southern dairy industry has something valuable to offer subtropical dairy farmers. This article tells a dairy stock purchasing success story and provides practical evidence that, with intentional planning, careful animal health management and the right class of cattle, southern dairy heifers can be successfully integrated into a Queensland farming system. For dairy farmers looking to increase herd numbers faster than their own replacement rates will allow, casting the purchasing net further south may be worth serious consideration, especially when local purchasing options are limited.

Why buy?

For the Roderick family at Harrisville, the decision to consider purchased heifers was driven by timing, cash flow and risk management. Financial planning for the construction of their compost shed began in the second half of 2024 using the QDAS scenario tool. The farm's QDAS results were used as the baseline for multiple cash flow and profit scenarios across the next three financial years. These scenarios tested the impact of changes in milking cow numbers, production per cow, milk price, purchased and homegrown feed costs, herd and shed costs, additional

labour requirements and finance costs associated with shed construction.

Across the scenarios evaluated, one consistent theme emerged: increasing cow numbers as soon as possible after the shed was commissioned was critical to providing the cash flow security needed to service the loan. Relying on production-per-cow gains alone was considered too risky, particularly in the early years while the business was still learning to optimise the compost shed within its broader farming system.

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Northern Horizons Editorial SDP Chair



Welcome to Northern Horizons.

At our Annual General Meeting to be held online on 19 November, 2026, two farmer directors (Elke Watson and Dan Cork) will be stepping down from the Subtropical Dairy board. Leading up to the AGM, we are seeking nominations from dairy farmers for these two board positions. Dan Cork has indicated that he will be standing again. Terms are for three years. We are seeking Expressions of Interest from potential candidates to submit applications for Board positions through our selection panel process. Please contact our Company Secretary, Brad Granzin on brad@subtropicaldairy.com.au or 0431197479 for further information. Applications must be lodged with the Company Secretary by 6 PM AEST Friday July 24, 2026.

At our June board meeting, we signed off on Subtropical Dairy's Annual Operating Plan for 2026/27. Some of our events leading up to the end of 2026 are shown on the last page of Northern Horizons. One programme we are reinstating in 2026/27 will be our Regional Group projects. Legally, Regional Groups are the members (or owners) of Subtropical Dairy Ltd. They appoint directors to the Board and vote on motions at Annual General Meetings. Each Regional Group has three votes at an Annual General Meeting. Regional Groups also have the key purpose of identifying industry priorities for research, development, extension and education. These priorities are communicated to the Subtropical Dairy Board. Regional Groups are also advocates for Subtropical Dairy and Dairy Australia projects and services. Through their membership, they encourage farmers to participate in workshops, groups and other events. They also provide feedback about how projects and services can be enhanced. We are looking to re-commence our Regional Group projects in the Darling Downs/Burnett, Southeast Queensland, Sunshine Coast, Far North Queensland, Far North Coast of NSW and the Mid North Coast of NSW. Each region has an indicative annual project budget of \$5,500. Membership of Regional Groups is comprised of farmers from the local region, Subtropical Dairy staff, representatives from the processing sector, agribusiness, government staff and the University of Queensland.

This edition of Northern Horizons also contains two articles from our key regional benchmarking projects, the Queensland Dairy Accounting Scheme, and Dairy Base in NSW. Both articles focus on the key biophysical attributes, management strategies and financial indicators of the top 25% of farms in each state. The results reveal the broad range of farm sizes, systems, regions, breeds, feed sources, debt levels, costs and labour structures across our industry. Efficient resource use, cost control and risk management are themes central to profitability.

Once again, welcome to Northern Horizons and I hope you find this edition of value and interest to your business.

Luke Stock, Chairman,
Subtropical Dairy Programme Ltd.
P 0474 800 245

During the 2024 mating season, the Rodericks increased sexed semen usage in their 400-cow dairy herd, aiming to lift the number of replacement heifers born in 2025 from about 130 to 180. However, with shed construction scheduled for the second half of 2025, those extra 50 replacement heifers would not enter the milking herd until autumn 2027 – around a year later than required to align with the expected completion of the compost shed. As a result, the DPI extension team recommended exploring other options to increase milking herd numbers as quickly as possible once the shed was complete.

With limited success purchasing dairy cattle in the past, buying stock was not initially an option the Rodericks were keen to revisit. However, in spring 2024, dry conditions across southern Australia and a slowing Chinese export market for dairy heifers combined to increase the domestic supply of favourably priced, quality dairy heifers. This created an opportunity for the Rodericks to purchase a line of mating-age heifers within a budget and timeline that suited the farm's expansion plans.

Who from?

With this plan in mind, Paul began the process of sourcing heifers that ticked the boxes he was looking for. "I wanted to maintain the genetic standards in our herd, especially since we were targeting higher milk production once the shed was built, so I was prepared to go as far as necessary and pay a bit more than the market rate," said Paul. He eventually found what he was looking for in South Australia: a group of 51 genomically tested heifers, 12–13 months old, all sourced from one farm with a long record of good genetics and a breeding program using similar AI bulls.

Buying from one farm was an important part of reducing risk. It provided more consistency across the group especially around genetics, health history and management background. It also simplified communication and made the planning of transport, vaccination and arrival management more straightforward.

From south to north

Once purchasing terms were finalised, the next phase involved planning the transport and arrival of the heifers on farm. With more experience in long-distance transport, the vendor advised on and arranged the movement of the heifers. The trip was split into two legs: Mount Gambier to Dubbo with one carrier, followed by several hours off the truck before being loaded onto a second carrier for the Dubbo to Harrisville leg. The heifers

Image 2 – Heifers grazing in South Australia



arrived at Harrisville on 11 February 2025 and were unloaded into the old dairy concrete holding yard, where they could be closely observed while they settled in (see Image 1). Adequate rest, careful loading and unloading, and clear communication between vendor, carrier and purchaser all contributed to the heifers arriving in good order.

Vaccination and quarantine period

Tick fever was considered the biggest disease risk, particularly because the heifers arrived in mid-summer at the height of tick season. Paul said, "We discussed vaccinating them before transport with the vendor, but after considering many things decided to do it ourselves as soon as they arrived on farm. We followed our vet's advice to vaccinate for tick fever alone, the day after arrival." Periodic ivermectin pour-on treatments were administered to ensure the heifers remained tick free during the eight weeks post-vaccination required for full immunity to develop.

Once settled and vaccinated, the heifers were transferred as one mob to a paddock where they were quarantined away from all other cattle for six weeks. During quarantine, they were monitored daily. Only one heifer required treatment for a reaction to the tick fever vaccine. Other vaccinations, including 7-in-1, botulism and pestivirus, were administered once full immunity to tick fever had developed.



Image 1 – Heifers arriving on farm



Image 3 – Heifers in dairy yard pre milking

This staged approach to vaccination helped avoid overloading the heifers' immune systems during a period when they were already dealing with transport stress, a new climate, new feed and a new management system. It also highlights the importance of involving the farm vet early when purchased cattle are moving between regions with different disease risks.

Diet

The diet change for the heifers on arrival at the Rodericks' farm was substantial. On the farm they came from, the heifers were grazing temperate grasses (see Image 2 Page 3). On arrival, they changed to a PMR silage-based diet which included some grazing of tropical grasses. Despite this significant change, there were minimal issues associated with the transition. Their age and stage of development likely helped. They were old enough to handle the move and adapt to a new system, but young enough that they were not also managing the demands of pregnancy or lactation. After their initial quarantine period, the heifers progressed through the Rodericks' homegrown replacement heifer program before entering the milking herd.

Where are they now?

Most of the purchased heifers have now calved and entered the milking herd (see Images 3 & 4). "So far the heifers that are in the milking herd are definitely showing the genetic potential I was aiming to purchase, with their milk production and type just as good, if not better, than our own replacements," said Paul. The addition of the purchased heifers to the herd in the first half of the Rodericks seasonal calving period has allowed the milking herd to build up to peak numbers faster than previous years. Paul said "We usually reach peak milking herd numbers in October, however, this year we expect to peak at around 500 milking cows around August. This will help us get the most out of the ryegrass season in our PMR system and allow most cows to reach peak lactation before the heat and humidity arrives."

The keys to success

Two factors were critical to the overall success of the purchase. The first was the willingness to pay more and cast the net wider to secure the right type of cattle. "If I had compromised on this, it would have been a real let down to go through the whole purchase and integration process successfully only to have the heifers enter the herd with disappointing production or type," Paul said.

The second, and arguably most important, factor was the age of the heifers at purchase. At 12–13 months old, they were

about half the price of milking cows or point-of-calving heifers, meaning any losses would have been less costly. They were also smaller and lighter, which reduced transport cost per head and made the long trip easier on the animals. Most importantly, they were not dealing with the added demands of lactation or pregnancy, leaving their immune systems better placed to cope with vaccination, transport stress and significant changes to their diet and environment.

A planned purchase, not a lucky one

The Rodericks' experience shows that buying dairy heifers from outside the local region does not need to be viewed as too risky or a last resort. In this case, the purchase worked because it was linked to a clear business need, supported by financial planning, and managed with careful attention to genetics, age, transport, vaccination and quarantine. While not every southern heifer will suit a subtropical system, this example demonstrates that well-selected young stock can adapt successfully when the purchase is planned properly from the beginning. For farms needing to grow, finding the right animals from the right source may provide a practical pathway to expansion. Ironically, the Rodericks may even have an excess of replacement heifers to sell in the future as culling rates are likely to decline, due to fewer health issues with the addition of the compost shed. ■■



Figure 4 – Heifer udder in dairy

Inside the numbers: How high-performing dairy farms drive profitability

Sheena Carter

Development Officer - Dairy

NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development



**Department of
Primary Industries**

Do you run your business, or does your business run you? Top farmers make informed decisions enabling them to optimise land, cows, feed, labour and water resources, while actively managing risks such as weather and price volatility.

This article compares the “Top 25%” (T25%) of NSW Dairy Farm Monitor Project (DFMP) farms with “The Rest” (the other 75%) averaged over the last five years and adjusted for inflation (2020/21 – 2024/25). It focuses on three areas:

- Profitability – the results
- Cost structures
- Efficiencies

Before we get to the financials, the table below shows some key physical differences averaged over the last five years for each group.

	Average milker number	Kilograms milk solids/cow (kgMS/cow)	Litres/cow (L/cow)
Top 25%*	640	605	8,090
The Rest	336	500	6,848

*Most Top 25% farms over the last five years have been in the NSW DFMP south subset.

Profitability – the results

To be in the T25% group, a business must rank in the top 25% for return on total assets (ROTA) in a given year.

In Figure 1, profit, measured as Earnings before Interest and Tax (EBIT) shows the Top 25% are performing strongly, and it's worth noting that milk price isn't the determinant. Over the last five years, the T25% averaged a \$10.67/kgMS milk price compared

Profits – Top 25% v The Rest (5 year average)

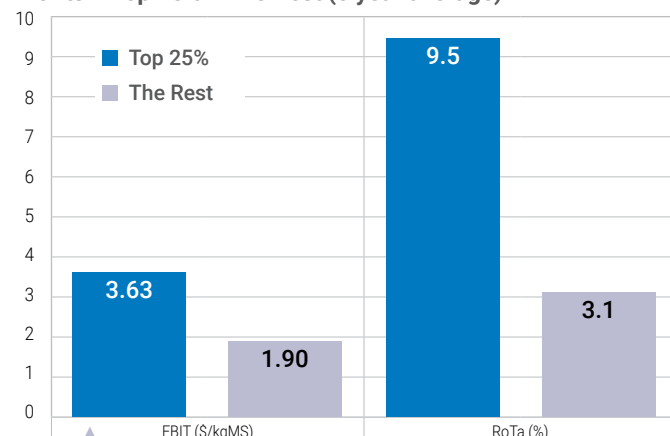


Figure 1: Profits (Earnings before Interest and Tax (EBIT) and Return on Assets (ROTA))

with \$11.55/kgMS for The Rest, while EBIT averaged \$3.63/kg MS (ranging from \$2.98 to \$4.57/kgMS over the 5-year period) compared to \$1.90/kgMS (range \$1.57 to \$2.44/kgMS).

Return on total assets (ROTA) shows how effectively all assets (owned and leased) are used to generate a profit. This average EBIT translated into a 9.5% ROTA for the T25%, compared to 3.1% for The Rest.

Cost structures

Efficient resource use and cost control are central to profitability. Figure 2 compares variable and overhead (operating) costs across the two groups, with particular attention to feed and labour, the two largest operating costs in most dairy businesses.

Secondary performance indicators – Top 25% v The Rest (5 year average)

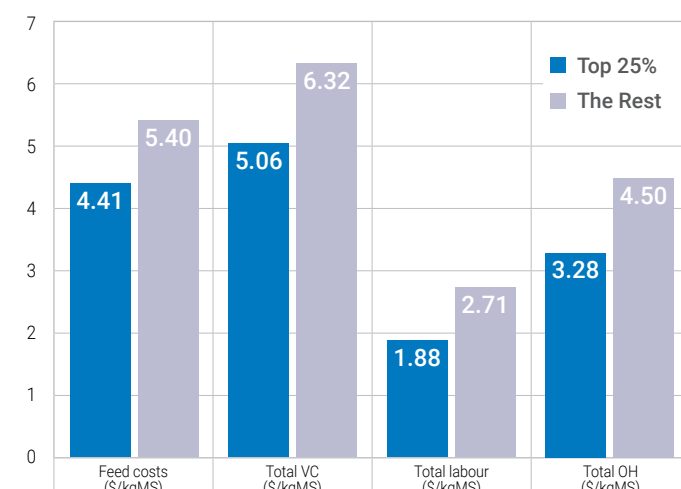


Figure 2: Variable (VC) and overhead (OH) costs

The T25% have lower feed costs than The Rest on a \$/kgMS basis, although feed makes up a slightly higher share of variable costs (87% v 85%) for the T25%. As these farms are mostly in southern NSW, they are often closer to grain and fodder sources, reducing freight costs, and they also tend to contract feed supplies to manage risk. They also tend to have more efficient cows.

Labour is generally the second-largest operating cost on dairy farms. Although the Top 25% use more labour overall (7.1 FTE compared with 4.9 FTE), they achieve lower labour costs on a \$/kgMS basis than The Rest (\$1.88 compared with \$2.71/kgMS). This reflects stronger labour efficiency.

Overhead cost control remains critical, as extra spending here does not usually improve productivity. Higher production can help dilute these costs on a \$/kgMS basis.

Efficiencies

Figures 3 and 4 show efficiencies that can impact performance.

Cow efficiency

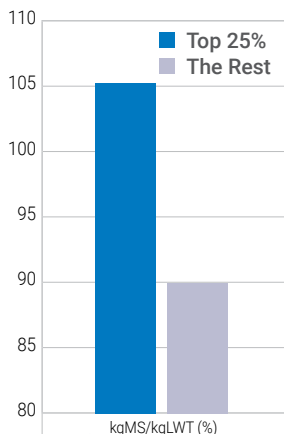


Figure 3. Cow efficiency – Top 25% v The Rest (5 year average)

Labour efficiency

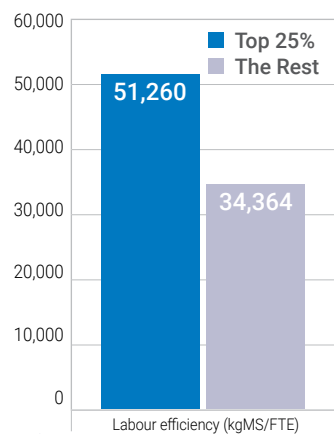


Figure 4. Labour efficiency – Top 25% v The Rest (5 year average)

Figure 3 shows the Top 25% have more efficient cows than The Rest (105% v 90% cow efficiency). In practical terms, a 600 kg cow at 105% efficiency produces 630 kgMS/year, compared with 540 kgMS/year at 90% efficiency. This difference is influenced by many factors including feed conversion efficiency, grazing management, ration balance and herd fertility.

Figure 4 shows a large difference in labour efficiency, with the Top 25% producing 51,260 kgMS/FTE compared with 34,364 kgMS/FTE for The Rest (49% higher). This helps explain why they achieve a lower labour cost on a \$/kgMS basis despite higher total labour costs. Labour efficiency is influenced by factors such as farm layout, dairy infrastructure and investment priorities.

The data suggests that Top 25% farms tend to manage resources more effectively than The Rest. They manage the business to optimise input efficiency while maintaining a strong focus on overhead cost control.

It is important to remember that these results represent the average of two groups of farms in the NSW Dairy Farm Monitor Project. Performance still varies within each group, as individual businesses manage their resources and apply their skills in ways that suit their own circumstances.

What about you – how is your business performing?

Are you running your business, or is your business running you? Dairy businesses are more complex than they were 10 or 20 years ago, so performance must be monitored and managed closely.

If you use DairyBase, you already have the information to interrogate your business in relation to the metrics outlined in this article. Check your numbers and see what they tell you – have you been improving, are you doing well, or are there areas that need investigation?

If you don't use DairyBase, now is the time to start. If you want something simpler, try Dairy Australia's Farm Business Snapshot tool.

Key end of financial year activities

Good managers make informed decisions which are aided by good data. Keeping accurate records is part of this. The end of financial year is the right time to update key information:

June 30th is 'stocktake' day!

- **Get accurate livestock information** – how many milkers, replacements, calves, bulls and/or dairy x beef head do you have on hand?
- **How much feed do you have in your sheds and silos** – record the tonnes of each individual type of feed

If you manage your finances in accounting software, use the Dairy Standard Chart of Accounts (SCoA). It puts your numbers into categories that transfer easily into DairyBase or Farm Business Snapshot and produces more useful management reports than tax-only reports. The SCoA is tax compliant, so speak with your bookkeeper or accountant before the new financial year and set it up for next year. ■ ■

If you are interested in participating in the NSW Dairy Farm Monitor Project, please contact Sheena via email.

sheena.carter@dpird.nsw.gov.au

Disclaimer: Interpretation of top 25% benchmarking results should be undertaken with caution, as the analysis is based on an unbalanced panel of farms. Changes in the farms participating each year can influence the composition of the top-performing group, limiting the ability to draw conclusions from the data.

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QDAS – Support your dairy business decision making with your own financial data

Ray Murphy

Senior Dairy Extension Officer, Department of Primary Industries, Queensland



Queensland has a very diverse range of dairy systems which are evolving rapidly to adapt to a range of challenges and opportunities. From the constant uncertainty of farming through climate variability to the endless opportunities to advance technology, there are limitless options to invest in change that is being considered by dairy farmers every single day. So, which change will benefit your dairy business the most in the current environment; where should you focus your time and money; how do you make an informed decision?

What information does QDAS provide?

Benchmarking through the Queensland Dairy Accounting Scheme (QDAS) provides the opportunity for participating dairy farmers to annually compare the physical, cash flow and profitability aspects of their farm operation. The comparison of your own business performance year-on-year is the internal benchmarking aspect of QDAS, offered to all participants. External benchmarking allows you to compare your farm to other farms in the Queensland industry. Participation in this aspect of QDAS is voluntary.

The top 25% of QDAS farms in 2024/25

Fifty six dairy businesses participated in QDAS in 2024/25 with these farms representing a broad cross-section of the Queensland dairy industry. As part of QDAS analysis, the Top 25% of farms are anonymously identified as the farms with the highest Earnings Before Interest & Tax (EBIT) measured in dollars per cow. EBIT is the amount of profit retained after paying all expenses except finance costs and tax, with allowances included for depreciation, owners labour, and cattle and feed inventory changes. Table 1 shows the average, high and low values for the physical indicators of the 14 farms in the Top 25% in 2024/25. Table 2 shows the average, high and low values for selected cash and profit indicators of the four farms in the Top 25% in 2024/25. It is important to note that the high and low values for each indicator represent the range of these indicators across all 14 farms, meaning all the high values are not values from the same farm and similarly for the low values.

Physical Indicator		Average	High	Low
Cows (Milking + Dry)		302	625	120
Total Production (L)		2,193,708	5,469,915	845,452
Production per Cow (L)		7,271	9,459	4,834
kg DM fed to cows per day	Forages Grazed	5.8	13.6	0.0
	Conserved Forages	5.2	13.8	0.0
	Concentrates*	10.8	16.7	4.7
Milk from homegrown feed		47%	73%	19%
Litres per labour unit		480,625	619,891	268,572

*Concentrates includes grain, protein meals, byproducts, additives and other non-forage commodities

Table 1. The average and range for selected physical indicators of the 14 farms in the Top 25% of QDAS participants in 2024/25

Cash or Profit Indicator	Average	High	Low
Purchased feed cost (cpl*)	31.6	38.8	15.3
Fertiliser (cpl)	3.0	7.1	1.1
Total feed cost (cpl) (including inventory change)	39.3	52.5	23.9
Employed labour (cpl)	10.7	18.4	7.2
Owners unpaid labour (cpl)	6.1	13.4	3.0
Repairs and maintenance (cpl)	4.6	8.9	1.0
Finance and land lease (cpl)	4.9	13.9	0.3
Equity	86%	100%	26%
Liabilities (\$/cow)	3,188	10,423	0

*cpl – cents per litre

Table 2. The average and range for selected cash and profit indicators of the 14 farms in the Top 25% of QDAS participants in 2024/25.

Once again, the analysis of the Top 25% of QDAS farms reveals the broad range of farm sizes, systems, regions, breeds, feed sources, debt levels, costs and labour structures represented within the 14 farms. This is evident from the large range between high and low values of all indicators in Tables 1 & 2. In the Top 25%, there were grazing farms from every region, including North Queensland, as well as PMR and TMR farms from SE Queensland and the Darling Downs.

The broad range in the value of all indicators in the Top 25% shows that there are dairy farmers in every region of the Queensland industry who have adapted to a varied range of systems and structures that optimise the profitability of the farming business they want to run. There is no ideal size or system that maximises profitability on all farms, rather individuals finding the right balance for their operation. These actual numbers from real commercial farms, collected annually, provide real time context for physical and financial indicators for all dairy farmers in the Queensland dairy industry.

The benefits of QDAS involvement

Participation in QDAS offers the opportunity to network and compare with this group of dairy farmers operating a broad range of profitable systems. The collection and processing of the physical and financial data conducted from August to October each year enables the development of cash flow, and profit and feed reports for each individual farm. Figure 1 (Page 8) shows an example of a profit map developed for each individual farm. This internal benchmarking allows comparisons to be made with previous years and the impacts of any changes made during the year to be analysed through physical and financial indicators.

Group dairy farm profit map

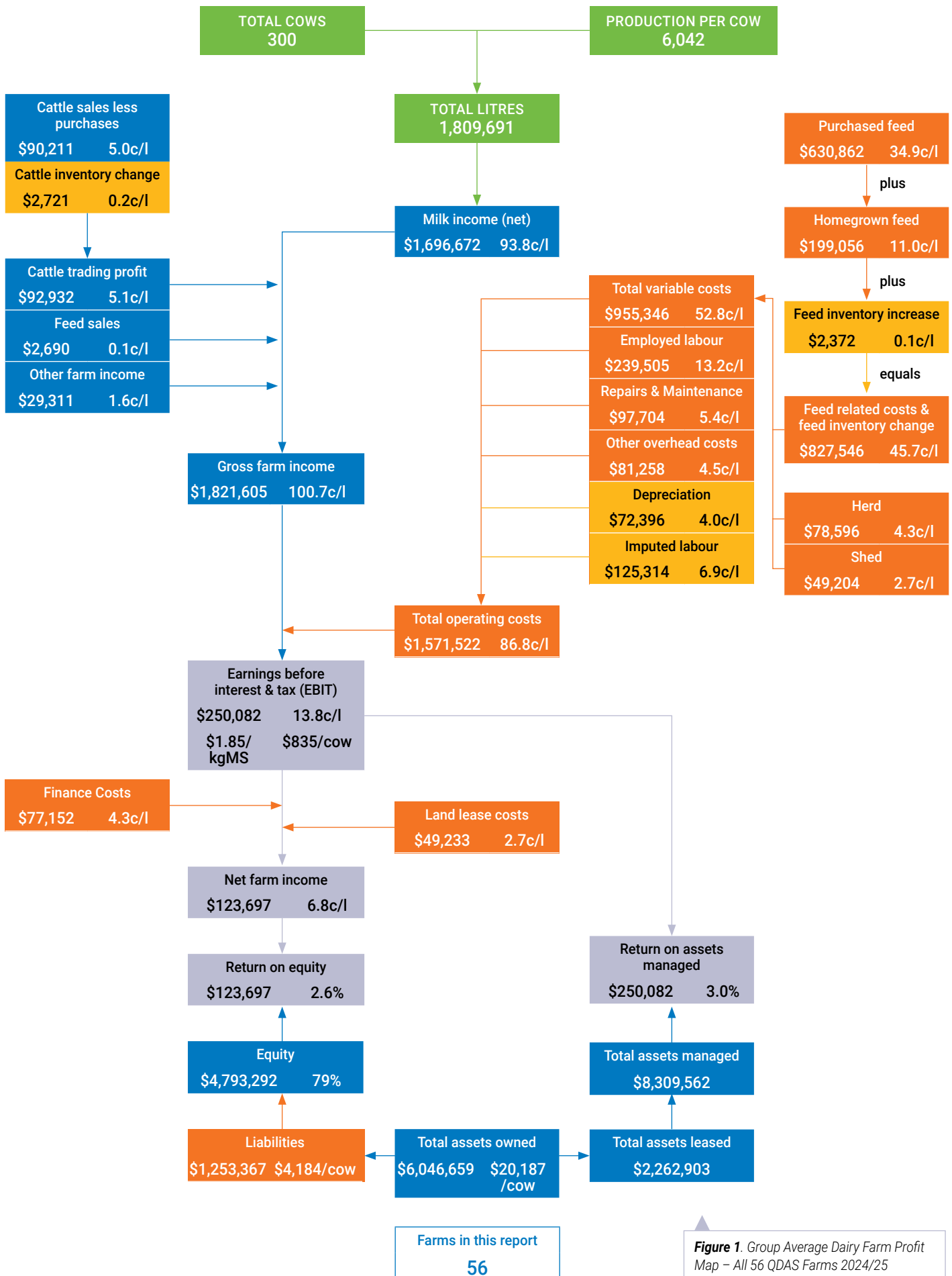


Figure 1. Group Average Dairy Farm Profit Map – All 56 QDAS Farms 2024/25

For example, how much did the new grain mill reduce purchased feed cost? Did milk production and/or components increase?

QDAS workshops run in November every year offer participants the opportunity to externally benchmark their farming operations. These workshops are only attended by participants and QDAS data collectors. This allows for confidential discussions regarding group, regional and farming system results for the year. These workshops allow participants to identify areas for improvement and network with other farmers who may have experience and advice to offer with changes that you may be considering for your farm. This is where the real opportunity lies for QDAS participants to make more informed, supported and confident decisions to continuously improve their farms.

Scenario analysis tool adds power to QDAS

QDAS cooperating farmers have the opportunity to use the QDAS Scenario Tool to help them better understand the financial and feed impacts of changes to their farm operations. Whether planning to expand, adjusting a herd size, or making other operational changes, this tool guides farmers through the decision-making process.

The QDAS Scenario Tool is designed to:

- Analyse the financial and feed impacts of proposed changes.
- Compare the new plan with the farm’s most recent QDAS results.
- Highlight areas where advice might be required from specialists, such as a nutritionist or banker.

Any QDAS cooperating farmer can request a farm visit from their QDAS data collector, who will load the farm’s most recent QDAS data into the tool, which will serve as a baseline for comparison. When the analysis is complete, the tool generates a report that summarises assets, debts, cashflow, profit and feed requirements. An example of the first page of the report can be seen in Table 3.

Carbon Emissions Report

QDAS cooperating farmers also receive a carbon emissions report, using the DairyBase Carbon Calculator from Dairy Australia. The calculator equips farmers to measure their farm carbon footprint, understand sources of emissions and explore options for reducing emissions through herd, feed and soil management or reviewing their farm system. Opportunities such as reducing energy use and switching to renewables can deliver efficiency improvements that also lower greenhouse gas emissions. An example of the carbon emissions report can be seen in Figure 2.

Table 3. Page 1 of the QDAS scenario tool

How to be involved in QDAS

With the end of financial year upon us, QDAS collection is about to kick off for another year. For all continuing QDAS farmers, keep an eye out for your inventories in your inbox. If you would like to give QDAS a go for the first time in 2026, call Mark Bauer QDPI on 0488 095 754. All Queensland dairy farmers are welcome and encouraged to participate in this free and confidential program.

Scenario Forecasting

The purpose of this document is to provide an indication of how changes in your business may impact on cashflow, profitability, equity and production.

This document has been created using the most recent QDAS data for your business and updated with current industry market values for sales and expenses. All values have been adjusted in consultation with you, the end user, to reflect current and future industry trends as accurately as possible.

Name: Xavier Amp
This analysis uses 2024/25 QDAS data as a base.

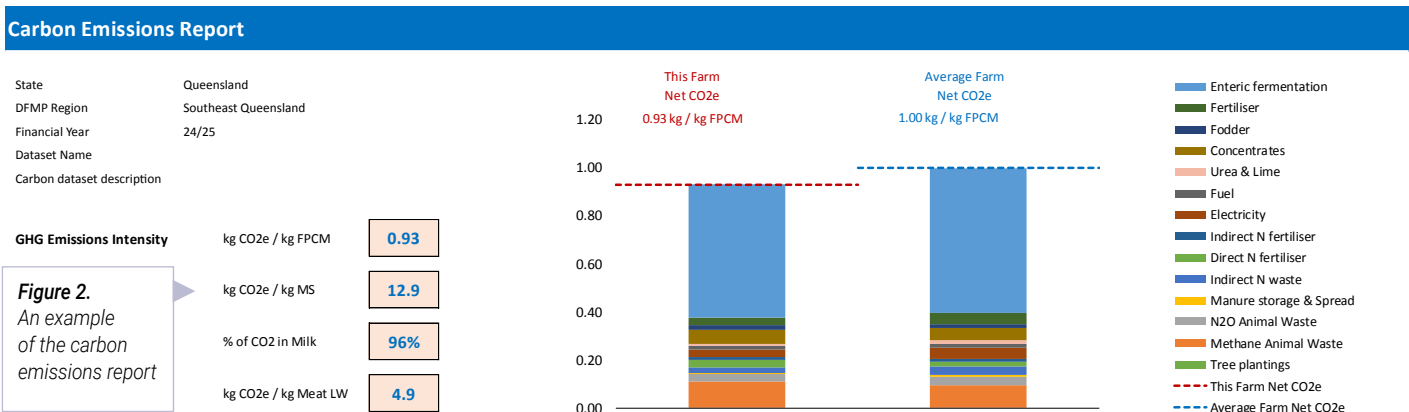
New plan
Buy 30 milking cows using a new loan of \$70,000

PRODUCTION	2024/25	NEW	Change
Cows (Milkers and dry)	120	150	+30
PPC	5,294	5,100	-194
Total Production	635,233	765,000	+129,767

New Livestock	Type1	Type2	Type3	TOTAL
Number				0
\$/head				\$0
Total				\$0

New loans	Loan1	Loan2	Loan3
Amount	70,000		
Years	5		
Interest rate	7.20%		
Interest only payments per month	\$420		\$420
P&I repayments per month	\$1,393		\$1,393

RESULTS	2024/25	NEW	Change
Feed Related Costs	199,242	247,000	+47,758
Feed Related Costs (c/L)	31.4	32.3	+0.9
Farm Operating Cash Surplus	208,054	263,528	+55,474
Farm Operating Cash Surplus / L	32.8	34.4	+1.7
EBIT (\$/cow)	695	1,056	+362
Equity	82%	81%	-1%



Mobile phones on farm – The distraction risk in your pocket

Di Gresham

Human Resource Consultant



Technology has made our lives easier in many ways. Beyond the obvious benefit of being able to communicate quickly, mobile phones give farmers access to business information, herd and financial records, weather and an array of decision-making tools at the touch of a button.

For many farms, the mobile phone has become an essential part of the day-to-day running of the business. But these small devices also come with risks. Like every other hazard on farm, mobile phone use needs to be recognised, discussed and managed.

Jack runs a busy dairy business with nearly a dozen staff. He is used to having his mobile phone being switched on and available most of the time. On this particular day, things were even busier than usual. Jack had been away at a workshop for two days, which meant the rest of the week was compressed. He needed to catch up on what had happened while he was away, respond to staff, make decisions and plan the next few days efficiently.

The farm itself is mostly flat, with straight, well-constructed laneways. Jack was using a two-wheel bike to head down the paddock. He had just finished speaking with the milking crew and had sent off several text messages – both responding to questions and asking his own about where things were up to.

This was not unusual behaviour. In fact, it was something Jack did all the time. It felt normal, practical and productive.

As he rode along the laneway, the ping of an incoming text prompted him to take his phone out of his shirt pocket and look down. Jack later estimated that the bike was travelling so slowly he could probably have walked faster.

But while he was reading and processing the message, the bike continued moving. It drifted straight into the barbed-wire fence running

alongside the laneway. The impact itself was not dramatic. In fact, Jack described it as almost gentle.

The outcome, however, was anything but.

Barbed wire is unforgiving. Even at very low speed, it can do serious damage. Jack's hand was badly torn and he suffered a deep gash across his calf. He needed a trip to the local emergency department and many stitches to repair the injuries.

The incident left him sore, restricted and unable to work properly for some time. It also placed extra pressure on the rest of the team, who had to pick up the slack while he recovered.

Jack's incident is not the only way mobile phones can create risk on farm. In most cases, the phone itself is not the hazard. The risk comes from distraction, rushing, poor timing, or using the phone in the wrong place.



Examples might include:

- Checking a message while operating a side-by-side, quad bike or two-wheel bike and failing to notice a washout, gate, animal, person or piece of machinery ahead.
- Answering a call while driving a tractor, loader or feed-out wagon and losing concentration while reversing, turning, attaching equipment or working near other people.
- Walking through the dairy, yard or laneway while looking down at a phone and slipping, tripping, stepping into a drain, walking into a rail or failing to see an animal move unexpectedly.
- Using a phone while working around cattle and missing the early warning signs that an animal is becoming unsettled, protective, agitated or about to kick.
- Taking a call while opening or closing gates and becoming distracted, leaving a gate unsecured or allowing cattle to move into the wrong area.
- Checking a phone while climbing on or off machinery, over a fence, through a gateway or across uneven ground and falling because attention is not on hand placement, footing or maintaining three points of contact.
- Stopping in an unsafe location to read or send a message – in a laneway, near a blind corner, beside operating machinery, or in an area where vehicles or livestock are moving.
- Wearing earbuds or using hands-free calling and failing to hear a reversing

vehicle, shouted warning, approaching bike, machinery alarm, or animal movement nearby.

- Becoming distracted while using a farm app or taking photos and stepping too close to a moving PTO shaft, auger, crush, chemical area, effluent pond, dam or other high-risk area.
- Looking at a phone while handling chemicals, treatments or animal health products and misreading a label, missing an instruction, or losing track of what has already been measured or administered.
- Dropping a phone near water, effluent, mud or machinery and instinctively reaching into an unsafe area to retrieve it.
- Receiving an upsetting or stressful personal message during the workday and continuing to work with machinery, vehicles or livestock while distracted or emotionally unsettled.
- Sending urgent messages to staff when they are likely to be driving, riding bikes, operating equipment or working with cattle, unintentionally encouraging them to respond at an unsafe time.
- Using a phone late in the day when fatigue and time pressure are already increasing the chance of distraction or poor decision-making.

The common thread in all these examples is not that mobile phones are bad. It is that they can take our eyes, ears, hands or attention away from the job at exactly the wrong moment. If these examples ring true for you, then they are almost certainly ringing true for your staff as well.

The way phones are used on farm sets the standard for the whole team, so it is important to treat mobile phone use as a real workplace safety issue that needs to be talked about, agreed on and managed. It's not just a matter of personal choice.

Managing mobile phone risk on farm does not need to mean banning phones. The aim is to put some clear expectations around how and when phones are used, particularly around machinery, vehicles, livestock and other high-risk tasks.

Some practical steps could include:

Set a clear "stop before you use it" rule

If a message, call or notification needs attention, stop the bike, vehicle or task first. Move to a safe location, secure the machinery or vehicle if needed, and then check the phone.

This simple rule can apply to bikes, side-by-sides, tractors, loaders, feed-out wagons and walking through the dairy, yards and laneways.

Identify no-phone tasks and areas

Some jobs and locations should be treated as phone-free, unless there is an emergency. This might include operating machinery, handling cattle, working in the dairy pit, climbing on or off equipment, working around chemicals, using augers or PTOs, reversing vehicles, opening gates, or moving through busy laneways.

Identify the tasks on your farm where distraction could quickly lead to injury.

Think about how messages are sent

Supervisors and managers should also think about when they are sending messages. If a staff member is likely to be milking, riding a bike, operating machinery or moving cattle, consider whether the message is genuinely urgent.

Not every message needs an immediate response. Where possible, make it clear when something can wait.

Use hands-free carefully

Hands-free does not remove the risk. A conversation can still take attention away from the job, especially when operating machinery, working with livestock or making decisions under pressure.

Hands-free may reduce the need to hold the phone, but it does not remove the distraction.

Manage earbuds and headphones

Earbuds can stop workers from hearing approaching vehicles, reversing alarms, other staff calling out, animals moving behind them, or machinery changing sound.

Be clear about where earbuds are not appropriate, particularly around machinery, vehicles, livestock and shared work areas. In some workplaces, banning earbuds in operational areas may be the safest option.

Make phones secure

Phones should be carried or mounted in a way that does not create extra risk. A phone falling out of a pocket while riding, climbing or working around machinery can create a sudden distraction and an instinctive urge to retrieve it.

Where phones are needed in vehicles or machinery, a proper mount or safe storage spot is better than having the phone loose.

Use voicemail or call-back expectations

One simple approach is to agree that staff are not expected to answer calls or respond to messages while doing high-risk work. They can let the call go to voicemail or return the call once they are safely stopped. This reduces the pressure to respond immediately.

Lead by example

If farm owners and managers check messages while riding bikes, operating equipment or walking through cattle, staff will see that as normal behaviour. The standard set by the people in charge is often the standard followed by the rest of the team.

If the rule is "stop before you use it", that rule needs to apply to everyone.

Include mobile phone use in your farm safety system

Mobile phone use can be included in farm policies, inductions and safe work procedures. New staff should understand the farm's expectations from the beginning.

This does not need to be complicated. It can be as simple as a short policy that says phones are useful tools; however, must not be used in a way that distracts from high-risk work.

Talk about expectations with the team

Mobile phone use should be discussed openly with staff. This is not about catching people out or banning normal communication. It is about agreeing on what safe use looks like.

A simple Toolbox Talk could cover when phones are useful, when they create risk, and what everyone agrees to do differently.

Review any near misses

If someone has a close call involving a phone, talk about it. Was the person driving, walking, working with cattle, using machinery, or rushing? Was there pressure to respond straight away? Was the phone being used for work?

Near misses are a good opportunity to improve expectations before someone is seriously hurt.

At the end of the day, mobile phones are part of modern farming. The goal is not to remove them from the workplace, but to make sure they are used at the right time, in the right place, and in a way that does not put people at unnecessary risk.

Dairy farm's cost-savvy hack makes cow comfort 'Cono-key'



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As Queensland braces for a potentially warm and dry winter, a father-son dairy farming duo hasn't let high fuel, fertiliser and feed costs sour their drought preparedness after cleverly combining a free program, grant and concessional loan to save money.

Stewart and Dylan Conochie's family operation, 'Brookland Stud Farms', located at Kalbar, 80 kilometres southwest of Brisbane, has saved tens of thousands of dollars from grant funding and in interest on a loan for drought resilient on-farm infrastructure through the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA).

"Anybody who's thinking about getting ready for drought – look at QRIDA. They have amazing assistance and amazing people there to help you with any application and progress your business to be better prepared," Stewart said.

The cost-saving combination requires producers to first create a free Farm Business Resilience Plan (FBRP). Then, producers can stack a Drought Preparedness Grant with a concessional Sustainability Loan through QRIDA to fund the on-farm infrastructure improvements identified in the FBRP.

"We used a QRIDA Drought Preparedness Grant to install a centre pivot irrigator," Stewart said.

QRIDA Regional Area Manager for South East Queensland and the Lockyer Valley, Brian Coe, said the

irrigator has increased the family farm's cropping area and improved the quality of their sorghum and lucerne.

"The Conochie family can now more efficiently water approximately 20 acres of double cropping which means about an extra 600 tonnes of silage for their livestock," Brian said.

The co-contribution Drought Preparedness Grants of up to \$50,000 are available to Queensland primary producers subject to the availability of funds.

The Conochie family then used a concessional QRIDA Sustainability Loan as the co-contribution for their Drought Preparedness Grant to fund a compost feed shed.

"The shed has added comfort for the cows with the soft bedding, along with being able to bring feed directly to them and it being cooler for the cows, especially on the hotter days," Dylan said.

To find out how Queensland primary producers can get ready for drought with QRIDA, visit qrda.qld.gov.au or call 1800 623 946.



QRIDA Regional Area Manager for South East Queensland and the Lockyer Valley, Brian Coe, encourages Queensland primary producers to get in touch with their local Regional Area Manager for help completing their QRIDA financial assistance application.

If this drought story raised any concerns for you, call 000 in an emergency or visit qrda.qld.gov.au for a list of confidential mental health resources available for Queensland primary producers.



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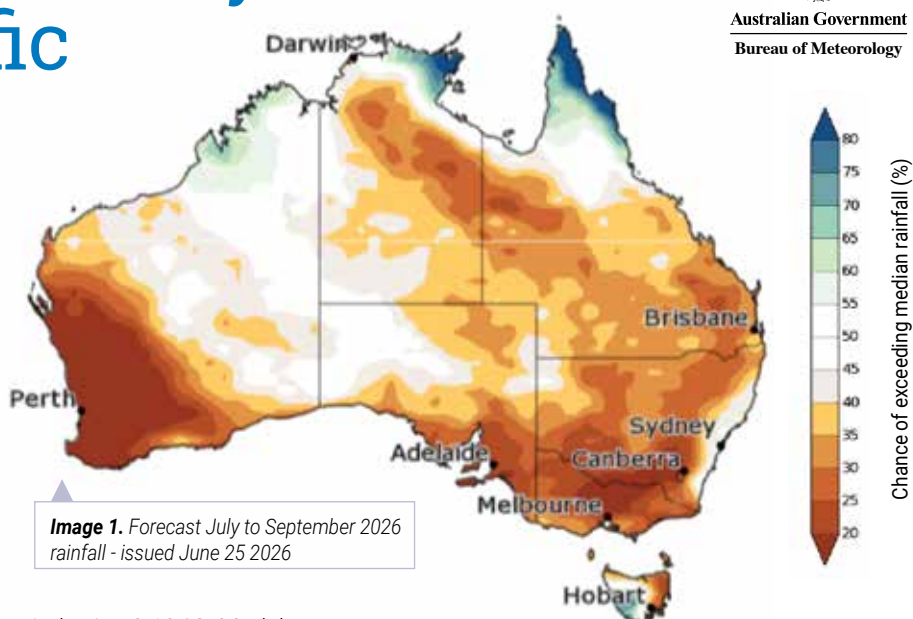


El Niño is underway in the tropical Pacific



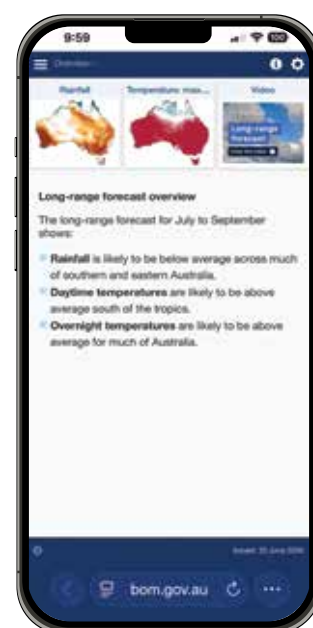
Australian Government
Bureau of Meteorology

- Sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in the central tropical Pacific are above El Niño thresholds, and atmospheric indicators are also aligning with an El Niño state. This suggests the ocean and atmosphere are acting to reinforce the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) state, which is likely to strengthen and sustain this event until at least the end of the year.
- The latest relative Niño3.4 index value for the week ending 14 June 2026 is +0.92 °C, above the El Niño threshold (+0.80 °C). All models, including the Bureau's, forecast the tropical Pacific to continue warming in the coming months.
- Atmospheric indicators, such as trade winds, pressure and cloud patterns are now showing signs consistent with El Niño. Trade winds are either reversed or weaker than average across most of the tropical Pacific, cloud patterns near the Date Line have started to shift to a more El Niño-like state and the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) has shown a steady decline in recent months, with the 30-day SOI (to 14 June) dropping to -23.3.
- Forecasts are pointing towards a strong to very strong El Niño event, based on the extent of warming in the central tropical Pacific. Around half of the models indicate this event could peak at levels among the highest observed since 1950.
- A strong El Niño signal in the Niño3.4 region does not necessarily mean strong impacts on Australia's climate; ENSO is only one of many factors that can influence Australia's seasonal weather and climate.
- The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is currently neutral. As of 14 June 2026, the IOD



index is -0.13 °C. Models suggest a positive IOD event is likely in the southern hemisphere winter-spring. However, model forecasts show a large variation in both the timing and strength of this potential event.

- The SST analysis for the week ending 14 June 2026 shows waters are average to above average around most of Australia. Waters are especially warm along the New South Wales and eastern Tasmania coasts (peaking at around 3 to 4 °C above average). This SST pattern is forecast to continue in the coming months.
- More broadly, global sea surface temperatures have been very warm, with May 2026 global SSTs the warmest May on record (since 1900).
- The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) index is positive as of 13 June 2026. It is forecast to return to neutral in late June.
- The long-range forecast provides the best guidance on likely rainfall and temperature patterns in the coming months, taking into account all influences from the oceans and atmosphere. ■■



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Breeding for Heat Resilience



Editorial – Practical Insights for Australia's Dairy Future from a Kentucky Dairy System

Heat stress is increasingly shaping dairy profitability in North Eastern Australia.

While cooling infrastructure can help, one Kentucky dairy farmer's experience confirms that genetics is another powerful tool for improving resilience.

South Central Kentucky Temperature Humidity Index (THI) - H&S Dairy / Morgantown, KY (2023-2025)

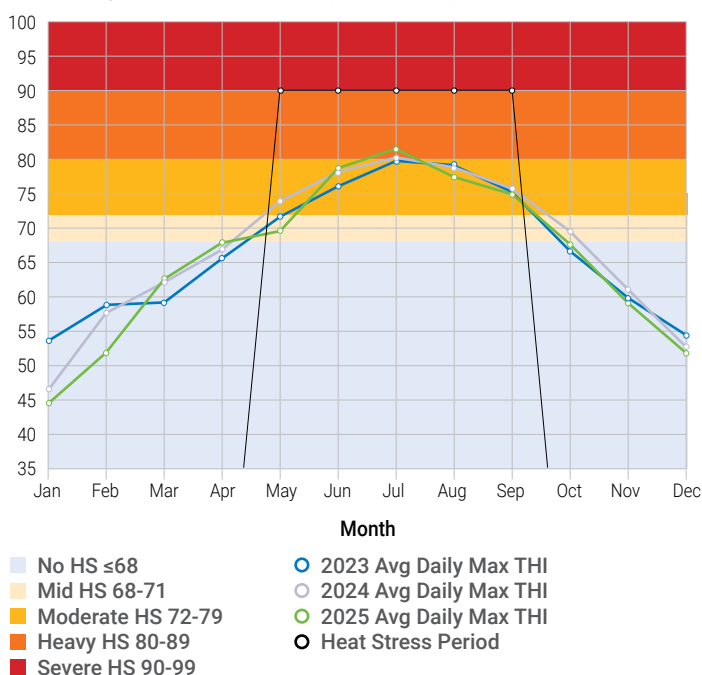


Figure 1. Typical South Central Kentucky heat-stress (HS) profile highlighting the May-September challenge described by Michael Hunt.



Michael Hunt of H&S Dairy (IceBlue Genetics) began incorporating SLICK Holstein genetics in 2020 to create a more efficient cow for a heat-stress environment. Hunt reports that cows experience heat stress from May through September (see Figure 1), with the most severe conditions occurring in late June through August.

Field observations have been compelling. SLICK heifers continue grazing during hot weather while conventional animals seek shade. SLICK cows remain at the feed bunk and maintain feed intake when others congregate under fans. Hunt also reports no compromise in udder quality or commercial conformation.

Research Snapshot: Does SLICK Have a Winter Penalty?

One question often raised by producers is whether cattle carrying the SLICK trait may be disadvantaged in cooler conditions because of their shorter hair coat. Recent research from Lincoln University in New Zealand provides some encouraging early insights. [Robb et al. (2024), *New Zealand Journal of Animal Science and Production*.]

Researchers compared SLICK and non-SLICK dairy heifers during winter under both unrestricted and restricted feeding conditions. During the feed restriction period, the control group



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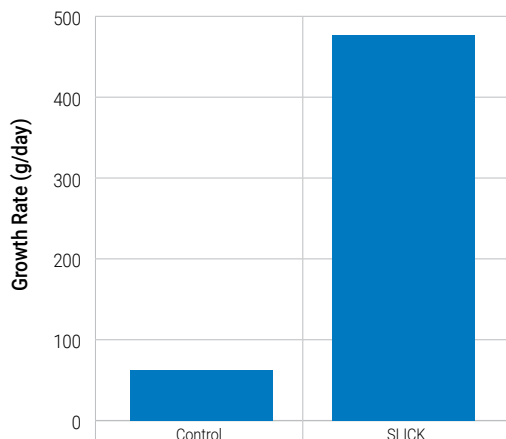
experienced an 87% reduction in growth rate, while SLICK heifers recorded a minor reduction in growth and displayed behavioural adaptations consistent with efficient energy use (Figure 2).

The study concluded that further research is warranted, but the results suggest the SLICK trait may not be associated with the winter disadvantages that some producers might expect refer to figure 2.

For Australian dairy farmers, that is an encouraging finding. While SLICK genetics were originally developed to address heat stress, emerging research suggests they may contribute to resilience and efficiency across a broader range of environments.

Winter Feed Restriction Study

Figure 2: Heifer growth rate during restricted feed period in winter 2023 (May-July).



Why does this matter for Australia?

The SLICK gene enables cattle to:

- Maintain feed intake during heat stress, which supports higher fertility and reproduction
- Improve whole-herd resilience to deliver more milk through Summer & Autumn
- Reduce reliance on additional cooling inputs
- Maintain growth and efficient feed utilisation, including during winter.

The Bottom Line

Poor fertility and reduced milk production during periods of heat stress should not be accepted as an unavoidable cost of doing business. While management practices remain essential, genetics offers an additional opportunity to improve herd resilience and long-term profitability.

As climatic pressures increase, genetics that help cows remain productive, fertile and comfortable under heat stress will become increasingly valuable for northern Australian dairy systems. For producers looking to build greater resilience into future generations, heat-adapted genetics represent an opportunity worth serious consideration.

"I thought adding the SLICK gene could increase the output of our animals without adding more daily costs. Now I know it does!"

ABOUT RESILIENCE GENETICS AUSTRALIA

Resilience Genetics Australia is the Australian arm of Tropical Resilience Genetics (TrRG), a specialist dairy genetics provider focused on developing high-performance cattle for hot, humid and heat-stressed production environments.

Established in 2009, the programme combines elite dairy genetics from New Zealand, Australia and the United States, including one of the world's largest and most diverse Homozygous SLICK sire teams. Holstein-Friesian, Jersey and crossbred bloodlines are bred to deliver productivity, fertility and resilience across a range of dairy systems.

Australian-bred sires offer competitive BPI rankings alongside strong fertility, management and type traits, enabling producers to capture the benefits of the SLICK gene without compromising overall breeding objectives.

Working closely with commercial farmers, industry partners and research organisations, Resilience Genetics Australia advances practical, science-based solutions for heat resilience and dairy profitability. The Australian team is supported by Peter Semmens, a respected dairy and beef genetics professional with extensive experience across the Australian livestock industry.

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Dry cow antibiotic shortage

Treatment of cows with dry cow antibiotic at the end of lactation is a key part of a herd's mastitis management strategy: the long-acting antibiotic in dry cow treatment maximises the likelihood of curing subclinical mastitis infections. In the event of a shortage of dry cow antibiotic product/s, farms will have to change their dry cow management, such as using a different product or changing from blanket (whole-herd) to selective (part-herd) dry cow treatment for a period of time.

These changes will be specific for each farm and needs to be discussed with their prescribing veterinarian in a dry cow consult. This factsheet covers some common considerations.

Know the differences between antibiotic dry cow products

There are many products on the market, with different active ingredients. Cloxacillin products are effective against Gram positive bacteria like Staph aureus and Strep uberis, while cephalonium products and those containing ampicillin also cover Gram negative bacteria like E. coli. Research has shown that products with more milligrams per tube of active ingredient will have higher cure rates.

The key difference from a farm management point of view is the minimum dry period: that is, the required number of days between administration at drying off and calving. As seen in the following table, there is almost a 20-day difference between products. Depending on the timing of the shortage, changing to a product with a longer minimum dry period might be unfeasible for some farms that have cows that are closer to calving. Accurate calving dates are essential to help reduce the risk of cows calving within their minimum dry period.

Active ingredient per tube	Minimum Dry Period
Cloxacillin 600mg	35 days
Cloxacillin 500 mg	30 days
Cloxacillin 500mg + Ampicillin 250mg	30 days
Cephalonium 250mg	49 days

For cows calving after the minimum dry period has elapsed, all dry cow products have a milk withholding period of 8-milkings.

Consider selective dry cow treatment

Selective dry cow treatment is where only the cows most likely to have subclinical mastitis are treated with intramammary antibiotic at drying off. It is a potential way to make supplies of antibiotic products last longer.

Farmers treat **all quarters** of any cow that a) had clinical mastitis during lactation and b) those that have had a peak individual cow cell count (ICCC) above a certain threshold. Farmers will need to discuss with their vet as to the most suitable ICCC threshold, although a common cut off is 150,000 cells/mL.

Dairy Australia's Drying-Off-Checklist outlines the herd level criteria for best practice selective DCT, including:

- An annual average bulk milk cell count of <150,000 cells/mL.
- Good cow identification.
- Complete and accurate clinical case records.
- Less than 25 clinical cases of mastitis per 100 cows (25%) within the last 12 months.
- No Strep agalactiae (based on PCR testing and/or individual cow milk cultures).
- At least one individual cow cell count (ICCC) for each cow within 80 days of planned drying-off date.

While four or more herd tests over a lactation are recommended to provide the best information on ICCCs for culling decisions and drying off treatments, New Zealand research has shown that either of the following can be as predictive in defining if a cow is infected (or not) with a major pathogen at drying off:

- The ICCC result from a single herd test ("spot test"), carried out in the last 80 days prior to dry off.
- For farms with inline ICCC sensors, the average of the last 12 weeks of ICCCs.

With selective dry cow treatment, all cows should still receive an internal teat sealant (ITS). These products contain an inert non-antibiotic product (bismuth subnitrate) that blocks off the teat canal and help prevent new infections occurring during the dry period. For farms that haven't used teat sealants before, it is important to get advice and training from your veterinarian as the application method is different from dry cow antibiotic.

The Selective Dry Cow tool

The Selective Dry Cow tool is available to Herd Platform users on DataVat. It draws upon herd test results, clinical case records and other available herd/cow records and provides the recommended course of action for each individual cow that is within 80 days of the end of their lactation. For more information see: [Factsheet Selective Dry Cow Tool](#).



Have realistic expectations: When using herd test or spot test data to select the cows that will and won't receive antibiotics, it is inevitable that some infected udders may be missed and receive no antibiotics and vice versa. Changing the ICCC threshold for treatment will change the proportions of each and is something to discuss with your veterinarian

Don't waste product on incurable cases

Cows to consider for culling are those which are unlikely to cure. This includes cows which have had high cell counts throughout two consecutive lactations (despite receiving dry cow treatment in the intervening dry period) and cows that have had three or more clinical cases of mastitis during the lactation. The Mastitis Focus Report – available on DataVat – can help farms create a cull cow list based on herd test and clinical case data.

What if a farm doesn't herd test and a spot test isn't possible?

For some farms, it may not be feasible to get individual cell counts prior to drying off. In this scenario, a logical approach is to target treatment towards those more likely to cure: that is, the younger animals within the herd. After confirming how many cows-worth of dry cow is available, a farmer could create a list of cows in ascending age order and treat from the youngest to the oldest.

The number of older cows that will be excluded from treatment depends on the amount of product available and the size of the herd. However, in addition to being the animals who are more likely to have chronic infections, these older animals are less likely to continue in the herd for multiple lactations.

For some farms, it may be feasible to do rapid mastitis tests on all or some of the cows, and only treat the cows that

test positive. However, this can be difficult to do safely and hygienically, and interpretation can also be difficult. Again, this is something for farmers to discuss with their veterinarian.

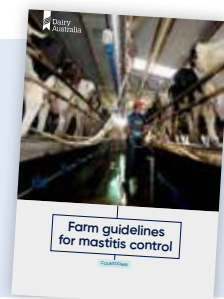
Focus on other drying-off management practices

The following are always important to do, regardless of the availability of dry cow products:

- Ensure best practice hygiene during dry cow treatment to reduce the risk of introducing bacteria up through the teat canal.
- Reduce milk production to appropriate levels prior to drying off (6 to 12 litres per day) to minimise risk of cows leaking milk after drying off.
- Consider the environmental conditions dry cows will be facing – aim for dry cows to have the cleanest paddocks in the first and last two weeks of the dry period when the teat canal is less likely to be fully sealed.
- Reduce risk of new infections during the remaining lactation, particularly those spread at milking time like Staph aureus: check the concentration of post-milking teat disinfectant and ensure good coverage: everywhere that the teat cup liners touch. ■ ■ ■



The [Countdown Farmer Guidelines for Mastitis Control](#) have more information about best-practice dry off management.



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Using teat sealants in your herd

Teat sealants are used in cows at the time of drying-off to help protect them from environmental mastitis infections during the dry period and prior to calving.

They are infused into the teats after the last milking and stay in the lower part of the teats throughout the dry period, physically preventing bacteria from entering the teat canal.

Teat sealants are not antibiotics but they can cause black spot blemishes in maturing cheese. This is not a human health problem but can result in export customers rejecting or downgrading product.

To maintain Australia's reputation for high quality dairy products it is essential that milk leaving the farm does NOT contain teat sealant.

The three key steps for the proper use of teat sealants

1. Administer teat sealants correctly

The techniques required are very different to those used with antibiotic Dry Cow Treatment. It's important that you and your staff know how to administer the product correctly.

Administer teat sealants LAST.

If a cow is to receive antibiotic Dry Cow Treatment in conjunction with teat sealant, make sure that the teat sealant is the final product administered.

Keep the tubes sterile.

Cold temperatures can make the product hard to instil into the teat but it must not be warmed above 20°C. Do not warm tubes by putting them directly into warm water. Instead, place the tubes in a warm room prior to use.

Completely disinfect the teat ends.

Wearing gloves, disinfect by rubbing the teat opening with a teat wipe or cotton ball and alcohol (70% methylated spirits & 30% water). Repeat until no dirty colour is evident on the wipe.

Gently close off the top of the teat and insert the tube nozzle.

To encourage the product to remain within the teat cistern and canal (rather than in the udder) gently squeeze close the top of the teat (closest to the udder). Remove the tube cap (without touching the tip), gently insert the nozzle into the teat canal and infuse the product in

slowly. Do not insert the nozzle to its full depth – this can damage the teat end. Remove the tube before letting go of the top of the teat: there's extra pressure in the teat, and this allows teat sealant to move down into the teat canal rather than up into the udder.

DO NOT massage the udder after infusing teat sealant.

Unlike antibiotic treatments, the infused product must sit in the lower part of the teat. It is advisable to stand cows for 2-3 minutes after teat sealing. Avoid transporting cows for 24 hours after teat sealing.



X-ray of a teat showing the position of correctly administered teat sealant in the teat cistern and canal.

2. Remove teat sealants from fresh cows

It is very important to stop teat sealant from fresh cows entering the vat.

This can be time consuming especially if you have large batches of cows calving, so make sure you have enough staff available.

At the first milking strip each treated quarter at least 10-12 times.

This removes the bulk of the teat sealant so that it does not come in contact with the milk lines or rubberware – remember to wear gloves! This step is necessary even if calves have sucked prior to the first milking.

Keep milk from fresh cows out of the vat for at least 8-10 milkings after calving.

Small amounts of residual teat sealant will still be present in the milk for the first few days after calving, so it is important that all cows have a minimum period of 8 milkings before milk is included for pickup. This is also the standard recommendation to minimise colostrum in the milk for sale.

Preferably use designated clusters and test buckets.

Teat sealants adhere to milk lines and rubberware. Where possible avoid running milk from treated animals through normal milk lines during the first eight milkings.

3. Clean milking equipment carefully

Residual teat sealant can stick to and form clumps in areas of reduced milk flow, such as milk claws and plate coolers. It will be seen as a greasy white substance.

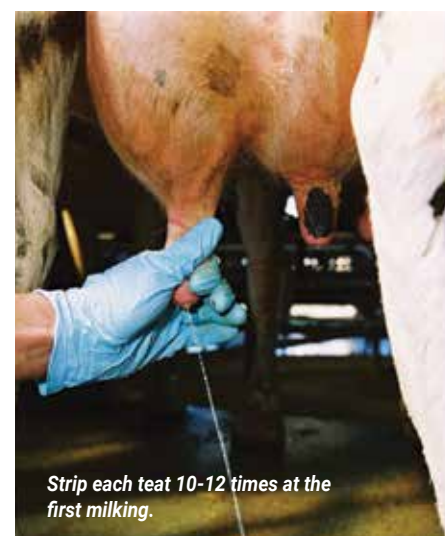
Carefully clean the milking plant to ensure that every effort has been made to prevent residual product from entering the bulk vat.

Review the cleaning routine in your shed and update milking staff.

Take extra care to follow label directions on the cleaning products used. Ensure that the water temperature, chemical concentration, and volume used is according to label directions.

Change filter socks regularly.

Effective filters are crucial to limiting the amount of residual teat sealant entering the bulk vat. Change filter socks regularly, especially if there is visible teat sealant present and leave filters in place during the cleaning phase to stop any product coming in contact with the plate cooler.



Strip each teat 10-12 times at the first milking.

For further information

For more information or to discuss which animals to treat, contact your veterinarian. ■ ■

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Effluent application for pasture and crops

Rising fertiliser costs and supply uncertainty can place significant pressure on farm input decisions. In these conditions, dairy effluent presents an opportunity to partially offset fertiliser requirements by supplying nutrients already available within the farm system.

Dairy effluent is a valuable source of nutrients and organic carbon that can support pasture growth, improve soil structure and reduce reliance on purchased fertiliser.

When used strategically, effluent can reduce input costs while maintaining pasture production. However, to achieve this, it must be managed as a fertiliser input with careful consideration of rates, timing and application area.

How much to apply

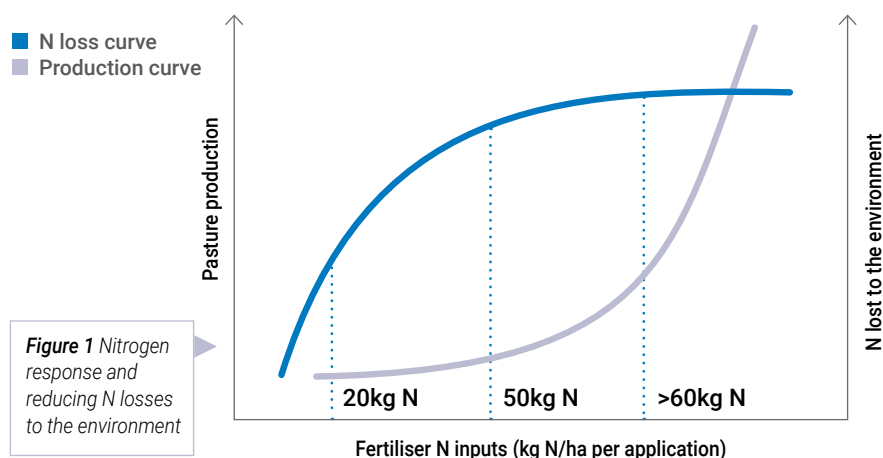
Applying the right amount of effluent is critical to achieving a productive response while avoiding nutrient overload. Effluent nutrients are not balanced, meaning each nutrient must be considered individually when determining application rates. In most cases, the nutrient that requires the largest land area, often potassium, will determine how much effluent can be safely applied.

Total potassium applications should not exceed 60kg per hectare in a single application and 120kg per hectare over a year. Nitrogen applications should be limited to 60kg per hectare per application. These recommendations reduce the risk of nitrate poisoning and metabolic disorders such as grass tetany and milk fever.

Limiting nitrogen applications to 60kg per hectare also improves pasture response rates (pasture response rates progressively decline after 50kg per hectare), and reduces nitrogen losses to the environment. Refer to Figure 1 Nitrogen response and reducing N losses to the environment.

If effluent analysis is not available for either liquid effluent or sludge, these conservative rates can be used:

- 8mm of liquid effluent per hectare (1 ML per 12 ha)
- 25mm of sludge per hectare (1 ML per 4 ha)



KEY POINTS

Treat effluent as a fertiliser input. Plan, monitor and adjust its use over time.

Apply liquid effluent and sludge at the correct rate, over the right area, and in suitable conditions.

Liquid effluent and sludge application rates:

- Potassium ≤ 60 kg/ha per application or 120 kg/ha annually.
- Nitrogen ≤ 60 kg/ha per application.

If no chemical analysis is available for liquid effluent or sludge, these conservative application rates can be used:

- 8mm of liquid effluent per hectare (1 ML per 12 ha).
- 25mm of sludge per hectare (1 ML per 4 ha).

For greatest response:

- Apply liquid effluent to actively growing crops or pastures.
- Apply sludge to established pastures or incorporate into seedbed prior to sowing.

Ensure adequate land area and rotate paddocks to prevent nutrient accumulation.

Do not graze young stock on paddocks that have received effluent due to disease risk.

Sample effluent and conduct regular soil testing to guide decisions.

Sample effluent

To ensure effective nutrient management, it is strongly recommended that farmers get their farms effluent regularly sampled by an approved service provider and use farm-specific results to guide reuse and application rate.

Soil testing

Conduct regular soil testing of the areas where effluent is being applied to monitor nutrient levels and soil health



Where to apply

Ensuring there is sufficient land area available for effluent application is essential. Applying lighter rates across a larger area improves nutrient use efficiency and reduces the risk of nutrient accumulation.

Repeated applications to the same areas can lead to a reduced response rate and imbalances, particularly elevated potassium levels, which can affect both pasture composition and animal health.

When to apply

Timing of application plays a significant role in determining how effectively nutrients are used and the level of environmental risk. Effluent should only be applied when there is no likelihood of nutrient loss via runoff from the property or leaching through the soil profile.

Applying to saturated soils or ahead of heavy rainfall increases the risk of nutrients being lost to waterways and reduces the benefit to pasture growth. Matching application timing to periods of active pasture growth will maximise nutrient uptake and response.

Managing risks

Applying excessive amounts of effluent in a single application increases the risk of a range of issues, including nitrate poisoning, mineral imbalances and reduced nitrogen use efficiency. It also increases the likelihood of runoff and nutrient loss.

Effluent should always be treated as a fertiliser input that is managed strategically, rather than as a product requiring disposal.

Monitoring and follow-up

Monitoring and follow-up are important to ensure effluent is being used effectively over time. Testing effluent or sludge provides valuable information on nutrient content and allows application rates to be tailored to individual farm systems.

Regular soil testing of paddocks receiving effluent helps track nutrient levels, identify any imbalances and inform future management decisions.

Grazing management

Grazing management is an important consideration following effluent application. Paddocks should be isolated and grazing withheld for at least 21 days after effluent has been applied to pasture or crops. This allows time for nutrient uptake, reduces fouling and minimises the risk of pathogen transfer.

Where sludge has been applied, a longer withholding period of six to eight weeks may be required due to the higher solids and weather conditions.

Spreading effluent on pasture brings an increased risk of infectious pathogen spread, particularly for Johne's disease and Salmonella. The heightened susceptibility of young stock means that any paddocks intended to be grazed by calves or heifers should not receive effluent application.



Key message

When applied with care and planning, dairy effluent can be a highly effective tool to support pasture production and soil health. The key is to apply it at the right rate, across an appropriate area, and under the right conditions, while continuing to monitor and adjust management over time.



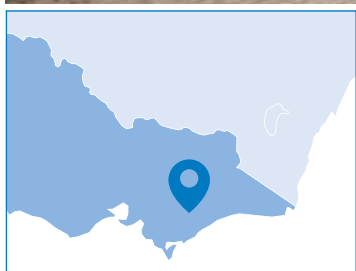
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Our Farm, Our Plan



DELIVERING for DAIRY

**Brendan and
Nicole Saunders**
Maffra, Victoria

Enhancing staff management for your business Victorian dairy farmers Brendan and Nicole Saunders know that the key to running a successful business is having everyone on the same page.

Participating in Dairy Australia's innovative Our Farm, Our Plan provided the Maffra-based couple with a strong understanding of exactly what their vision was, helped set the goals needed to get there and ensured that their staff were all aligned.

"We did Our Farm, Our Plan with our staff and it was absolutely the best thing we've done. It was about them, what they want to achieve and their goals in life to ensure the pathway they're on with us aligns with what they want to achieve," Nicole says.

Brendan and Nicole own three farms – one is their home farm, the other is leased and the third is sharefarmed (50 per cent). There are around 500 cows on each property

"We're in the growth stage of our business, so it's important that everyone's on the same page and we have a strong knowledge of what our vision is and what our goals are, and how we're going to achieve that," says Nicole.

Nicole adds that she would recommend the Our Farm, Our Plan program to anyone.

"We have already done a lot of business strategic and tactical planning. We'd already covered a lot of the course content, but we do an annual review of our strategic plans every year anyway," she explains.

"It was a perfect revision process for us. But for a lot of people who haven't done that in the business yet, it's a great first starting point. I really hope a lot more people take advantage for their staff to go on it as well, because I think it's beneficial to provide them with a vision and plan."

Communication was a key factor in the program, and Nicole says having a farm consultant was helpful.

"You look at how you communicate as part of a team and your own personality. I think wrapping up with a farm consultant visit is beneficial too – because that keeps you on your toes to make sure you do what you said you would."



Brendan says participating in Our Farm, Our Plan set the Saunders' business for success.

"It was a massive benefit to us and our team. It was taking a step back, and having a bit of an overview of what you can do, because you can get tied up in the day-to-day operations," he says.

"It's extremely important to spend the time and invest in your staff – you can't be everywhere yourself. It's giving a chance to look at why they want to work for us and where they want to head in the future." ■ ■ ■



FURTHER INFORMATION

For further details about Our Farm, Our Plan and how it can help enhance your farm business management, visit dairyaustralia.com.au/ofop or call 1800 548 073.

2026 Event Calendar

DATE	EVENT	REGION	LOCATION	CONTACT
July to September				
TBC	Employment Starter Kit	Sunshine Coast	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Employment Starter Kit	South East Qld	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Employment Starter Kit	Darling Downs	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Employment Starter Kit	Far North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
TBC	Employment Starter Kit	Mid North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
TBC	Dairy Industry Dinners	Far North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
TBC	Dairy Industry Dinners	Mid North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
TBC	Employment Basics	National	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Cash and Costs (Managing Farm Costs Workshop)	Far North Qld	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Cash and Costs (Managing Farm Costs Workshop)	Sunshine Coast	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Cash and Costs (Managing Farm Costs Workshop)	South East Qld	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Cash and Costs (Managing Farm Costs Workshop)	Darling Downs	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Cash and Costs (Managing Farm Costs Workshop)	Far North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
TBC	Cash and Costs (Managing Farm Costs Workshop)	Mid North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
October to December				
TBC	Regional Dairy Dinner	Sunshine Coast	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Regional Dairy Dinner	SE Qld	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Regional Dairy Dinner	Darling Downs	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Regional Dairy Dinner	Sth Darling Downs	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Carbon Farming Outreach Program	Far North Qld	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Healthy Hooves	Far North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
TBC	Healthy Hooves	Mid North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
TBC	Top Fodder	Far North Qld	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Top Fodder	Mid North Coast NSW	TBC	Maree Searle
TBC	Dairy Farm Business Analysis	Sunshine Coast	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Dairy Farm Business Analysis	South East Qld	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Dairy Farm Business Analysis	Darling Downs	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Farm Business Fundamentals	Sunshine Coast	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Farm Business Fundamentals	South East Qld	TBC	Belinda Haddow
TBC	Farm Business Fundamentals	Darling Downs	TBC	Belinda Haddow

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- Construct compost feed sheds to improve animal welfare
- Improve on-farm water infrastructure including tanks, troughs and bores

*Eligibility criteria applies. The information contained herein is for general information purposes only. You should not rely upon this information as a basis for making any business, legal or any other decisions.

Drought Preparedness Grants

- ✓ \$50,000 co-contribution grant to cover up to 25% of drought preparedness project costs.
- ✓ A QRIDA Sustainability Loan can be used as co-contribution.

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