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

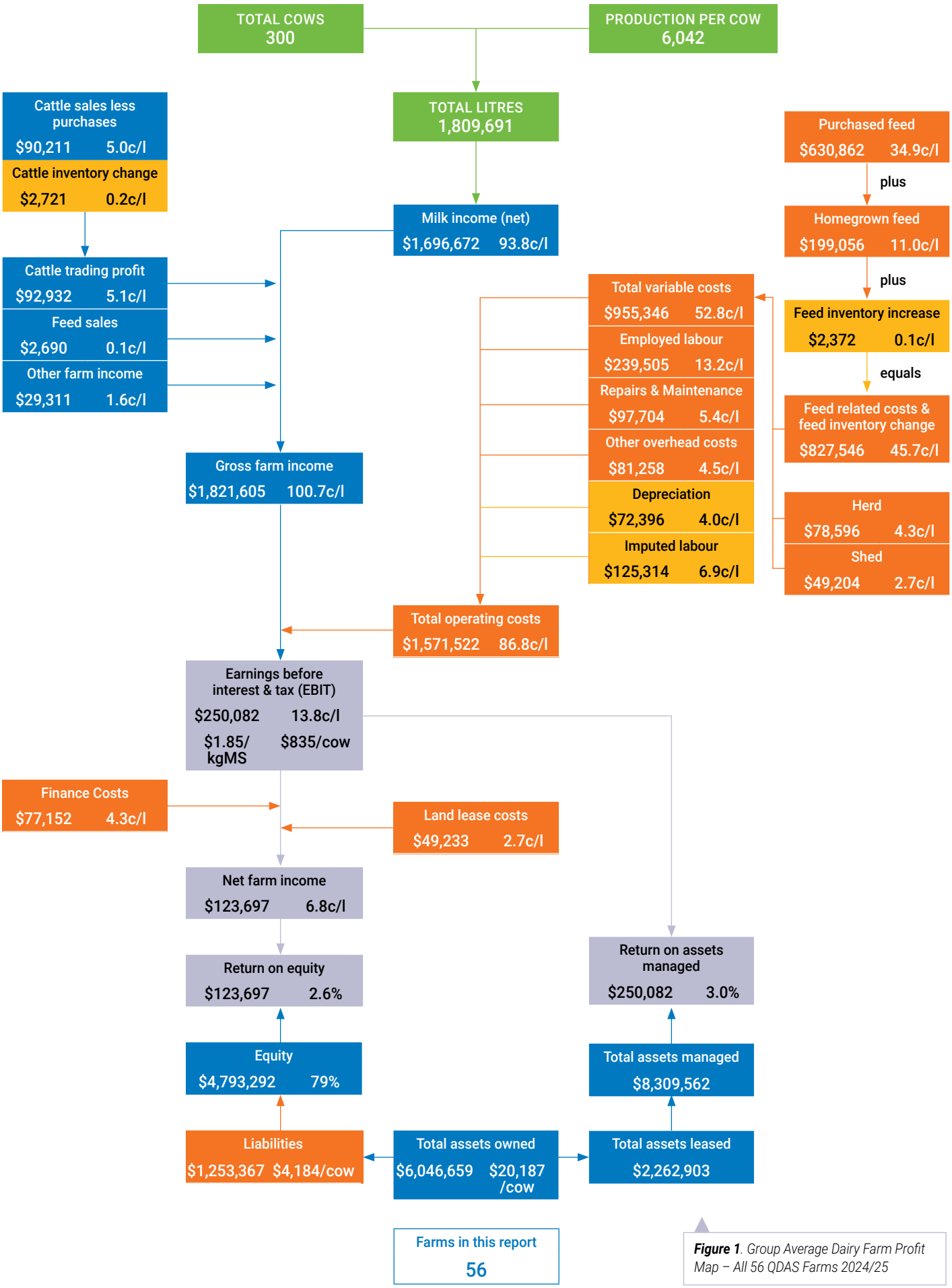

***Figure 1**. Group Average Dairy Farm Profit Map – All 56 QDAS Farms 2024/25*

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.

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%	

Table 3. *Page 1 of the QDAS scenario tool*

Carbon Emissions Report

State	Queensland
DFMP Region	Southeast Queensland
Financial Year	24/25
Dataset Name	
Carbon dataset description	

GHG Emissions Intensity	kg CO2e / kg FPCM	0.93
	kg CO2e / kg MS	12.9
	% of CO2 in Milk	96%
	kg CO2e / kg Meat LW	4.9

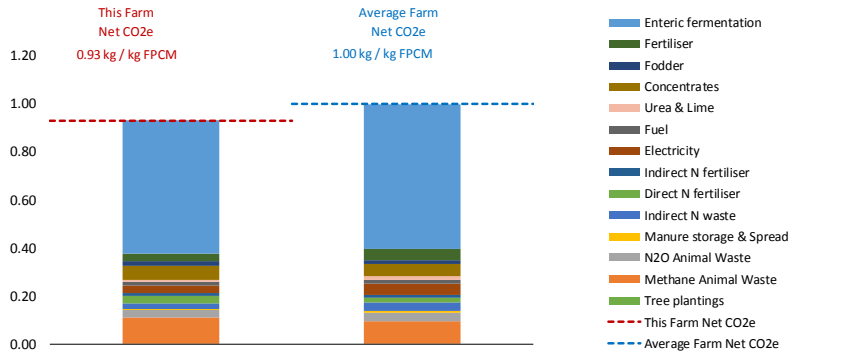

Figure 2. *An example of the carbon emissions report*