

The Northern Dairyfarmer

APRIL-MAY 2007

Planning winter forage with limited water

KEY POINTS

- Plan around available water
- Maximise forage production
- Determine soil moisture content

By Kevin Lowe, Mark Callow, Tom Bowdler and John Miller*

DO YOU usually rely on irrigation but have limited or no water available this winter? All is not lost.

Forage choices for winter and spring will be limited. Farmers may not be able to produce the quantity and quality that they usually would with adequate irrigation – but they still do have options.

Farmers are likely to be facing one of three scenarios in the coming months:

Scenario 1: Some irrigation water, which can be strategically applied to forage for most or all of the growing season (April-November). Recommended planting options are:

- a small area of irrigated ryegrass, or small areas of irrigated, nitrogen-fertilised chicory and

ryegrass (planted separately), or a small area of established irrigated lucerne oversown with ryegrass.

- planting the remaining cropping area to raingrown cereal crops.

Scenario 2. Stored soil water and available irrigation water are unlikely to last a full growing season. Recommended planting option is cereal crops. If soil water content is high, cereals can be sown with chicory or forage brassicas in a mixture.

Scenario 3. No irrigation is available. Recommended planting option is cereal crops. If soil water content is high, cereals can be sown with chicory or forage brassicas in a mixture.

Species selection background

The aim of winter planting and irrigation management is to maximise forage production from any available water. Straight plantings of single species are likely to produce maximum dry matter from water used.

Mixtures tend to be less productive and less water-efficient than separate areas of each species, which can be optimally managed.

Nitrogen-fertilised ryegrass

will yield more dry matter from less water than ryegrass/clover and will tolerate heavier grazing, so is the preferred choice when irrigated area is limited. Ryegrass requires frequent watering.

Cereals are better able to extract soil moisture at depth, are able to survive on less water, and are more efficient compared with ryegrass at converting water into dry matter production.

Before deciding on the type and proportion of pasture or forage crops to plant, assess the stored soil water available, and the amount, reliability and expected duration of irrigation supply.

Determining soil water content

Before selecting the most appropriate forage, determine whether there is sufficient soil moisture to establish and grow a forage crop at this time of year.

Estimate whether there is soil water down to a depth of 50 centimetres (equivalent to 100 millimetres of plant-available water for a heavy cracking-clay soil). If not, then forage growth will rely predominantly on rainfall or limited irrigation.

Continued page 4

INSIDE



■ Making the most of water

PAGE 5

■ Vale Lindsay Volz

PAGE 8

■ LIFTOUTS
Drought bulletin
NRM update

■ Water plan
details needed

PAGE 11



■ River protection
benefits farm

PAGE 12

■ Looking after
yourself key to
wealth

PAGE 13

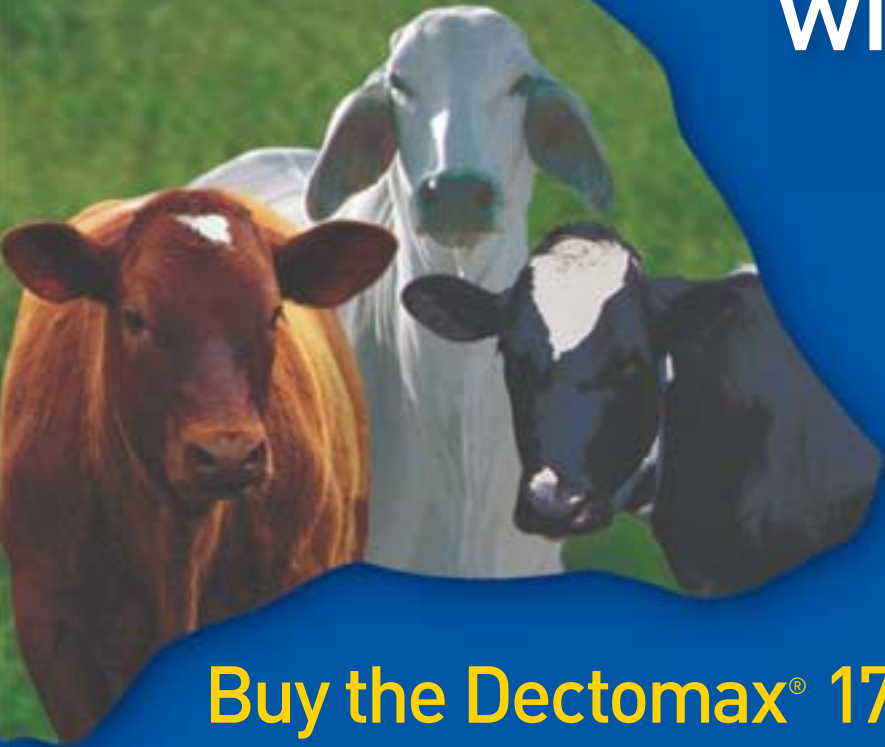
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ANIMAL HEALTH

Weather patterns of concern

IT IS hard to think about the northern dairy industry without being concerned about current weather patterns. I know northern Queensland has had good rain, as have parts of NSW, but farms in these areas are not immune from the effects of drought, in particular the cost of feed such as grain and hay.

In south-east Queensland we have gone through another 'wet' season without any significant falls and it is now common to hear of farms with serious lack of stock water. We have been fortunate to enlist the services of Belinda Haddow as drought response co-coordinator.

She has been funded through Dairy Australia, Subtropical Dairy and the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation. The drought package I received from Belinda was well-researched and contained a lot of useful information.

It listed a number of opportunities to gain help whether by freight subsidy, loans or relief through waiving of fees for water charges and council rates. I urge you all to take the time to consider these opportunities that could help you.

Some shires are in an Exceptional Circumstance area but not drought-declared. If you fall in this category, consider applying for individual drought declaration. Many farms would be eligible and it would give a wider range of opportunities to help your operations. If enough applications are received, then the shire can be totally drought-declared.

As I write this, news has just come through on results of the levy poll, which has given a clear mandate for continuing the existing levy. Given the dire circumstances in which much of the industry finds itself, the vote can be seen as an expression of confidence in the work of Dairy Australia and its regional bodies such as Subtropical Dairy.

I would like to thank all who participated in planning the information meetings and those who attended. I believe they were a valuable exercise in communication in both directions.

The levy will allow Subtropical Dairy to keep working to address the needs of the northern dairy industry.



Laurie Dunne
Chair
Subtropical Dairy



Forward contracts help manage risk

THE SITUATION weather-wise in Queensland is a major concern for us all as we move closer to the end of our 'normal wet season' period. Producers across the state are all affected and no one is now sheltered from higher input costs associated with grain and silage, hay and concentrates.

On a brighter note, many producers have told me they had entered into contracts to take better control of input costs. The downside this time around is that as contracts end, the new ones to be written will be at higher prices and the risk management benefits will not be as good as with previous contracts.

I encourage producers to continue using this ability to forward-buy as it will still enable you to hedge against even higher prices mid-winter and also secure supply, which will be tight if we do not get a late break.

I would like to thank all dairyfarmers who took the time to fill out our Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) survey and forward it back to us. The staff have done a great job analysing the responses into some meaningful indicators as to where people are at now. Further into the magazine, you will find a summary of some key survey results.

Also, State and District councillors will have a full report that they would be happy to discuss at meetings with producers. We have made the full report available to processors and milk supply co-ops and collective bargaining groups.

As well as this we have had, and continue to have, discussions with processors about high farm-gate cost imposts. At a national level we will, through Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF), continue to seek further support and a fairer share of industry margins for producers across Australia through all sectors of the industry's value chain, including retailers, and will continue to work with Dairy Australia and other agencies on drought-support initiatives for producers.

We also have many issues that both QDO and ADF are working on for the long term and this includes water. The Prime Minister's announcement of \$10 billion Murray Darling initiative will ensure we have plenty of work to do in this area to secure a long-term future for all of agriculture and, most importantly, dairy.



Wes Judd
President
Queensland Dairyfarmers
Organisation



The Northern

Dairyfarmer

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Planning winter forage with limited water

From page 1

Soil water depth can be measured quickly using either a 'push rod' (by pushing it into soil by hand); or a 'soil corer' (by hammering it into the ground to remove a core sample for inspecting soil moisture).

Soil water content can also be roughly estimated by assuming 20% of rainfall during the fallow is stored as soil water — for example, 20mm of soil water will be stored from 100mm of fallow rainfall.

Estimating irrigation needs

Use the following steps to estimate potential water requirements for the farm using rainfall records and forage water-requirements tables. Refer to M5 Project Information Series No 206 for a complete description.

1. Calculate effective rainfall — for each month, average for the year, average for best and worst years.
2. Select forage types — determine growing season by month for each forage.
3. Estimate irrigation water potentially required for each forage.
4. Make allowance for irrigation water losses and inefficiencies.
5. Multiply the area of each forage type by irrigation requirements for an estimate of total irrigation megalitres in low, average and high requirement years.

Scenario 1 – Limited irrigation water

A limited area of intensively managed ryegrass may be the best option to produce the greatest amount of dry matter from limited irrigation water.

Other areas of the farm available for planting could be put under winter cereals (details of cereal option discussed under Scenarios 2 and 3). Relative proportions of the farm planted to ryegrass and/or cereal crop will be determined by an assessment of available water.

Annual ryegrass requires about five megalitres of water per hectare from April to November.



Planning winter forage options means maximising the benefit from available irrigation. If water is likely to be available for most of the growing season, a small area of ryegrass is a good option.

Table 1: Recommended seeding rates for rain-grown or irrigated cereals

	Rain grown (kg/ha)	Irrigated (kg/ha)
Oats	25-40	40-60
Barley	50-60	80
Wheat	30-50	50-80
Triticale	50-75	75-100

Chicory is also capable of producing large amounts of high-quality feed using a similar fertiliser and management strategy to ryegrass and has similar water requirements. Be aware chicory can cause milk tainting if it contributes more than half the cow's daily feed intake.

Managing annual ryegrass for maximum yield and use is also critical under this scenario. Start grazing ryegrass when plants are securely anchored by an established root system.

To test if ryegrass is ready for grazing, grab a handful of ryegrass to simulate an animal grazing. If only the leaves rip off and the rest of the plant remains in the ground, grazing can start. If the whole plant, including the roots, comes out of the ground, delay grazing and test again in a week's time.

However, do not hold off grazing for too long, say, eight to 12 weeks after planting. This runs the risk of inefficient grazing due to trampling and selective grazing, and will achieve low pasture usage and poor

water-use efficiency. This effect will be most severe in paddocks left until the end of the first rotation.

At Mutdapilly Research Station, annual ryegrass grazing usually starts six weeks after planting. The growing point of ryegrass at this time of the year is microscopic and close to ground level, so will not be damaged if the plant is grazed or cut.

So it is possible to remove all the green leaf, leaving just the stubble (equivalent to five centimetres high), as long as plants are then left to recover and restore energy reserves. It is important not to let cows come back and graze this new regrowth too early, or dry matter yield will be reduced. Use a back fence.

Pasture growth is a function of both plant density (number of plants in the paddock) and growth per plant. Both are important in determining pasture growth rate, and both can be modified by management.

Grazing can compensate for low initial density by stimulating

new growing points called daughter tillers (a plant growing within the leaf sheath of an existing plant). Tillering depends on light getting to the base of the sward and nitrogen fertiliser.

For maximum growth of dry matter, get ryegrass on to the correct rotation speed. If ryegrass is planted in early April and growth rate has been high, the first rotation can be quite quick — about three weeks (equivalent to three leaves per tiller).

If it is planted later in the season and growth is slower, rotation speed should also be slower — four weeks (equivalent to three leaves per tiller).

To get the correct rotation speed, watch paddocks after they have been grazed, and keep checking paddocks ahead of the cows. If paddocks are not growing back fast enough, then slow the rotation by cutting back on the daily area.

Scenario 2 – Uncertain irrigation water

With an uncertain supply of water (for example, water may run out before the season is finished), farmers may be tempted to take a punt and plant ryegrass, which depends heavily on irrigation water.

Deciding between planting some ryegrass or sticking with cereals should be made with a realistic understanding of the sit-

Making the most of available water

KEY POINTS

- Using limited irrigation for ryegrass
- Planting dryland oats on rest of farm
- Higher milk price needed

By **Carlene Dowie**

MAKING the most of available irrigation water will be the key strategy for Harrisville, Queensland, dairyfarmers the McInnes family in the next few months. Ross McInnes, who milks up to 450 cows with his wife, Pam, and brothers and sisters-in-law, Duncan and Mary and Morris and Monica, said the family would aim to maximise production of silage and ryegrass pastures from the available water.

The McInneses own 200 hectares and lease another 160ha. When pasture feed is available, cows are fed in the paddock; when it is not available, as has been the case in the past five years, cows are fed on a feedpad near the dairy, with a mixer wagon used to prepare the ration.

In mid-March they were milking about 330 cows that were being fed silage (about one-quarter bought in), grain, soybean meal, canola meal, lucerne hay, whole cottonseed and molasses. About 2.5-3 kilograms of grain is fed in the bail in the 16 double-up herringbone dairy.

Two full-time staff and some part-time milking staff are employed on the farm. Ross said the dry seasons in the past five years had meant the cows were

fed a lot more on the feedpad, creating more work.

"Because of the dry seasons, we're spending a lot of time hand-feeding," he said. "We'd have averaged five mixes a day (of the feed wagon) for the past four years."

To cope with the dry seasons, they have leased additional country to grow more sorghum, barley and corn crops for silage, which has also created extra labour demands.

The herd is split into two – a fresh herd and a stale herd. The stale herd grazes the areas furthest from the dairy, while the fresh herd spends more time on the feedpad or on any irrigated pasture close to the dairy.

Ross said this season had been "very ordinary". For the fifth year in a row, they are unlikely to receive any of their 500-megalitre water allocation from the Moogerah Dam. Irrigators only receive allocation when the dam is above 20% of capacity. It currently sits at 4%.

In the past five years they have averaged less than 600 millimetres of rainfall compared with the average annual rainfall of 800mm.

The McInnes plan for this year is to grow ryegrass on 12-15ha that are irrigated from bores.

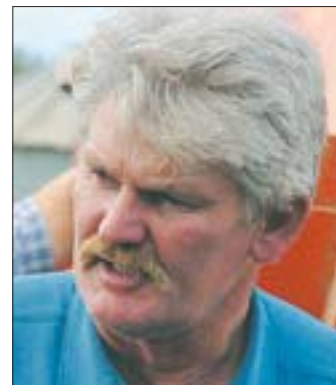
The area sown to ryegrass will depend on the likely amount of water available from the aquifer that feeds the bores, and that will depend on the amount of rainfall.

The ryegrass planting is usually split with an annual ryegrass variety such as Surrey used on half, and a short-rotation variety such as Flanker used on the other half to provide some growth into summer.

Ross said although ryegrass

RIGHT: Ross McInnes: higher milk prices are needed to prevent exodus from dairy industry in southern Queensland.

BELOW: Cows on the feedpad at the McInnes farm at Harrisville, Qld. The feedpad is used when there is insufficient pasture, as has been the case for the past five years.



did not have as high water-use efficiency as some other choices, they needed it to provide more protein in the cows' diet to balance the large amount of corn and sorghum silage being fed.

They plan to plant any other area to oats and grow it as a dryland crop. They also have a small amount of lucerne cut for hay or occasionally grazed.

Ross said milk price was a critical issue for dairyfarmers in south-east Queensland, with farmers needing a 4-5 cents a litre increase.

"The biggest drama I see at the moment is that with the ongoing dry and high prices for

commodities ... a lot of dairies are sitting in a holding pattern," he said.

"In the next few months if there is not a considerable change in the season or the milk price we could face a huge exodus from southern Queensland. The trouble is that we then start losing our critical mass and there won't be enough milk for the white-milk supply.

"There is a simple message for processors, retailers and consumers – either pay the cost of maintaining the Queensland production where it is or run the real risk of paying a lot more in the future."

uation, based on best-case to worst-case scenarios.

If the expectation is that water will not be available to carry ryegrass for a longer season than cereals, farmers may decide to use the water to give winter cereals a good start and to irrigate

them for as long as possible.

Plant irrigated crops at rates 50%-100% higher than rain-grown (see Table 1). Cropping areas should be sprayed with a herbicide to stop weeds from removing valuable stored soil water, and to conserve as much

rainfall as possible before planting.

If there is sufficient soil moisture, planting cereals from March can provide autumn feed and continuity through winter. Consider using varieties with different maturities. With little oats

seed available this season, choice may be limited to other cereals.

Optimum soil temperature for oats germination is 15 to 25 degrees Celsius. Planting early (in early March on the Downs

Continued page 6



Clean water vital for dairy cows

WATER is the most crucial nutrient for dairy cows but is often overlooked. It is a vital ingredient for the normal maintenance function of an animal.

Besides body maintenance, water plays a vital role in the function of the rumen, the engine room of a cow. The rumen is a liquid environment and water replenishes and maintains this.

There are also many acids in the rumen and water acts to dilute the concentration of these. Water is also vital for some of the metabolic reactions that occur within the microbes.

The quantities of water required by cows vary depending on the animals' physiological status, weather conditions and topography.

As a general rule, a lactating cow will consume up to 100 litres of water per day. This will increase if temperatures rise significantly, or if the cow is

required to walk long distances or be forced into the sun for long periods.

Water quality is another factor that requires consideration. Dirty, slimy water is less palatable to the animal. If forced to drink this, the cow will drink only the minimum amount. This will have a negative effect on production and general cow health.

Clean, cool water should always be made available. Ensure there is adequate trough space and volume for all animals. Cows generally prefer to drink from clean troughs, as opposed to muddy dams or still creeks.

Maximise the intake of water to ensure optimum production.

It is always good to have troughs available for the milkers on entry and exit of the dairy yard.

— Ross Warren,
Department of Primary
Industries and Fisheries

From page 5

and two to four weeks later (below the range) runs the risk of warmer temperatures causing poor establishment and encouraging rust.

Put a thermometer into the soil at planting depth around 5pm in the afternoon. If seed supplies are available, look for a rust-resistant oats variety that handles warmer soils and is capable of good, early growth.

Later plantings of oats will mature quickly, so from June onwards other cereals – barley, wheat or triticale — are preferred. These could be planted on part of the cropping area to extend the growing season. Wheat performs better than barley on acid soils.

Scenario 3 – No irrigation water

Winter cereals such as oats, barley, wheat and triticale are the best options for rain-grown winter forage on southern and cen-

tral Queensland dairy farms. While there is usually a vast array of varieties with different characteristics, this year choice will be extremely limited.

Be aware leaf and stem rust is a major problem with many varieties of oats and some barley, so check with the seed supplier about this. Planting rates under rain-grown will be less than if irrigated for all winter cereals.

Rain-grown planting requires good fallow management to trap and conserve moisture for the following crop. Reducing tillage as much as possible in ground preparation and using herbicides rather than tillage to control weeds will allow the soil to harvest more water from heavy storms if they occur.

There have been some promising results from chicory and forage brassicas, but their reliability under rain-grown conditions in regions away from the coast is not yet clear. Mixing them with cereals is an option for winter forage.

If good rain falls, the herbs and brassicas are likely to contribute strongly. If only stored soil moisture is available, the cereals will still provide a grazing option. For these mixtures, reduce the recommended sowing rate of cereals in Table 1 by half.

Green chopping winter forage and feeding in troughs is an option for producers with these facilities and will help maximise use of forage dry matter. This option makes much better use of feed produced, with less damage and wastage compared with grazing. However, there are additional costs and labour.

Water-use tips

Whichever option is followed, farmers should set themselves the challenge of producing the most forage possible from limited water by paying attention to the following:

- selecting the best variety for the locality;
- soil testing to correct deficiencies in soil nutrients;
- using optimum seed-bed preparation;
- using the right planting rate;
- using a roller to ensure good seed/soil contact;
- ensuring the irrigation system is operating efficiently, and monitoring pasture water use for the best response from water (talk to Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries rural water use efficiency officers);
- grazing ryegrass at the three-leaf stage and using back fencing;
- watering and fertilising immediately after grazing.

The efficiency with which water is converted into dry-matter production can be increased in two ways — by increasing production and by reducing water loss.

Crops can be twice as efficient as pastures at converting water into fodder for cows.

Adjust irrigation timing and volume throughout the growing season to meet plant requirements. For example, ryegrass requires the least amount during autumn for seedling establishment when plants are immature and evaporation is low. During spring, water application needs to double to meet plant growth requirements and higher evaporation losses.

Fine-tune grazing and fertiliser management to greatly improve water-use efficiency.

Manage grazing to maximise plant growth, which in turn will improve water-use efficiency.

Monitor rainfall, evaporation and soil moisture content to effectively match irrigation water application and timing to plant needs, and to minimise water loss via deep drainage.

Check and correct water losses from pumps, lines and equipment, and check and correct irrigation-distribution uniformity.

Minimise tillage to improve soil cover and organic matter, to increase soil water-retention capacity.

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A call above and beyond

ON MARCH 12 many family and friends attended the funeral service for long-time Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) District and State Councillor Lindsay Volz.

Mr Volz represented the Darling Downs region for the QDO at both District and State Council level from 1988 and 1989 to 2006. At State Council level he held many positions including being an executive member of the QDO for many years and representing the dairy industry on the Land Protection Council and the Intensive Livestock Advisory Committee.

At a local level he capably represented dairyfarmers on the local co-op board as well as being involved in numerous local community groups such as the local church, school and bushfire brigade. Mr Volz was also a keen sportsman with a particular love for cricket, which he pursued through serving the local cricket club as a player and administrator.

Members of the QDO throughout the state came to know Mr Volz as a strong and forthright advocate for the dairy industry. He was always across the issues with a talent to ensure he had adequate background

knowledge of the issue of the day.

Many dairyfarming families have benefited immensely from his ability to represent their interests with vigour across a wide range of areas. He travelled widely and took great pride in meeting and sharing knowledge with primary producers in Queensland, across Australia and overseas.

Mr Volz's passion for primary production saw him take an active interest in all commodities. He was equally adept at having in-depth conversations with a canegrower, horticulturist or cattle producer.

His cattle industry interests saw him involved in the United Graziers Association at the front of the Dalby branch as chairman and secretary for a number of years.

Producer representatives of the character and calibre of Mr Volz do not often come along. Dairyfarmers in Queensland have been lucky to have high-quality candidates come forward to offer themselves for election to represent farmers.

When they do, they commit to doing their utmost to get better outcomes for those they represent. They also then have to bal-



Lindsay Volz: a great champion of the Queensland dairy industry.

ance their family and business commitments with their public duties.

The example that men such as Mr Volz have set leaves us a legacy and model to which young men and women in agriculture can aspire.

The pride that can be achieved, as well as the results, make the task worthwhile, and all at QDO know, as his family

does, that Lindsay Volz had many unheralded achievements throughout his career.

Mr Volz's broad experience, dedication, talent, uncanny memory and attention to detail will never be matched and will be sorely missed.

He is survived by his wife, Denise; mother, Jean; and children, Roger, Sandra, Helen, Ashley and families.

Farmers support dairy service levy

KEY POINTS

- 64% support holding levy
- 4% support increased levy
- 32% support no levy

THE FIRST-EVER levy poll giving dairyfarmers the opportunity to vote on the dairy service levy has demonstrated the extremely tough times dairyfarmers have experienced and will continue to experience well into another season.

This drought, coming as it has on top of the worst drought in 100 years only four years ago, has caused dairyfarmers to carefully consider their expenditure

in all aspects of their dairyfarming businesses.

Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) recognises how difficult it has been for dairyfarmers to consider long-term investment at this time. Even given the huge impacts of the drought, there were still 64% of votes to hold the levy at its current level while a further 4% of the votes supported an increase of 15%.

However, there is no doubt times are hard. This has been clearly demonstrated by the 32% of votes for the levy to be removed. These dairyfarmers have effectively indicated they need to find further savings throughout their entire farm business, including the dairy service levy.

"While ADF would have pre-

ferred to have had the dairy service levy poll under much better seasonal conditions, the outcome of the poll will give the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry the confidence to continue with the levy for the foreseeable future," ADF president, Allan Burgess, said.

"The fact that 53% of farmers participated in the voluntary levy poll will also give the Minister strong argument that dairyfarmers do care about their industry and have, even in these difficult times, turned out to cast their vote.

"This participation rate is higher than the participation rate for similar farmer levy polls in other industries; 68% of votes were to retain or increase the levy, which provides the funding base for much of the dairy indus-

try's research, development and extension as well as services that promote and protect the industry's interests.

"Australian dairyfarmers will continue to face challenges and issues that are unique to Australian dairy. Dairyfarmer returns are exposed to export and import competition and dairyfarmers recognise that we need to invest collectively to fund activities that will assist us to stay internationally competitive.

"The industry as a whole will work together to identify priorities that need to be addressed to give us a sustainable future. Working together to identify priorities is something we need to do all the time to maximise the return dairyfarmers receive from their levy investment."

Survey reveals state of industry

KEY POINTS

- Good response to industry survey
- Results sent to range of industry groups

LATE last year the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) undertook a survey to collect data and information critical for a range of important functions carried out by the QDO.

A key purpose was to gather key data from dairyfarmers about the ongoing drought and difficult industry conditions, and farmers' opinions and thoughts for the future of their operations.

About 20% of dairyfarmers in Queensland responded to the survey. As a result, it has taken longer than expected to process and analyse all the data received. The following survey summary provides a snapshot of results for the majority of the questions.

The data for some questions has not been reported as the results were not statistically valid or are for internal purposes of the QDO. The data is time-sensitive. Survey responses were received in the period from last December until January.

In the expanded survey report, the QDO has provided a range of supplementary information about current and future industry environment.

The QDO has forwarded copies of the survey report to a

range of industry groups, including collective bargaining groups, processors, regional development groups, Dairy Australia and government agencies.

Key results

A range of survey questions related to past, current and future production capacity and some key results presented the following:

- Of 150 responses, 72 or 48% presented that they believed they still expected to be dairying in three years' time; 11% presented that they would not; and 41% presented that they were unsure; this data reflects the continuing attrition of farmers from the northern dairy industry.
- Further, 37% presented that farm-gate prices were the critical issue for the future of their farm; and 36% presented that water supply was the critical issue for the future of their farm.
- The average and median number of cows milked in the past year has fallen by 4% and 7%, respectively.
- Milk production has fallen; this was in line with Dairy Australia data showing an ongoing trend in recent months of a decline of greater than 10%, and a year-to-date trend of -9.6% as at last December.
- If farm-gate prices rose by 6 cents per litre, 21% of survey respondents presented they would increase production; if farm-gate prices rose by 2 cents per litre, 8% presented that they would increase production.

- Eight of 88 responses presented they carried out testing of fodder, whereas 32 said they used a nutritionist.
- 37 of 132 responses presented that they required information on drought assistance.
- 79 of 151 responses presented that they had not applied for fodder freight subsidies in the past three years, and 19 of 64 responses said the reason for not applying was that the process was deemed too difficult or not worth it.
- 44 of 131 responses presented that they needed to borrow for funds this year to keep their dairy operating, with the average amount required being \$63,000.
- Average equity levels are 85%; however, respondents presented they would like debt levels to be about two-thirds less than current levels.
- 72% of responses presented that they did not plan to invest further in their dairy plant in the next year.

- 47% of responses presented feed management was the highest priority for the next year, and 35% of responses presented that irrigation and water was the next highest priority.
- 21% of responses presented that they planned to employ additional labour next year, and 29% of responses presented that they were experiencing difficulties in attracting and retaining labour.
- 64% of responses presented that they had a farm business plan in place, and 36% presented that they did not have a farm business plan.
- 49% of responses presented that they had a succession plan in place, and 51% presented that they did not have a succession plan.

MORE INFO
QDO
 Phone: (07) 3236 2955

Apply for NLIS reader rebate

REBATES for the National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) reader costs are still available.

The funding has been made retrospective so that any producer who bought a NLIS reader after January 1, 2005, can apply for a rebate.

The rebates amount to 20% of expenditure up to a maximum rebate of \$1200 for expenditures up to \$6000 (excluding GST). Producers

who have not claimed their rebates yet should do so as soon as possible as the scheme is run on a first-in, first-served basis until the funds are exhausted.

Contact: Website <www.dpi.qld.gov.au/NLIS>; Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries business information centre, phone 132 523; Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation, phone (07) 3236 2955.



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Malanda milk blows away competition

KEY POINTS

- Grand Dairy Awards recognise best Australian dairy products
- Malanda milk takes top dairy product award

MALANDA Milk took out the top award at the Grand Dairy Awards in Melbourne in February. Award winners were selected from dairy products from around Australia.

Malanda Milk, produced by north Queensland dairy farms on the Atherton Tablelands and processed at Malanda by the Dairyfarmers Co-op, took the

Traveston Dam questioned

A REVIEW of Water Supply-Demand Options for South-East Queensland has warned the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam would not ease impact of the drought and was unnecessary for providing future water supply.

The report has presented that the proposed dam was a "high total cost, high unit cost, high risk and high environmental and social impact option".

The report recognises the need for long-term water management and acknowledged that a diverse portfolio of options is necessary to ensure ongoing supplies of water for consumption. However, the report concluded the dam should not be one of the recommended options.

The report found water from the dam would cost almost three times as much as other water-supply options. The report was commissioned by the Mary River Council of Mayors, convened last year. It is the work of seven leading consultants from engineering company Cardno and the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) at the University of Sydney.

Grand Champion product award.

The Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) extends its congratulation to all involved in north Queensland in the production, processing and marketing of dairy products in this region. Winning this award means a great boost to the industry in this region after what has been an extremely challenging 12 months since Cyclone Larry.

After the cyclone last April, there was major disruption to all functions of normal dairy production for many months, and producers are still working hard towards recovery.

When QDO officers and staff have visited the region in the past year, it has been clear that even with this disruption, all the people at farm, support and factory level remained dedicated to dealing with whatever had to be done to continue producing dairy products to a high standard.

This is clear proof that this unique dairying region can match it with the best and is an important dairy production region of Australia, servicing an ever-growing market in a unique pristine environment. The people are always cheerful and focused, and QDO couldn't think of a more deserving bunch.

The Australian Grand Dairy Awards are organised by Dairy Australia. This year, it attracted more than 360 entries representing 95 Australian dairy manufacturers. The Grand Champion Cheese award went to the multi-award-winning Heidi Farm Raclette cheese from Tasmania.

Champions Cheeses included Florida Traditional Ricotta,



The award-winning milk from Malanda, Qld.

King Island Dairy Black Label Double Brie, Heidi Farm Gruyeres, Farmers Union Centenary Rinded Vintage Cheddar, Mil Lel Superior Romano, King Island Dairy Bass Strait Blue, Barossa Valley Cheese Co Washington Washrind and Milawa Capricornia Champion Flavoured Cheese.

Champion Dairy Products included Mundella Greek Style Natural Yogurt, Gourmet Yogurt Crushed Passionfruit, Gundowring Finest Ice Cream French Vanilla, Gelati Sky Macadamia Kiss Gelato, Perfection Vanilla Custard, Riverina Fresh Milk, Dare Iced Coffee Double Espresso, Gippsland Dairy Pure Double Cream and Tatura Butter.

It is interesting to note with this judging of the best of the best of Australian dairy products that as an Australian agricultural industry, Australia's premium dairy foods help drive international exports and national demand, and that each year Australia's dairy industry takes

NRM team changes

THE NATURAL Resource Management (NRM) portfolio with its flagship program, Dairying Better N Better for Tomorrow, has a new staff member — Ruth McInnes.

She joins the NRM team of Bronwyn Ford, Raelene Rosevear and Sarah Kenman as a project manager. She has a degree in Agribusiness and Applied Science, majoring in Animal Production, from the University of Queensland Gatton as well as a background in the dairy industry.

Ms McInnes is keen to get started and looks forward to working with dairyfarmers and the broader dairy industry in her new role. She will look after, and deliver, a range of NRM projects for both the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) and Subtropical Dairy (SD).

Contact: Ruth McInnes, QDO, phone (07) 3238 4217 or 0400 669 994.

As part of her new role, she will be out and about at workshops and other industry events. Ms McInnes replaced Lisa Thompson within the NRM team.

While Ms Thompson is furthering her education, she will still work part-time.

The QDO and SD wishes to thank Ms Thompson for all her hard work.

We welcome Bronwyn Ford back after a stint on maternity leave, and wishes Sarah Kenman all the best for her upcoming rendezvous to tie the knot followed by a well-deserved holiday.

\$3 billion worth of milk and transforms it into premium foods worth about \$9 billion.

Senate inquiry into dam

THE TRAVESTON Dam proposal will be the focus of a Senate inquiry into solutions for south-east Queensland's water crisis.

The Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee was to inquire and report by March 27 on impact

on the Mary River, its dependent species and environs of the proposed dam; implications for communities living along the Mary River of the proposed dam to their livelihood and lifestyle; and the balance of other options available to meet the region's water-resource needs.

The committee will also examine all reasonable options, including increased dam capacity, for additional water supplies for south-east Queensland, including their merits and the social, environmental, economic and engineering impacts of the various proposals.

Details needed on water plan

KEY POINTS

- Commonwealth control of Murray Darling Basin
- States and Commonwealth agree
- More detail required
- Qld water rights must be protected

THE QUEENSLAND Farmers Federation (QFF) and member bodies have called on the Federal and State Government to consult water users and the community extensively as they develop details of the national water plan for the Murray Darling Basin.

The governments need to ensure the plan is workable and delivers effectively on its objectives and industry's needs for certainty and security.

The 'in principle' agreement in February was a 'positive first step' but what was not agreed to in the plan was far more significant than what was agreed.

Industry organisations still do not know if the Commonwealth will allow Queensland to finish its 10-year water-planning process and what status existing plans and entitlements will have under the new agreement.

They do not know what powers will be handed to the

Commonwealth, what the role of the States will be, or how environmental flows will be managed.

The negotiation surrounding all of that detail is now handed over to senior officials and the industry wants to ensure they talk to water users on the ground and communities involved to ensure the new arrangements are workable, effective and take into consideration the work already done in many of these catchments.

The QFF wants the process to fix what is broken but leave well enough alone those bits of the system that are operating well.

The industry needs to consider what this approach means for other areas and systems of the nation as well.

It looks forward to working with the Commonwealth and State Governments to deliver an outcome that delivers certainty and security for Queensland farmers, and better outcomes for the Murray-Darling Basin as a whole.

The February agreement followed a series of intense meetings between State and Federal Governments and industry. Following the 'in principle' agreement between the Premiers and the Prime Minister on February 23, a group of senior officials will now work on developing a memorandum of understanding to outline how

the transfer of powers will occur.

The Commonwealth appears to have backed down on its long list of powers sought, sensibly leaving much of the operation of water plan and river systems with the States.

The Commonwealth's powers will include:

- preparing a Basin-wide strategic plan setting a sustainable cap on surface and ground-water use;
- establishing Basin-wide, water-quality objectives;
- setting standards for catchment level plans;
- seasonal allocation of water resources;
- directing the operation of rural bulk water-supply systems;
- environmental water management; and
- setting rules for water trading and charging regimes.

Leaders agreed it would be imperative to maintain continuity of bulk water supply with minimal disruption to operational arrangements.

They agreed to explore the option of continuing current river operation arrangements subject to Commonwealth direction on flow management consistent with the Basin-wide strategic plan.

The industry has advocated a 'common sense' model similar to the final outcome. Nevertheless, a huge amount of detail is missing and the industry

has called on both Government to extensively consult industry and other stakeholders in developing the more detailed arrangements.

The Federal and State Government must end the uncertainty hanging over the Murray Darling Basin communities in Queensland and urgently confirm that Queensland can complete the water-planning process which has been delayed by the Federal Government's Murray Darling plan.

The nine-year-long water planning process for the Condamine-Balonne and Border Rivers was entering into its final stage of determining and issuing secure water entitlements for water users when the Premier, Peter Beattie, froze the process following the Prime Minister's Australia Day announcement of a Commonwealth takeover of management of the Murray Darling Basin.

It is essential that the planning process be completed before Queensland hands over its control of the basin to Canberra so that Queensland farmers enjoy the same level of secure water entitlements already granted to farmers in the other states.

MORE INFO

Website:

<www.pm.gov.au/news>

WestfaliaSurge

MILKING time

New WestfaliaSurge Dealer



An association with dairying which began in 1966 and led to the formation of Queensland Dairy Equipment as Westfalia Milking Equipment dealers in 1982 has recently come to a close.

Lloyd and Joy Howard who established Queensland Dairy Equipment in July of 1982 ceased operating on March 31st and Wal Newton Dairy Services began, taking WestfaliaSurge Milking Equipment into a new era in Queensland.

WestfaliaSurge Australia Pty Ltd is pleased to be associated with Wal Newton and his wife Beth who have recently taken over the reigns as their dealers in Queensland.

The reputation of WestfaliaSurge as a leader in milking

technology continues with Wal Newton Dairy Service installing a new Dematron 70 milking plant on the Corrie farm at Pilton near Toowoomba.

Lloyd and Joy would like to thank Queensland's Dairying community for their support over the past 25 years and are pleased to see this support flow on to Wal and Beth, who continue to offer their full range of milking equipment. Wal and Beth are currently introducing themselves to their new customers and are eager to meet and assist all dairy farmers in the area.

Wal Newton Dairy Services

Mt Crosby

Ph: 0409 262 593





River care helps dairy enterprise

KEY POINTS

- Fencing river creates environmental benefits
- Stress levels reduced in herd
- Lameness also reduced

DAIRYING Better N Better for Tomorrow is an on-farm adoption process conducted at a sub-catchment level. The program has been developed to make direct links between natural resource management (NRM) awareness, knowledge, decisions and actions.

Key aspects of the program include using the Dairy Self Assessment Tool (DairySAT), linkages with local, catchment and regional NRM priorities, and implementing a three-stage workshop series with action planning and implementation.

In 2004, Peter Rohan was one of 10 participants in the pilot of Dairying Better N Better for Tomorrow at Kerry, south of Beaudesert in south-east Queensland. One of the NRM priorities for this group was managing the riparian zone adjacent to the Albert River.

Before participating in the program, Mr Rohan had already taken action to fence off his section of river and could see the benefits emerging. Excluding cows along the three-kilometre stretch of river that runs through his property has produced both environmental and farming benefits.

His initiative is helping to protect the upper reaches of the Albert from degradation and is making for a less stressful, more productive dairy enterprise. Mr Rohan said the upper reaches of the river were prone to bank erosion, with flood flows from Lamington National Park.

"Lantana is a major problem as nothing grows under the thick weed infestation," he said. "I'm aiming to establish a natural grass cover on gently sloping banks to protect the soil from erosion."

Mr Rohan said invasive species such as Chinese elm choked the natural river flow in big floods, contributing to bank washouts. A single electric wire has been an effective solution to keep stock out of the riparian zone where permanent fencing would be at risk of flood damage.

Mr Rohan said having his cows kept away from the river and directed through a single fenced-off crossing had significantly reduced stress levels in the herd.

"The cows used to spend a lot of time loitering and standing in the river, making it extremely frustrating to muster the herd for milking," he said.

Lameness has been reduced, as has the risk of injury from cows slipping down steep river banks.

Through significant support provided by Subtropical Dairy, five members of the Kerry group, including Mr Rohan, received funding through the Federal Government's Envirofund to help collectively protect more than 13 kilometres of the Albert River.

For Mr Rohan, this involved cleaning up invasive woody weeds in the riparian zone and buying and installation five extra stock watering troughs in paddocks fenced off and without water.

This successful model of attracting external funding to aid implementation of on-ground improvements has since been introduced to farmers throughout the Subtropical Dairy region.

Mr Rohan has had a long involvement with Subtropical Dairy and was an early adopter of NRM principles. Mr Rohan said much of his 240-hectare property was steep, rocky country of limited use.

He has recently reduced the number of milkers from 135 to 120, reflecting difficult seasonal conditions and restricted access to irrigation. Water is pumped from the river and two bores into a 1.5-megalitre holding dam, and liquid waste from the dairy is



Peter Rohan received funding for extra water troughs to allow him to fence off the river on his property.

shandied into this dam for irrigation.

Nutrient recycling has significantly reduced the need for chemical fertilisers.

Mr Rohan composts manure accumulated at the silage feedpad for spreading on his pastures.

His pasture base is mainly kikuyu and Callide Rhodes grass, with ryegrass oversown to fill the winter feed gap.

Mr Rohan has been growing lucerne for the past three years, mainly for night grazing with a break crop of corn or sorghum for silage.

Groups formed through Dairying Better N Better have continued to work together

beyond the initial project in an effort to learn more about NRM.

Subtropical Dairy program manager, Janine Teese, said: "It is great to see sustained interest beyond the initial project. Farmers are working together to build their knowledge, as evidenced by the soils workshops, which have been recently held."

MORE INFO

Dairying Better N Better

Janine Teese
Phone: (07) 5462 2281

or 0438 715 625

Email:
<Janine@dairyinfo.biz>



Key to wealth: look after yourself

KEY POINTS

- Difficult times can lead to stress
- Stress affects people differently
- Take steps to reduce stress

“It is really important that if you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed by life, you speak to someone about it or take time to relax and get a fresh perspective on things. You can’t look after your loved ones, your farm, business or property if you don’t look after yourself first.” Jeff Kennett, chairman, beyondblue: the national depression initiative.

AUSTRALIAN farmers are known for ‘toughing it out’ even in the most devastating times.

But there is nothing weak in admitting that persistent worries over the drought and the future are taking their toll ... and that life is starting to feel like hard work.

Life on the land today is getting tougher with low prices for milk, stock feed prices up, crops failing and in some areas, no rain. Stress is common in daily life and can be associated with work, family, personal worries or obligations.

Beyondblue-funded research carried out

by Professor Fiona Judd and her team at The Centre for Rural Mental Health at Bendigo, Vic, revealed that farmers saw issues such as drought-induced financial difficulties, stock losses, the pressure of decision-making and the unrelenting physical and mental demands of farming work as being key contributors to their stress.

Former dairyfarmer Noel Trevaskis, of Goulburn, NSW, now area manager for fertiliser company Incitec Pivot, went through a rough patch several years ago.

“I knew my behaviour was changing but I didn’t realise it was due to stress,” he said. “I couldn’t make decisions.

“I had lost motivation and didn’t care about my small farm. I had lost interest in doing things with my family and was constantly irritable and not sleeping properly.”

Stress affects people in different ways. You may be finding it harder to relax. You may feel overwhelmed by your responsibilities and the future, or you may feel panicky and more anxious than usual about dealing with an issue.

It is important to understand stress is not depression. However, acute distress associated with tough times can occur and may be a risk factor for depression if it persists.

So to avoid stress developing into something more serious, it is important to look at ways to reduce stress in your life.

- Avoid isolation – spend time with family and friends. Allow yourself at least a few hours each week to do something you enjoy with others such as playing sport.
- Maintain control of your work by stepping back and taking a deep breath. Focus on things you can control. Get some advice from others if you need help on how to address a problem on the farm. Don’t think that you have to come up with solutions to everything by yourself.
- Find positive ways to let off steam. Don’t bottle up feelings.

- If a personal relationship is causing stress, get some advice from a friend or some help from a doctor or other health professional.
- Do things you enjoy. To help take your mind off your worries, it’s important to allocate relaxation time for reading, listening to music, socialising or exercising.
- Reduce your intake of coffee and alcohol.
- Avoid smoking tobacco or marijuana.
- Try to eat well, including plenty of fruit and vegetables each day.
- Get a good night’s sleep – if you’re having trouble sleeping, seek help from your doctor or read beyondblue Fact Sheet 7 Sleeping Well.

Mr Trevaskis said that after experiencing years of severe stress, his condition escalated into major depression. Hindsight was a great teacher, he said.

“The most important part of my day now is the hour-long walk I have first thing every morning,” he said. “It helps me reduce my stress and gives me the space to think about the day ahead.

“You need to take time out from thinking about the farm, whether it’s playing golf, bowls, or bushwalking. You must get a balance in your life.

“You need to spend time with your family and really listen to them. If your family is important to you, then you will find the time. The farm must come second to your family. I know because I lost years with mine.”

MORE INFO

beyondblue

Website: <www.beyondblue.org.au>

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QDO conference

THE QUEENSLAND Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO) is joining forces with the Dairy Industry Association of Australia (DIAA) in planning a joint conference to be held on Tuesday, July 24, and Wednesday, July 25, at Gympie, Qld.

The event will be structured in a similar format to what was presented last year in two full days.

The first day, Tuesday, July 24, is planned to entail discussions on issues relevant to the dairy industry and new innovations, with guest speakers to present on a range of key industry issues. It will include a conference dinner that evening with entertainment.

Day two, Wednesday, July 25, is planned to include a members' breakfast, the QDO annual general meeting, a section dedicated to interaction between producers and processors, followed by a farm tour in the afternoon.

Once again, the QDO will heavily subsidise registration fees for members to keep the cost

affordable. It looks forward to continued strong support of the industry in making this event a success.

Spend less time in the dairy

WANT to spend less time in the dairy without spending more money, working harder or compromising quality? Don't miss ShorterCowTime's Darold Klindworth will show farmers how to milk more cows per hour using the latest results from the Shorter Milking Times research conducted at Ellinbank, Victoria. Farmers will go home with ideas to put into practice at the next milking, their herd's maximum milk out time and a free timer to get them started.

The course also covers some automation options to reduce labour needs.

Courses will be held between 10am and 2:30pm at the following venues and visiting a dairy nearby:

- Gympie, Monday, April 30, Gympie RSL (RSVP Julie

Hanson or John Miller [07] 4169 9800);

- Wondai, Tuesday, May 1, Wondai Diggers Club (RSVP Julie Hanson or John Miller [07] 4169 9800);

- Warwick, Wednesday, May 2, Hermitage Research Station (RSVP Julie Hanson or John Miller [07] 4169 9800);

- Mutdapilly, Thursday May 3, Mutdapilly Research Station (RSVP Julie Hanson or John Miller [07] 4169 9800);

- Far North Queensland, Friday, May 4, Malanda RSL (RSVP Ruth Rasmussen [07] 4096 7227).

Dairy dates on-line

THE NSW Department of

Primary Industries has launched a diary of events for dairy industry.

Go to the website <www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/dairy> and look at 'coming events' on the right-hand side of the screen.

Events in the Subtropical Dairy region are listed on <www.dairyinfo.biz>. Click on 'events'. All farmers and industry service providers are encouraged to check out the easy-to-use online calendar.

Anyone who has an event to add for Queensland should email it to <di.gresham@dairyinfo.biz>. For NSW, email it to Tim Burfitt, <tim.burfitt@dpi.nsw.gov.au>.

Min till, max benefit

THE BENEFITS of a minimum-tillage system are clear: decreased labour requirement; increased flexibility; promotion of good soil health, and conservation of soil moisture. But converting to a minimum-tillage system and getting it right can be a little more challenging than just listing off the advantages.

Recent workshops run by the Darling Downs Soils Project, funded by the Condamine Alliance, looked at different aspects of a minimum-tillage system and how to get it all to work effectively. Thirty-six farmers from across the Darling Downs attended the one-day workshops held on the Southern and Northern Downs in February.

Information was presented to farmers about the soil health, production and economic benefits of minimum tillage as well as system and machinery conversion.

Principal speaker for the days was Rob McCreath, a grain grower from Southbrook, Qld, who discussed his journey into minimum till after coming to Australia from Scotland 15 years ago. Knowing little about Australian farming techniques, Mr McCreath adopted a minimum-tillage system because it seemed to "make sense".

Just like any other farmer, he




Grower Rob McCreath shares his experience in minimum-till design at a recent Southern Downs field day.

made wise and poor decisions on how to effectively convert machinery and get the system working right. Sharing his experiences with the other farmers during the day gave the producers present an insight into what plant production is like in another industry. Local dairyfarmers were also invited to speak on their process of machinery conversion. Lead by Braden Bullick of Janke, the different options, issues, successes and failures of machinery design and conversion were discussed.

Several programs are running soil health workshops across the Subtropical Dairy region.

Farmers interested in attending or organising a soil health workshop should contact Subtropical Dairy.

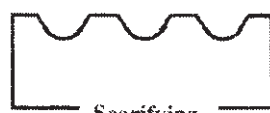
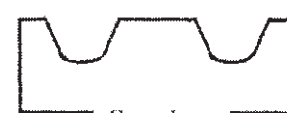
Contact: Ruth McInnes, phone 0400 669 994, email <ruth@dairyinfo.biz>.



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- April 17:** **InCalf Farmer Session, Monto Town Hall, Monto, Qld**
Contact: Charlie Ernst, phone (07) 4931 7616.
- April 17:** **InCalf Farmer Session, Rockhampton, Qld**
Contact: Charlie Ernst, phone (07) 4931 7616.
- April 18:** **InCalf Farmer Session, Woodford, Qld**
Contact: Sonya Ferris, phone (07) 5494 9747
- April 18:** **InCalf Farmer Session, Beaudesert, Qld**
Contact: Pearl Martin, phone (07) 5544 9197
- April 19:** **InCalf Farmer Session, Warwick, Qld**
Contact: Bill McVey, phone (07) 4666 1570
- April 27:** **Shakin' Off the Dust social evening and seminar, Toowoomba, Qld**
Contact: Cassandra Kath, phone (07) 4630 7232, mobile 0427 307 232, email <kamayl@bigpond.net.au> or Janine Teese, Subtropical Dairy (see page 3)
- April 30:** **Cowtime Shorter Milking Secrets Shed Shake-up, Gympie, Qld**
Contact: Julie Hanson or John Miller, phone (07) 4169 9800.
- May 1:** **Cowtime Shorter Milking Secrets Shed Shake-up, Wondai, Qld.**
Contact: Julie Hanson or John Miller, phone (07) 4169 9800
- May 2:** **Cowtime Shorter Milking Secrets Shed Shake-up, Warwick, Qld**
Contact: Julie Hanson or John Miller, phone (07) 4169 9800
- May 2:** **Dung Beetle Workshop, Woodview Hall, Casino, NSW**
Contact: Johanna Kempff, phone (02) 6627 0120, mobile 0428 270 123
- May 3:** **Cowtime Shorter Milking Secrets Shed Shake-up, Mutdapilly, Qld**
Contact: Julie Hanson or John Miller, phone (07) 4169 9800
- May 4:** **Cowtime Shorter Milking Secrets Shed Shake-up, Malanda, Qld.**
Contact: Ruth Rasmussen, phone (07) 4096 7227
- May 8-11:** **Beyond the Basics Computer Course, Malanda, Qld**
Contact: Di Gresham, phone (07) 5483 5450, email <training@dairyinfo.biz>
- May 10-11:** **Nutrition Plus\$ two-day basic nutrition course, Clifton, Qld**
Contact: David Barber, Mutdapilly, phone (07) 5464 8742. Ross Warren, Gympie, phone (07) 5480 4418. Amy Anstis, Mutdapilly, phone (07) 5464 8747
- May 20:** **Murgon Dairy Heritage Festival, Queensland Dairy Industry Museum, Murgon, Qld**
Contact: Phone (07) 4169 9000, email <krewald@burnett.net.au>
- June 1:** **Beyond the Basics Computer Course, Northern NSW (venues TBA)**
Contact: Di Gresham, phone (07) 5483 5450, email <training@dairyinfo.biz>
- June 14-16:** **Primex, Casino, NSW**
Contact: Phone (07) 5531 4600, fax (07) 5531 3072, email <exhibits@bigpond.net.au>, website <www.primex.net.au>

DIARY DATES To have an event included in the diary dates, send information to **Carlene and Alastair Dowie** Phone/fax: (03) 5464 1382 Email: <alastair.dowie@ruralpress.com> or submit event to website <www.dairyinfo.biz>

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