



Business pathway focus for subtropical dairy farm

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Across Australia, Dairy Australia has established a network of Focus Farms to support farmer decision making. The tracking of real decisions on real farms under real conditions over a two-year period provides visibility and insight into the impact these decisions make on the bottom line. In addition, Focus Farms provide the opportunity for farmers to learn through the “experience and story” of others. Over the next two years, Subtropical Dairy’s Focus Farm will be Paul and Jo Judge’s dairy business at Gowrie Junction on the Darling Downs.

It is often discussed throughout the northern Australian dairy community about what opportunities and options young people have to purchase their own dairy business and the steps needed to achieve this goal. Over the next two years, Subtropical Dairy will focus on this journey with Paul and Jo Judge by following how their business and careers progress towards the goal of dairy business ownership.

Paul started in the dairy industry over twenty years ago as a farm apprentice for seven years in the Southern Highlands before moving back to the Northern Rivers NSW. He worked his way up to farm manager and three years ago, he and Jo took the leap to starting up on their own by leasing a farm at Gowrie Junction on the northern outskirts of Toowoomba.

They have just completed the first term of the original three-year lease and have recently taken up an option for another five years. Paul and Jo currently have a 170 cow herd, producing 650 to 700,000 litres per year. The system is pasture based with 75% home grown feed. The farm is 80 ha with 60 ha of irrigation. They have 350 ML water allocation for the farm and a combination of side rollers, centre pivot and hand shift pipes as their irrigation infrastructure.

Today, their business is profitable and debt free, however there are aspects that

need addressing. They acknowledge that their work/life balance has been affected over the last three years with no extra labour being employed other than the occasional relief milker. Herd reproduction and breeding strategies are also being reviewed. Given this, Paul and Jo are looking at ways they can increase their milk production to enable cash flow to employ labour. Their vision is to have a dairy business in the future they can be proud of and generate enough wealth to eventually own their own farm.

An advisory group is currently being setup to act as a ‘sounding board’ for Paul and Jo’s business decisions over the next two years. Aspects of the business’s management such as pasture agronomy and grazing, irrigation infrastructure, herd nutrition, reproduction and employing staff will be examined in detail to work out what changes the business needs to make today to meet the longer-term business goals and career pathway for the Judge family. With the assistance of the advisory group and project team over the next two years, Paul and Jo will be able to analyse, implement and evaluate a few different options for their business in a quest to meet their longer-term goals.

Over the next two years, we will be publishing regular updates of Paul and Jo’s progress in Northern Horizons.