

Outstanding milk quality helps farmers weather tough season



Second generation Subtropical dairy farmers Dallas, Adrian, Glen, and Melvyn Zischke weathered a tough season with high input costs by focusing on producing high quality milk.

The Darling Downs farmers were recently announced as a 2019 winner of Dairy Australia's Milk Quality Awards, placing them within the top 100 farmers nationwide for milk quality, and the number one farm for milk quality in Queensland.

It is the thirteenth successive win for the dryland farmers, who operate near Toowoomba in Queensland's south-east.

After taking over the family farm in 2005, the brothers continued to milk their 120-cow herd.

'We've been in dairy farming all our lives, and we're very proud to be Milk Quality Award winners for the thirteenth year in a row,' Dallas said.

'We always try to maintain high milk quality, for the sake of getting all our bonuses and keeping up our profitability.'

With no irrigation system in place, a volatile climate and high hay and grain costs have put pressure on the Zischkes' farming system and placed even greater importance on milk quality.

As a supplier of Norco, the Zischkes' milk quality sees them earn a premium of up to 11 cents per litre on top of their base milk price, allowing them to stay on top of high input costs.

'The premiums we get from high milk quality have a big impact on our bottom line,' Dallas said.

The Zischkes have always relied heavily on home-grown fodder to feed their herd, but tough weather conditions last season presented a major challenge.

'We're usually very self-sufficient and grow our own hay, but the weather hasn't been in our favour,' Dallas said.

'We bought in hay last year at over \$500 per tonne, which was very expensive.'

For the Zischkes, the secret to maintaining their milk quality and profitability came down to sound management and effective herd monitoring.

'It's all about management,' Dallas said.

'We do monthly herd recording, which lets us keep track of cows with high bulk milk cell counts and make informed decisions.'

As well as actively tracking the BMCC of each cow, the Zischkes stay across best practice for mastitis prevention, including by using Dairy Australia's Countdown resources.

'We teat spray every time, and we always have,' said Dallas.

'At drying off, we treat every cow with a dry cow treatment to prevent mastitis.'

'Every day, you have to stick to it – it's about consistency.' ■■

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Dairy farmers can access a range of resources to improve milk quality and prevent mastitis from Dairy Australia at

dairyaustralia.com.au/mastitis