

Murray Dairy Achievement Report

2022/23



DELIVERING
for DAIRY

Gollars

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Introduction

Murray Dairy has continued to respond to the drivers that shape our region including water policy reform, climate change and volatile seasonal conditions, while also attracting investment and delivering in areas of priority including emergency response and recovery (floods), workforce attraction, retention and feedbase.

At the close of 2022/23, Murray Dairy had delivered over 109 events to 2,142 participants, including farm owners, managers, staff, students and service providers. Outlined in the report is a snapshot of some of those key achievements throughout 2022/23 period.



Courses and workshops

Feedbase and animal nutrition

8
workshops delivered



Feeding Pastures for Profit (FPFP)

75
people attended

The FPFP program aims to provide farmers with the underpinning knowledge, skills and tools to achieve the profitable balance between home grown feed and supplement use. The program comprises of two classroom days followed by five on-farm seasonal days to reinforce the workshop content and how they apply throughout the season. Forages covered include conventional pasture species, lucerne and forage crops.

Locations:
Wangaratta (25)
Tallangatta (32)
Kyabram (18)



Nutrition Fundamentals

15
people attended

A course that encourages farmers to understand rumen function and then address feed gaps in a cost efficient and effective way using supplements and homegrown feeds (both grazed and conserved).

Location:
Kyabram (15)



Advanced Nutrition in Action

10
people attended

A course for those with a solid grasp of dairy nutrition and feeding management who are looking to extend their capabilities to a higher level. Participants will acquire and apply new approaches, information and tools in herd nutrition management, enable better integration of herd nutrition with the other components of the farm system and assess how key aspects of a farm's herd nutrition program are performing, and identify and pursue opportunities for improvement.

Locations:
Shepparton (10)



Top Fodder

68
people attended

Top Fodder is a two-day course which looks at the science and economics of silage making. A comprehensive range of silage topics are covered including selecting the right crop at the right time, silage additives and feed testing. The workshop also addresses controlling losses throughout the harvesting and feeding out process of silage production.

Locations:
Kyabram (26)
Leitchville (17)
Dederang (25)

Agribusiness

4
workshops delivered



Our Farm, Our Plan (OFOP)

46
people attended

OFOP is an industry-led response identified as part of Australian Dairy Plan (ADP) commitments - that provides farmers an opportunity to participate in 1:1 and/or group combination of activities that assist them to develop strategic plans using a range of industry developed and piloted tools and processes. Delivery to include: revisits to those who have previously engaged in strategic business planning, group sessions, 1:1 with consultants and delivery of checklist embedded across all program areas.

Locations:
Tatura (6)
Numurkah (10)
Echuca (20)
Corryong (10)

Animal performance

18
workshops delivered



Healthy Hooves

The Healthy Hooves workshops will give you an understanding of the main causes of lameness, how to identify lameness early, how to minimise lameness with good stockmanship and handling, tools to treat lameness, restraint methods and different treatment options.

29

people attended

Locations:
Cohuna (15)
Kyabram (14)



InCharge

InCharge program provides a supportive learning environment in which herd managers and farm owners can learn how to measure, review and improve their herd's reproductive performance and fine tune their existing practices. Participants will investigate their own herd's reproductive performance and build a plan to achieve their targets.

13

people attended

Locations:
7 farm businesses -
one workshop



Milking Mastitis Management (MMM)

MMM superseded the Cups on Cups off (CoCo 2.0) course during the year. MMM is designed to help both farm owners, managers and employees to deliver best practice management around milk harvesting and milk quality, with the emphasis on the detection, treatment and prevention of clinical mastitis.

Locations: Koondrook (8), Kyabram (25), Leitchville (22), Lockington (18), Tatura (18), Wakool (8), Mayrung (7), Kiewa (9), Yarraweyah (8), Keyunyah (17)

140

people attended

Locations:
10 courses
Refer to content



Rearing Healthy Calves – Fundamentals

This program gives participants the knowledge and skills to manage fundamental principles of rearing healthy calves. Program topics include preparation for calving, colostrum management, calf feeding, weaning, calf health management, review of basic husbandry procedures, calf identification, bobby calf management and the calf rearing environment.

70

people attended

Locations:
Numurkah (10)
Kyabram (26)
Lockington (20)
Tallangatta (14)



Calf Management

Calf Management – The New Frontier workshop with Professor Nina von Keyserlingk. Nina is a lead researcher in animal welfare from the University of British Columbia. Nina spoke with local dairy farmers at Echuca in February 2023 regarding calf management around sustainability, animal welfare and milk feeding/social housing along with pathways for surplus calves.

56

people attended

Location:
Echuca (1)

Farm engagement

Emergency response and recovery – floods 2022



La Nina weather cycles brought extreme flooding events to the Murray dairying region of Northern Victoria and Southern New South Wales throughout October 2022.

It was estimated that 80 per cent of the regions' 900 plus dairy farms had been impacted by severe wet conditions, flooding, or riverine flooding.

The floods wiped out a majority of the regions' crops, significantly reducing the milking quality fodder reserves in the region.

As a result, farmers were needing to rapidly assess their options for replacement fodder to fill the feed gap until autumn 2023. The on-going wet conditions resulted in increased animal health and welfare issues including lameness, increased cell counts and general fatigue in both animals and people.

Dairy Australia and the Murray Dairy teams answered direct enquiries and/or referred enquiries from farmers and service providers with the main issues including:

- Power outages
- Road access
- Animal welfare
- Forage and nutrition options
- Flooding predictions and impacts
- Water quality issues for human consumption
- Water quality issues for animal and production use
- Fatigue and mental health

The response moved to a planning and recovery phase with an emphasis on supporting decision making on farm, building service provider capability to support the recovery effort and provision of broader dairying community support.

SUMMARY OF KEY FLOOD RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

Neighbourhood flood sessions – Eleven events (218 participants) – discussions included managing wet conditions, forage options, sourcing fodder, support services and grants.

Regional updates on-line – two updates (79 participants) – jointly presented with Agriculture Victoria covering the current situation, arising issues along with resources and support available.

Summer Forage Planning – one workshop (28 participants) – covering options for summer cropping programs.

Soil Pit Days and Autumn Start-up – four events (75 participants) – designed to better understand the effect of flood on soils and how this may affect production, remediation processes and preparation for autumn sowing.

Taking Stock – (72 businesses accessing service) provision of business support via a business consultant to individuals reviewing their operations in response to floods and seasonal conditions.

Dairy Community Connector Events – six events – linking with local communities for event opportunities that support social connection, networking and engagement on key topics facing dairy communities.

Mental Health Support – (20 participants) – promotion of the National Centre for Farmer Health resources available for farmers and service providers and two Occasional Counsellor sessions ran online for service providers.

Communications and resources – Production of technical fact sheets covering topics from animal husbandry, forage and fodder through to water quality. A managing mastitis video and a summer forage options video. A summer magazine highlighting resources and support services was mailed out to all dairy businesses.



Farm engagement leads



As part of a deliberate strategy to enhance farm engagement, Dairy Australia has invested in a new pilot model where farm engagement leads take a dedicated account management approach to individual farms.

Through this process, farm businesses are assisted to identify needs and link those businesses to expertise across Dairy Australia or to other agencies and organisations.

Murray Dairy has been part of the pilot and over a three-month period supported a number of farm businesses to access services including Dairy Australia courses and workshops, information, resources and services across government and other agencies.

Farm performance – Focus Farm



The Focus Farm project over two years aimed to support farm business management through prompting sound decision making via directly engaging with a host farm business, a supporting committee and consultant.

The Murray Dairy North-east Focus Farm has concluded, with Alice and Justin Colclough's progress through the two-year project quite significant despite the large impact of the Dartmouth Dam flood event.

The project was led by dairy farm advisor Geraldine Perkins, who ended up selling her consultancy and discontinuing her involvement in October 2022. The remaining events were run by Murray Dairy staff and the support group. The Colcloughs developed and are executing an extensive development and investment plan that saw them change banks to access more capital for irrigation development, a minor dairy upgrade, new calf facilities (material purchased construction yet to commence), establishing a pivot on the support area, significant lane upgrades and has them positioned to carry out expansion plans should land become available.

Focusing on the day-to-day operations – their feedbase plan changed due to a new pivot irrigation set up and the six week flood event. Without a focus on feed, particularly getting a Summer crop in, the impact of the flood would have been far more telling. Reproductive performance was another key subject with a more focused synchronised program and improved feeding system allowing greater control of a transitioning diet through purchasing troughs which allowed better access for the herd. Regular meetings of the Focus Farm continued on a monthly basis, with an open day held during the flood event, discussing and covering re-set and recovery plans, soil pits and impact of inundation on the farm.

Our Farm, Our Plan (OFOP)



Our Farm, Our Plan is an industry-led response identified as part of Australian Dairy Plan (ADP) commitments to provide farmers the opportunity to participate in 1:1 or group activities that assist to develop strategic plans using a range of industry-developed and piloted tools and processes.

A goal of the ADP is to ensure that every farmer has a plan by 2025, with additional tools having been made available to achieve this, including the Farm Fitness Checklist.

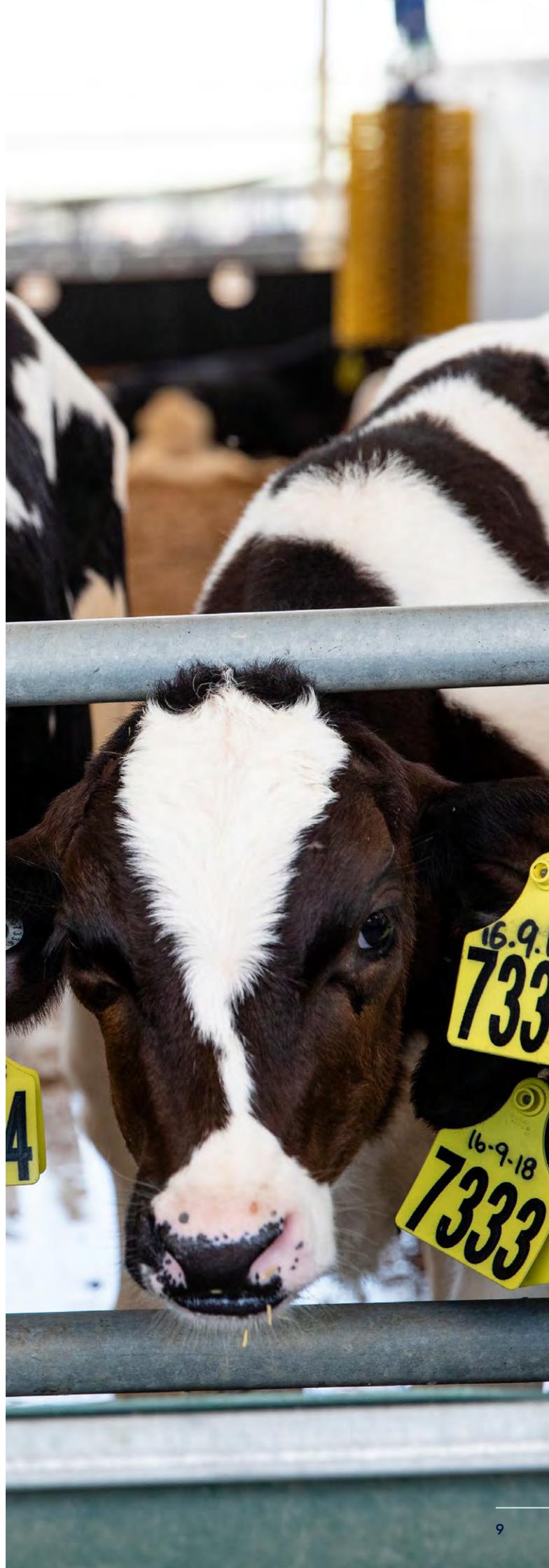
Murray Dairy has conducted 112 plans generated through Our Farm, Our Plan activities this year. Delivery has been across numerous forms including online, face-to-face, intensive overnight courses, single large farm businesses and monthly discussion group meetings all incorporating Our Farm, Our Plan.

The Our Farm, Our Plan has also been offered as an option for Taking Stock participants. Taking Stock is a one-on-one service made possible via funding from Gardiner in response to the October floods.

Our Farm, Our Plan includes six-monthly follow up one-on-one meetings with the course consultant and Murray Dairy Regional Extension Officer over the following 24 months.

Dairy Farm Monitor Project

Murray Dairy staff completed the data collection from six farms across the Murray Dairy region, which was collated with 24 other farms in our region – 80 in Victoria and 250 across the country to form a comprehensive database of dairy farm performance. The Victorian results were presented by project lead, Agriculture Victoria, along with Dairy Australia's *Spring Situation & Outlook Report*.



Projects

Feedbase and animal nutrition

Fodder for the Future



The Fodder for the Future project was funded through the Australian Government under the Murray–Darling Basin Economic Development Program and was established in response to the rapid change currently occurring on cropping and dairy farms in Northern Victoria and Southern NSW.

The project was designed to support the development of farming systems that optimise the use of both irrigated and dryland fodder. The project built on Murray Dairy's focus to provide information and resources that support the integration of alternative forages in dairy farming systems across the Murray region.

The A\$1.6 million, three-year project partnered with:

- Irrigated Cropping Council.
- Birchip Cropping Group.
- Southern Growers.
- University of Melbourne.
- Riverine Plains.
- Agriculture Victoria (participated for first two years).

Crops grown across the six cropping demonstration sites in the Murray region included different varieties of wheat, barley, oats, vetch, faba beans and other legumes, maize and sorghum. Various treatments were applied between the different partner sites and assessed differences in sowing times, sowing rates, nutrient applications, irrigation strategies, and cutting times with the goal to increase yield and quality of hay and silage specifically for use in dairy cow diets. Discussions within the projects technical committee refined treatments between the two growing years and highlighted key industry aspects that the project should consider. Nearly 2,000 crop samples were collected and analysed for yield and/or quality attributes over the project life.

A number of field days and workshops were held at each site and online, sharing in seasonal growing conditions and information about best practice management options. These reached 2,070 farmers and service providers.

The trial sites delivered a range of technical data to increase industry knowledge about how to improve yield and quality of fodder produced by key winter cereal and summer forages. It also identified a range of additional extension messaging to support dairy farmers and fodder producers to increase the performance of their fodder production. Which included:

- 1 **Relationship building:** The project emphasised the importance of building relationships between the dairy and grains industries. By understanding each other's needs, both industries can work together to create mutually beneficial outcomes, promote collaboration, and enhance long-term sustainability.
- 2 **Diversification and income generation:** The project delivered trials in extremely challenging and diverse seasonal conditions. Year 1 was largely dry across the region apart from the east, and Year 2 was extraordinary wet with flooding impacting the majority of trial sites. Results from the trials show that seasonal conditions had the biggest impact on quality and yield, which was to be expected in such extreme growing conditions. In order to manage this on-farm, farmers need to take a risk management approach to selecting the type, volume and desired end market for their fodder.
- 3 **Yield and quality trade-off:** It is well known there is a direct trade-off between quality and yield in most fodder species. The project demonstrated that within that there are often complex decisions to be made in practice to balance seasonal conditions and harvestability with target yield and quality. The project reiterated the importance of having a clear end-product with target yield and quality in mind from the beginning, in order to plan ahead for in crop management, particularly target cutting times.
- 4 **Importance of proactive weed control:** In traditional dairy perennial feedbase systems targeted weed control is less critical to feedbase performance given the natural weed suppression from intensive grazing and continuous ground cover that perennial ryegrass provides. In contrast, dryland fodder and grain areas surrounding irrigated dairy farms generally have a sophisticated integrated weed management approach to reduce the impact of weeds on target crop emergence, and conserve soil moisture and nutrients over the summer fallow periods. Through cross-collaboration, the project identified a number of critical improvements that dairy farmers should implement to reduce the impact of weeds on fodder crop performance, including the importance of rotations that break up continuous cereal and grass species with broadleaves (e.g. brassicas or legumes), pre-emergence and post-emergence chemical options, and summer fallow spraying.
- 5 **Importance of break crops in dairy rotations:** In addition to assisting in long-term weed control, particularly the avoidance of herbicide resistance in grass weeds, the project demonstrated the role of break crops in intensive fodder and grain systems. This is already an established practice on dryland grain and fodder systems in the region, but implementation on intensive fodder rotations on dryland and irrigated dairy feedbase systems is mixed. The project demonstrated various break crop options from legume and broadleaf species, and discussed the relative opportunities and challenges associated with each of them. These included agronomic considerations as well as the role of end product from break crops in dairy herd diets.





The C4Milk cropping desktop study was a 12-month project (2022-2023) designed to bridge between the end of the previous C4Milk program and a new body of work that would start in 2023.

The aim of the study was to identify cost effective fodder crop rotations for the Murray Dairy region that increase productivity and margin over feed cost. This information would then inform the design of the next body of experimental work.

The study consisted of two literature reviews, farmer surveys, the development of a crop matrix to inform how crops in a rotation can address specific agronomic issues in a farming system, and an analysis of specific crops rotations' impacts on yield, forage quality, water requirements, cost, and potential margin over feed costs.

The study highlighted the challenges in designing forage rotations that are both agronomically sustainable and economically viable.

Rotations that incorporated the three-forage family, four-cycle principles (ie highest agronomic benefits) were demonstrated to have the lowest and third lowest milk over feed cost (MOFC) of all rotational strategies analysed. In contrast, the two options with the lowest agronomic benefits were demonstrated to have the highest and second highest MOFC (\$/ha).

Furthermore, the challenges of climate variability combined with significant shifts in water policy further exacerbated the complexity in designing rotations that accommodated the targets. The only double cropping option that met Dairy Australia's target of 2.0 tonne (t) of dry matter per megalitre (DM/ML) (irrigation + in-crop rainfall) included forage sorghum, highlighting the benefits of a cropping rotation that incorporates forage sorghum to maximise dry matter yield and achieve a high-water use efficiency.

The study concluded that farmers need to balance their seasonal outlook, risk profile, natural resource base, herd requirements and agronomic aspects of the individual farm situation when designing a rotation strategy.

It also identified key research gaps that need to be addressed before the design, assessment and adoption of sustainable and profitable rotations can be recommended for forage systems.

The outcomes of this study are being used to design a new three-year research activity to be undertaken in the Murray Dairy as part of the new C4Milk Research Program. The program is being led by Queensland Department of Agriculture and Food (QDAF). The research activity will attempt to understand effects different crops have on the crops that are grown after them to inform sustainable fodder-crop rotation design for the industry.

Land, water and climate

Melbourne University greenhouse gas emissions project



Through small seed funding Murray Dairy has partnered with Melbourne University on two research projects.

The latest project was *Exploring the Impact of Replacement Rates on Carbon Footprint in Southeast Australian Dairy Herds* and this utilised Murray Dairy's network of farms as well as two farms from GippsDairy. These were across different feeding systems, herd size and production levels to quantify the impact on replacement rates has on carbon emissions using industry approved emissions modelling and extensive on-farm data.

The study found across all systems that a lower replacement rate led to a lower level of emissions. The final report has been submitted and will be sent out for publication this year.

The original project that commenced in 2001 entitled *Comparative enteric methane emission estimations for dairy farms in the Murray Dairy region of Australia* was accepted for publication in *Animal Production Sciences* this year.

North-east sustainable irrigation project



Alpine Valleys Dairy collaborated with Murray Dairy to draft a climate strategy for dairy in the Northern Victorian alpine region. One of the identified areas for work was the development of irrigation strategies to ensure the effective, economic, and environmentally sustainable use of irrigation water.

This includes system efficiency and applicability to crop type, farm system decisions, water use considerations, water source reliability and parameters that effect profitable and sustainable use of the irrigation resource.

Following up this strategic work, Alpine Valleys Dairy – in collaboration with Murray Dairy – will form a working group to identify the irrigation and water utilisation challenges that have the biggest potential to help private landowners address the barriers to improving water use. We will then identify farms that can be used as case studies covering these issues utilising AgVic and Dairy Australia developed and tested tools.

The case studies will be used to form the basis for reports and workshops delivered to farmers across North-eastern Victoria. Participating farmers will be encouraged to utilise the material produced and existing support services to develop their own irrigation strategy. The project is due for completion in April 2024.

North-east FertSMART project

In collaboration with North-east CMA (NECMA), Murray Dairy is delivering a series of FertSMART Plans, a total of eight plans in the North-east catchment, two as part of the Lower Kiewa Stewardship Project and the other six as part of the final year of NECMA funded federal government soil resilience project.

In addition to the plans, a flood recovery workshop for flood affected farmers to talk about soil impacts and a FertSMART pilot for FertSMART participants was held. The FertSMART pilot has now been developed into a nationally available workshop having been piloted for eight farmers and three agronomists via this program.

The Lower Kiewa Stewardship Program is in its second year of a three-year project and the Soil Resilience Project has now concluded.

Murray Dairy has once more partnered with agronomists to deliver the technical content of the project's FertSMART plans. In addition, Murray Dairy has also supported the project by volunteering as representative on the North-east Soils Steering Committee and the Lower Kiewa Stewardship Project Design Committee.

The North-east Soils Committee has run a number of progress meetings talking through how the various projects NECMA fund are tracking and also ran the Soils conference in Beechworth for 100 participants including Dairy Australia presenting a session addressing the risks and legalities of Carbon Farming.

The Steering Committee for the Lower Kiewa project is discussing what is possible to be tackled under the broader stewardship plan. The North-east Sustainable Irrigation Program, Farm Environmental Tracker, FertSMART workshops, Carbon Calculator and Multi Species trial work being conducted in the region are all being looked at for collaboration in the coming year under this program. Two media articles on land stewardship in the Lower Kiewa will also be delivered.



People

Workforce development

The aim of investment in workforce development is to provide information and programs to ensure that dairy farms that employ people are supported and to ensure HR compliance.

Murray Dairy's strategic plan includes a priority to attract and develop great people for dairy. Farm businesses will continue to require skilled labour on-farm. Success requires employers to be confident and capable to recruit, manage, lead and provide a safe work environment for capable people. Murray Dairy workforce development provided the following programs to dairy farmers in the Murray Dairy region throughout 2022/23 year.

Employment Basics – national online

Employments Basics is a nationally facilitated program for improving your skills and confidence as an employer. It also provides the opportunity to connect and share experiences with other dairy farmers.

Delivered online for farmer convenience by our people management experts, this eight-week program covered the following areas: attraction, recruitment, onboarding, retention and payroll/legal/compliance responsibilities.

Farming with My Team – national online

Farming with My Team is designed to provide farmers with an insight into their own leadership style and build their leadership skills. Improved leadership will not only benefit the farm business but provide farmers with skills that will benefit them beyond the farm gate.

Delivered online for farmer convenience by our people management experts, this eight-week program covered the following areas: attraction, recruitment, onboarding, retention and payroll/legal/compliance responsibilities.

Participants learnt to understand the benefits being a good leader will have on their team and assist in addressing workforce attraction retention challenges.

Managing People – national online

The secret to running a successful business isn't in the equipment you use or the breed of your cows, it's primarily based on the people running your farm.

If you choose to expand your farm business and employ staff, you will need to know how to manage staff to ensure workplace success. Managing People covered the essentials for supervising and guiding staff on-farm, as well as allowing time to learn from the experience of others and ask experts any questions.

The course was delivered online, and consisted of six-weekly sessions.

ESKi training – Tatura

This program was delivered face-to-face and is also delivered online.

The session involves an overview of the Employment Starter Kit Initiative (ESKi) consisting of:

- Employing someone – how to attract and retain, position descriptions, advertising and employment contracts.
- Payroll – how much do I have to pay?
- Individual Flexibility Arrangement (IFA) – a way to make paying people easier.
- Termination of staff – if we have to do this, let's do it right.

Compliance and general enquiries

Support is provided on a day-to-day basis to farmers who call with enquiries about people issues, training, compliance and other questions around people and staff management.

Within the Murray region, 18 farm businesses have been supported with HR 1:1.

Managing People 1:1 Support

Managing People 1:1 Support is a program to help dairy farmers in the development of their human resource management systems. The program is personalised to cover all aspects of human resource management, including attracting and recruiting, onboarding and induction, compliance, safety, managing people and staff retention.

Workforce attraction



Dairy Australia's two-year Workforce Attraction program aims to support farmers in finding and retaining workers by creating awareness of job opportunities in Australian dairy farming, attracting jobseekers into roles on farm and providing increased support for farmers in successfully hiring and managing staff.

One key element is the Dairy Jobs Board, developed to ensure jobseekers who are attracted by the campaign and wanting to explore opportunities further can easily find available job vacancies.

It has been well supported by farmers with over 70 vacancies being advertised in April 2023.

Murray Dairy has supported six significant career days, four career days out, four school/farm tours, with over 950 students engaged in direct conversation and more than 3,000 engaged at events using virtual reality goggles and resource sets. Murray Dairy has been actively engaged with GOTAFE, Wodonga TAFE, TAFE NSW and have co-delivered traineeship days.

Murray Dairy has actively engaged in dairy education and awareness with the tertiary, processing and broader local learning networks.

These include:

- University of Melbourne industry events and participation in the ARC linkage project, Youth retention in Ag sector.
- Marcus Oldham: Student and farm connection.
- Central Queensland University (CQU): RACE Goulburn project providing the mentoring of students over time directly into industry.
- Student tours, student placements and distribution of project resources and connection – Saputo, Fonterra, Bega and KyValley.
- Participation and connection with:
 - GV Jobs Forum, Goulburn Region Skill Taskforce, Campaspe Shire Careers, GMLLEN, NELLEN, NE Tracks, Campaspe LLEN and Murray Mallee LLEN, Food and Fibre Careers (more than 400 students and 78 teachers present – dairy workshops had more than 120 engaged students and committee).
- Murray Dairy has been active in discussions with Migration Agents, sharing Visa information and importantly supporting dairy to be included in the Goulburn Valley Designated Area Migration Agreement (GVDAMA).

Exciting News Murray Dairy and Tyler Farms, along with HW Greenham, CopRice, Industry Training Hub – Shepparton (MEGT), SLTEC Fertilizers and Shire of Campaspe – received a state wide recognition from VCAA the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority VCAL Achievement Awards class of 2022. This recognised our efforts for excellence in the category of VCAL Partnership – Workplace Learnings. This same offering is being continued in 2023, successfully placing dairy front and centre in the minds of the students engaged in this program. Murray Dairy is the first Dairy Australia RDP to gain this recognition.

Industry networking events

Young Dairy Network (YDN)



Designed to target people 'young in their career', the YDN is aimed at participants between 18-40 working in dairy who might need some help upskilling in areas on-farm. It also provides a networking opportunity with other like-minded farmers.

Murray Dairy Young Dairy Network has over 250 participants and throughout the year it runs a mix of social and educational workshops, along with study tours. All activities are run at a low or no cost to participants. Currently there are five active groups within the region (North-east, Tatura/Kyabram, Numurkah, North-west and Campaspe). These all have great engagement and high participation from upcoming dairy farmers and industry professionals.

Key events that ran through the year

Social dinners, Healthy Hooves workshops, Taking Steps workshop, Christmas party, trivia events on milk quality, US study tour information sessions, soil pit day and cropping tour in the North-west, as well as a YDN tour and evening event that involved Dairy NSW and DairyTas participants.

"It was such a great opportunity to be able to network across different regions and see how another region's Young Dairy Network operates."

DairyTas participant March 2023

Murray Dairy Young Leadership Program: US Tour Summary



Murray Dairy has invested in 20 YDN farmers to undertake a 12-month program of leadership that includes a modified Our Farm, Our Plan, communications, planning skills and US study tour components.

The program aims to get participants thinking about personal progression in the industry, industry leadership and setting long-term goals to achieve for the industry and with-in their careers. Building a program around an overseas YDN trip is seen as an investment and opportunity to increase the knowledge, confidence, skills and networks for the participants embedding planning for successful succession pathways into the industry and developing leadership skills over a longer period.

There have been three workshop days and half the group has had their first of two one-on-one consultations all facilitated by local business consultant Cam Smith.

For the remainder of the year, the group will now complete the program with a further two group workshops and the remaining 1:1 consultations and completion of leadership reports, by each group member.

"By focusing on robust succession planning, investing in comprehensive education programs, and embracing sustainable practices, we can build a resilient and prosperous dairy community."

DairyTas participant March 2023

US Tour Overview



“I hope to implement some of the new farming techniques and practices I learnt on the trip to my own dairy farm and in turn strengthen our dairy enterprise. This has been a great way to meet people in my area and create a bond I hope to have for years to come.”

Murray Dairy YDN participant, Leadership Program.

As a major component of the 12-month program, YDN members participated in a US study tour in May.

The tour consisted of an intense two-week tour of US farms, dairy industry facilities and relevant businesses across two states being California and Wisconsin.

California has a similar farming environment to Northern Victoria and with the challenges around water policy and irrigation, there was plenty of parallels and comparisons with participants own experiences and issues.

Wisconsin is a major farming state, with lots of family businesses providing a good place to discuss family business structures and successions that were more relevant to our cohort than the larger corporate farms prevalent in other US dairy regions.

Over the 14 days, the group visited 20 businesses including dairy farms (grazing and intensive), an almond business, genetics facility, dairy education centre and an irrigation company headquarters and trial site. There were two social mixer networking events with US Farm Bureau Federation young farmers in Turlock, California and Columbus, Wisconsin.

Murray Dairy was grateful for sponsorship support from the following businesses:

Gold Sponsor – Gardiner Foundation and Pioneer Seeds.

Silver Sponsors – Bega Group, Riverina Fresh, ProviCo Rural and Noumi.

Bronze Sponsors – Genetics Australia, ST Genetics, Rex James Stockfeed, Rochester Veterinary Clinic, Reid Stockfeed, Phibro Animal Health Corporation, Eagle Direct, Kyvalley Dairy Group and WB Hunters.



Dairy Business Network (DBN) and Discussion Groups



Murray Dairy provides support to 17 groups across the region with \$3,000 in funding and in-kind support, ranging from full facilitation and administration through to attending largely autonomously run groups.

Discussion Groups (DG)	Dairy Business Network Groups (DBN)
Kyabram DG	North-east Valleys DBN
Numurkah DG	Milawa, Ovens, King DBN (Wangaratta)
Riverina DG	Kyabram DBN
Saputo Ladies DG (previously Murray Goulburn Ladies)	Corryong DBN
Alpine Valleys Inc DG	Goulburn DBN
Deniliquin (Long Neck) DG (semi active - not funding)	Rochester DBN
Loddon DG (semi active - not funding)	Central DBN
North-west DG (not funding)	West DBN (*previously North-west DBN)
Women in Dairy (WID) – North-east	

Dairy Business Network Groups (DBNs) tend to be facilitated by a consultant with the aim to improve farm business management skills, review their business performance, analyse future management changes or capital investments, and identify and evaluate opportunities for their businesses.

Discussion groups vary in their aims from purely social and locality based through to topic focused or brought together for identified groups e.g. Women in Dairy groups and Alpine Valleys Dairy Tour.

As groups evolve and change overtime, it has been decided to review funding and planning arrangements so we can provide the best value for investment in these groups.

Some established groups have funding in the bank that they aren't spending – e.g. Loddon DG – and they will not receive funding for the coming year. Other groups, like the Central Managers group, have been funded through other mechanisms for the past 12 months and have an active engaged cohort that addresses a gap for peer discussion among managers and those new to farm ownership and lease/share farmers.

We will look to fund and encourage new active, engaged groups where we can. In order to identify where to invest discussion group funding, a process has been established covering group size, facilitation, membership and annual plans. This could be the catalyst for some semi-active groups to plan and in turn re-invigorate.

The Murray Muster 2023



This year's Murray Muster focused on people, with the aim of providing participants with strategies to attract and retain staff.

The program featured an industry update, two case study farms, support available to assist dairy farmers, strategies to make their business attractive, ideas on how to implement change and an after-dinner speaker talking on leadership.

More than 120 dairy farmers and industry members gathered at The Woolshed in Shepparton for the annual Murray Muster event, which was held on Wednesday 31 May. This year's theme was 'Attract and retain staff' and focused on a range of topics, including leadership, worker expectations, working with a culturally diverse workforce and worker support.

Attendees heard from Jerrica McLaren, a dairy farm worker at Mitta Agricultural Company. Jerrica is a mother of a young child and spoke about her positive experiences at Mitta – the flexibility, pay rates and facilities on the farm, plus the training and progression that is on offer. Jerrica is a manager of one of three Mitta farms, and her aim is to develop skills with the goal of successful farm ownership.

Next up was a panel that discussed the challenges faced by those who are from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, and how these are overcome.

Attendees listened to Alex, a Congolese worker at Coomboona Dairy. He left Democratic Republic of the Congo at a young age and spoke about how he overcame employment barriers. Alex and his parents work at Coomboona and enjoy being on a dairy farm.

Flavio Lubadi from the Masomo Mbele Foundation – an African Australian Youth Leadership Foundation – discussed why refugees make great employees. He outlined that it was opportunity and as a refugee for Namibia for eight years, he never had a vision and future.

When given opportunity to have a future, refugees grab it with two hands, Flavio said.

The first afternoon panel session looked at support that is available for dairy businesses to attract, train and retain good people. The focus is on attracting homegrown employees, as there is an expectation around transport and accommodation for workers who move from metropolitan areas. A housing shortage in regional towns, such as Shepparton, is a challenge.

Dairy Australia activities, such as the jobs board, Dairy Matters campaign and Farming with My Team program, were mentioned; however, it was said that marketing is not the silver bullet. It is part of the solution of increasing the pool of a diverse range of workers.

The final panel of the day included dairy farming couple Andrew and Christine Sebire, who spoke about what they do on-farm to make them an employer of choice. The people space is constantly evolving, and the couple shared what they have learnt over the last two decades in business.

Rounding out the day was Minds at Work speaker, Jason Clarke. Jason took attendees through an interactive session that focused on implementing change needed to make their farm an attractive place to work.

The focus then shifted to the night session – dinner and networking at The Woolshed. Attendees were treated to an entertaining presentation from 2005 Antarctic Expedition Leader Rachael Robertson, who shared her stories and lessons learnt as the leader of a year-long expedition to Antarctica.

The 2023 Murray Muster was a successful event with great insights and thought-provoking topics. The Murray Dairy team would like to thank the cohort of engaging presenters, event sponsors, and the wider industry for their support.

Major sponsors: Gardiner Foundation, Fonterra

Morning tea, lunch and afternoon sponsors: Lactalis Australia, Saputo Inc., Australian Consolidated Milk and Pioneer Seeds.

Murray Muster captured by Win News – 31 May 2022



Watch the news story [here](#).

Working to retain workers

BY ANDY WILSON

STRATEGIES FOR staff retention were highlighted at this year's Dairy Australia Murray Muster in Shepparton on May 31.

Key speakers from within the dairy industry spoke on a range of strategies undertaken by companies to ensure employment opportunities delivered for both workers and employers.

Regional extension officer Shane Byrne told the audience of about 200 that survey evidence strongly suggested that attracting and retaining of staff was a continual problem in the industry and urged employers to consider re-framing the ways of looking at a problem.

"The bottom line is that employment is very competitive at the moment and so in order for dairy farmers to attract and retain staff, they have got to do something different to meet the needs of the employees," Mr Byrne said.

"Staff tend to be wanting meaningful work, flexibility and career path training," he said.

"Our dairy farmers do not really score highly in those areas."

Dairy Australia regional engagement coordinator Phoebe Dillon has been able to undertake study for her Certificate IV in Agriculture whilst working full-time and said the advantages of doing both included her being able to understand farmer's needs.

"I am talking to dairy farmers all the time in my job, so I use my study heavily in that regard," Ms Dillon said.



This year's Dairy Australia Murray Muster highlighted challenges that dairies face in attracting and retaining staff. Coomboona Dairy has capitalised on the support of Uniting Victoria in securing the employment of the Bygero family, including Alex (left) and Jean Bygero.

"A lot of young people who are passionate about the industry really want to do a good job and also want to learn.

"I'm studying a good program and there are a lot of people in this area who are keen to have a crack."

Coomboona Dairy featured as a showcase item with regards to how the company has successfully employed and retained migrant workers.

Uniting Victoria business development worker Samantha Biles said hiring multicultural

staff would bring benefits to a business when managed thoughtfully.

"Simple ideas can overcome some basic barriers," Ms Biles said.

"You can overcome language barriers, for example, by arranging shifts where a family member who can translate is working alongside those who struggle with understanding."

The work of Ms Biles was crucial in establishing employment for the Bygero family.

Jean Bygero and his son Alex spoke as part of a panel about how Coomboona Dairy had employed their family of four.

The Bygero family fled the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2008 and their journey to Australia involved eight years in a Namibian refugee camp.

Alex said he had only been able to find two days of work in another job before being hired to join his family.

"One of the challenges as a refugee was that it wasn't easy to find a job," Alex said.

"Samantha really helped me; she is the number one person who does everything for us.

"And the dairy's management made me feel comfortable. They put me on a shift with my parents.

"I enjoy looking after the cows and everyone likes milk."

In addition to playing the key role of translator for his parents, Alex is given challenging tasks.

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"They put me working on things that I couldn't do but I always get support. Through an interpreter, he's the highly of his son."

"Anything he can do, he will do it." She said. She also said the support from Uniting Victoria and from Ms Biles was crucial to his family's success.

"Any problem we have, we go to Uniting they are our parents," he said.

Coomboona Dairy HR manager Rose Phillipson said the support among the company's staff had been inspired by the Bygero family's story.

"We can't help but be fascinated by what these guys have been through and how what they are doing in Australia," Ms Phillipson said.

Ms Phillipson said the wellbeing of people was just as important to the company as the wellbeing of their cows and the company encouraged people to enhance the workplace culture.

"We recognise what staff value the most and we enjoy celebrating success and milestones being reached," she said.

"Our plan is to provide opportunities for staff to develop skills across all aspects of our business and to provide reliable and long-term opportunities."

Ms Phillipson said the result was that staff were willing to continue working for the company.

Jean's family agrees with that sentiment, given the challenging journey they have made. "It was very difficult to work for Certificate, so I am really happy that I found the job here," he said.

"I was very proud to get that job."

Empower your staff



Baby Olivia stole the show at this year's Murray Muster in Shepparton. Her parents Zac and Lucia and Anna-Maria both work at Mitta Dairies, and they praise the efforts of general manager Richard Hamilton on how he understands the importance of balancing work-life challenges.

BY ANDY WILSON

MITTA DAIRIES general manager Richard Hamilton likes to tell a funny anecdote about one of his secrets to retaining good staff.

It is a case of many tips like former Olympic rower had up his sleeve when he spoke to dairy industry representatives at this year's Murray Muster in Shepparton on May 31.

At Mitta Dairies in north-west Victoria, his wife says he is working.

"You need to acknowledge who your staff are," Richard told the crowd of about 200.

"And you need to celebrate your product."

The anecdote about Richard's wife telling an employee who needed some words of encouragement that the driver filling his milk truck nearby only had a job because of what you do."

"Do you realise that the milk driver that truck only has a job because of what you do?" he told the employee.

The encouragement grew in the conversations, which soon included the fortunate employment of staff at workplaces from those facilities to fast-food outlets.

As the big grow, or not — we were told — did the employer's self-esteem.

On the following Monday, Richard asked the staff member how his weekend was.

"Well, I spent the whole weekend walking into all the local shops selling food and you selling everyone behind the counter you only have a job because of me!"

to feel like champions



Richard (left) shares an anecdote about an employee who needed some words of encouragement that the driver filling his milk truck nearby only had a job because of what you do."

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"Well, I spent the whole weekend walking into all the local shops selling food and you selling everyone behind the counter you only have a job because of me!"

"Every business competes with others on operating staff," he said.

"And you need to recognise the work-life balance that everyone has."

"If someone needs some time off the money and you grant it, you are to yourself. I have a lot of money with them here, it's an investment because they're going to be useful later on the year because they love their job."

Showcased at the event was the success story of two Mitta Dairies employees.

Jenna McLaren was a work program client first employed by the company, something which might normally make an employer pause.

Jenna's personal initiative seemed to assist Richard.

"If someone was willing to help me, then I am going to work for them," Jenna said.

"Richard is supportive of all staff, and I certainly supported me."

When Jenna started later in the year, the support continued with the not accompanying her mother at the dairy and being allocated a crèche area.

"Mitta is allowed to go into my work and have a safe and warm environment, and this is what gives a good work-life balance."

Jenna's partner Zac Law was then employed at Mitta Dairies and works in a range of tasks with the former carpenter even helping renovate rental houses on the property.

"This burgeoning family now (left) part of a larger one."

Jenna shared the story of her experience with the audience of industry representatives who had gathered to address the ruralwide employee shortage in the dairy industry.

"We should be supporting someone's dreams and passions," Jenna said.

"If you provide understanding of family needs, then I think you'll succeed in getting people to work for you."

"Ms Mitra, every effort is made to give time off for personal reasons, and when I ask for it, I am treated with no judgement."

"Richard is supportive of all staff, so everyone there is willing to continue working for Mitta."

Richard explains the staff to be fearless in the face of personal challenges and does support listening career for her partner's story.

The championship social-winning junior crew he coached once said their best in a school business during a race.

"The success how strong the herdment is, everyone is a world champion in something, but we've got to tell them that, and yet that's the secret is working toward a goal, whether it be sport or a dairy farm," Richard said.

"Often the biggest thing is that when someone comes through a tough challenge, someone ever says to them 'well, you have done this before'."

"These days, everyone is quick to judge, but I see value in understanding the journey they are on."

"I don't see it as a cause or a problem, but other employers often do."

"I don't see it as a cause or a problem, but other employers often do."



Mitta Dairies general manager Richard Hamilton sees value in understanding the journey his employees are on. "The more you empower you start to feel they are contributing to the way they run the business."

"They say 'we can't do this, and we can't do that'."

"And I want to challenge them on that and see what they can do."

Glossary

ADP	Australian Dairy Plan
ARC	Australian Research Council
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CMA	Catchment management authority
CQU	Central Queensland University
CoCo	Cups on Cups off (replaced by Milking Mastitis Management)
C4Milk	A research program led by Queensland Department of Agriculture and Food to improve milk production systems in tropical and inland dairy regions. Murray Dairy has complementary research activities within this program
DAMA	Designated Area Migration Agreement
DBN	Dairy Business Network
DM/ML	dry matter/megalitre
ESKi	Employment Starter Kit Initiative
Fertsmart	A program helping improve soils and fertiliser use
FPFP	Feeding Pastures for Profit
GMLLEN	Goulburn Murray Local Learning and Employment Network
GV	Goulburn Valley
GVDAMA	Goulburn Valley Designated Area Migration Agreement
ha	hectare
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
MEGT	Apprentice/traineeship/recruitment agency
MMM	Milking Mastitis Management (replaces Cups on Cups off)
MOFC	Milk over feed costs
NECMA	North-east catchment management authority
NELLEN	North East Local Learning and Employment Network
NE TRACKS	Local Learning and Employment Network covering Benalla, Wangaratta and Mansfield
OFOP	Our Farm, Our Plan
RACE	Raising Aspirations in Careers and Education - Goulburn
t	tonne
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
YDN	Young Dairy Network



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