

WestVic Dairy News

March 2025

Grounds for Growth

By Aylish Tobin-Salzman
Communications Coordinator

In early March, 170 people came together in Warrnambool for Grounds for Growth 2025, Dairy Australia's inaugural soil and pasture biodiversity event.

For three days, guest speakers from as far as Ireland and farmers from across the country, including some who had travelled from Western Australia, discussed how adopting multi-species pastures and other practices can improve soil health and function.

The event started with a farm tour to Simon Scott's family farm at Barongarook West to see how they have transitioned

to a regenerative agriculture farming system. This was followed by a visit to beef farmers Nick and David Allen at Purnim who are including practices to make their operation more sustainable. During the next two days other presentations from farmers successfully using multi-species pasture included Gippsland farmers Kate Mirams and Peter Neaves; and Irish dairy farmer, Gillian O'Sullivan.

Presentations at the forum included leading researchers in the field such as Danny Donaghy and Lucy Burkitt from the Whenau Haumanu project in New Zealand. Senior research scientist from Teagasc in Ireland, John Finn, presented on some of the findings from longer term Irish research. These presentations were

complemented by local researchers of multi-species pastures including Helen Suter from the University of Melbourne and James Hills from the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture.

Thank you to everyone who attended and all the guest speakers who made the event a great success. WestVic Dairy was proud to host Grounds for Growth in our region and see the networking and knowledge sharing that took place.

You can access the information shared at the event such as farmer case studies and biodiversity experts' presentations. Key information on multispecies pastures and other biodiverse practices from the event will soon be available at dairyaustralia.com.au.



Image: Tour of Simon Scott's farm in Barongarook



Image: Guest speaker: Irish dairy farmer, Gillian O'Sullivan

Pasture decisions supporting productivity gains

Bruce Vallance enjoys nothing more than watching grass grow on his Nirranda farm, but sometimes he has to look at pasture trial information on his computer to make sure that he's getting the most out of his efforts.

Over the past seven years, Bruce has consulted the Forage Value Index (FVI) tables each season to select the ryegrass varieties most likely to succeed in south-west Victoria. And it's working.

Bruce can see that pasture growth has been better since he started using the FVI to select his pasture varieties. Along with other improvements in feeding systems and genetic selection, the better grass output has contributed to a ten per cent rise in milk production over the past five years.

The basis of the FVI is a direct outcome of Dairy Australia's funded research in collaboration with several industry partners. The initiative commenced around a decade ago, and it has been further developed and expanded under the DairyFeedbase research program.

The FVI tables have been released annually since 2017 by Dairy Australia, in collaboration with DataGene, Meat & Livestock Australia and the Pasture Trials Network, to help dairy farmers like Bruce to make more informed decisions when selecting profitable ryegrass varieties.

They provide an independent and reliable assessment on the potential economic value of Perennial, Italian and Annual ryegrass varieties.

Bruce and his wife Andrea purchased their Nirranda farm in 1995. They now run it as an equity partnership with farm manager Isaac Fynn and their three children, Jordy, Sam and Casey, milking 830 three-way cross cows on a 287-hectare irrigated milking platform.

Bruce uses the FVI to validate the different ryegrass varieties on the market.

"It lets us look at all the commercially available ryegrasses and pick the right one for our farm. Grass is the biggest part of the cows' diet year-round," he says.

"When you sow a ryegrass pasture, you want it to last for a few years – so you want to make sure you get the best bang for your buck."

Bruce says the FVI has improved his business as it allows him to make more informed decisions.

"Dairy Australia developed a formula based on the trial sites in South-west Victoria, so we're not just picking ryegrasses from the best advertising; we're going with a science-based appraisal.

"We follow the formula and change the varieties according to what will be best for our light soil type."

Bruce focuses on Annual ryegrasses for the dryland part of the farm, Perennials for the irrigated areas and Italians for paddock renovation. They are also trialling multispecies pastures with promising results.

"We've changed the grasses because of the FVI," he says.

"It gives us an ability to change between companies to keep moving forward with the right ryegrasses."

Bruce is confident in the data.

"There's enough information to safely use new varieties," he says.

"That's one of the reasons we need this work because they do all the testing and validation. Improvements are incremental. Your eye will only pick up ten per cent or more growth, so unless you're doing all the trial work, you're not going to pick up the differences.

"Visually we've seen an improvement, and there has been a corresponding improvement in milk production."

Bruce says the information within the FVI is easy to follow and beneficial for all farmers.

"You're getting good information and it's addressing farmer concerns," he explains.

"Farmers want more drought tolerant grasses so they're also going down that path by researching a persistence component in the index.

"It's also good to see what endophytes they've got to address things such as black beetle damage.

"I think the FVI is a big step forward in our selection of ryegrasses and grasses in general."

The Forage Value Index is one of the many ways that Dairy Australia delivers outcomes from research to improve herd and feed genetics, as well as providing farmers with insights to support their decision making.

Find out more

If The 2025 Forage Value Index tables are available now at dairyaustralia.com.au/fvi.



Image: Bruce Vallance

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Dairy farmers reflect on conference experience

By Aylish Tobin-Salzman
Communications Coordinator

Each year, WestVic Dairy takes three young dairy industry members from South-west Victoria to attend the Australian Dairy Conference (ADC) to hear from the biggest thinkers in dairy and agriculture. This is possible thanks to the sponsorship of The Gardiner Foundation.

This year Kirkstall farmer Chloe Brown (CB), agronomist Emily Walsh (EW) and Jancourt East farmer Harm –Jan Pol (HP), travelled to the Gold Coast to learn and be inspired.

They share their reflections on their ADC experience.

What did you learn at the Australian Dairy Conference 2025?

CB: There are so many learnings I've taken away from the conference. A real highlight was Claire Booth's session around the legality of a farming business, which was incredibly informative. I also found a lot of benefit from the question asked of us 'Are we open to opportunities, and when they present are we prepared to take them?'

EW: How do you sum up nearly three days of learning! I now understand more about opportunities and being ready to take them; every day working toward a plan for that pivotal moment an opportunity arises that could be the turning point in your life.

Another lesson was from guest speaker Leigh Sales, a journalist whose message was about the importance of actively listening and the benefits it can provide you with.

I learnt a new way to look at innovation, that it isn't solely technologically based, it can be the small simple improvements on farm that create bigger impact. Talking among other likeminded individuals, I learnt a lot surrounding the industry's values and the importance of taking care of our farmers in the dairy industry.

HP: The ADC provided insights into new innovations in the dairy industry, which I hope to implement on the farm in the future to improve operations. I gained valuable knowledge on succession



Image: Kirkstall farmer, Chloe Brown, Jancourt East farmer, Harm –Jan Pol, agronomist Emily Walsh and WestVic Dairy Project Coordinator, Liza Fahey

planning and the key factors that contribute to successful share farming.

What was your favourite part of the conference?

CB: The networking opportunity was the best part. I made the most of the time to extend my network, with the conversations I had during dinner were some of the most memorable and impactful for today and for the opportunists they might present into the future.

EW: My favourite part was the feeling of inspiration and clarity listening to industry leaders and progressive farmers. The likes of Paul Roderick, Claire Booth, Clint Stephens, Sarah Crosthwaite, Josie Angus or the opportunities that David and Penny Conn had given farmers, and the stories of hardship and success for Jen and Don Stolp.

HP: My favorite part of the event was the session 'Farming in Australia – The Land of Opportunity.' This session really resonated with me because my family took the same path coming from the Netherlands to Australia for better opportunities. Led by Nathan Scott, it featured dairy farmers Clint Stephens and Brian Corr, whose journeys were very different and very inspiring. Another highlight for me was the session with Claire Booth. She provided a lawyer's perspective on share farming, breaking down different elements that need to be considered before establishing a solid succession plan.

What will you change or do after attending the conference?

CB: I've had so many thoughts and reflections after leaving the conference, with the main focus on how we as an industry support our farmers to be ready for when an opportunity presents itself. Whether this is a transition into

ownership, growing existing businesses, or preparing for the end of a farming business.

EW: I felt very reassured in the direction I have within my career and within my practices as an agronomist. In terms of my Young Dairy Network (YDN) leadership role, I can see a lot of potential to utilise networks I have made at the ADC to take back to our team and create some incredible opportunities for young farmers.

HP: Everything I have learned will definitely be beneficial in organising my share farming adventure and transitioning into farm business ownership.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

CB: I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to attend the conference and feel empowered, inspired and supported in my role and farming business. Thanks to you. Gardiner Foundation and WestVic Dairy.

EW: I am extremely grateful for the opportunity WestVic Dairy and Gardiner Foundation provided me with to be a part of the 2025 ADC. What an incredible industry we are a part of.

HP: It was a very interesting experience and I'm so glad I had the opportunity to attend the ADC.

Find out more

If you would like to get involved or stay informed with WestVic Dairy Young Dairy Network events, workshops and opportunities get in touch with liza@westvicdairy.com.au or follow the YDN on Facebook (@WestVic Dairy – Young Dairy Network).

Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group Tour to Tasmania

By Sheeraz Ahmad,
Extension Coordinator, Farm Business Management

Over the course of a three-day tour in February 2025, 17 members of the Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group experienced a series of insightful visits to leading dairy operations and research facilities across Tasmania.

The tour began seeing virtual fencing in action on farm and the final day was dedicated to exploring research and innovation at the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) Dairy Research Facility in Elliott.

The insights and experiences gathered during the tour will help inform future discussions within the group. Our continued focus on best practices, innovation, and sustainability in dairy farming is essential for driving the industry forward. We look forward to further collaboration and knowledge sharing at upcoming meetings and events.

Overall, the Tassie Tour was a valuable experience, reinforcing the importance of practical insights and continuous improvement in dairy operations. The trip participants expressed their gratitude to Demo Dairy Foundation for their support with accommodation and bus hire, and to WestVic Dairy for their facilitation and financial assistance.

Find out more

If you would like to find more about Discussion Groups and WestVic Dairy, Farm Business Management services and resources, please contact Sheeraz Ahmad on 0414 684 065 or email sheeraz@westvicdairy.com.au.



Image: Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group taking in the sights at Boat Harbour Tasmania



Image: Fodder beet crop at N&C Family Trust Flowerdale dairy farm



Image: Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture dairy research facility, Elliott

Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group Tour questions and answers

Harry Whiting, dairy farmer at Simpson

Q. What were your key learnings on the trip?

A. I took away how much Tasmanian dairy farmers store and utilise water throughout the summer months with most farms we visited being 70-100 per cent irrigated.



The common practice there was a spring calving herd and wintering their cows on adgishment where there was dry ground.

Q. What was your favourite part of the trip and why?

A. The social networking dinner with DairyTas was a standout part for me. There were many Tassie dairy farmers there from multiple areas of the north coast. Being able to talk and ask questions one on one was a great way to pick up things and learn about their businesses.

Q. Who did you enjoying meeting the most and why?

A. Jeffery Gijbers from Edith Creek - it was very interesting to hear him speak about his current farm business and journey to farm ownership. I was very impressed with his story. From coming to the country in 2011 not speaking English to now acquiring 340 hectares milking 630 cows. His drive and business management outlook was very motivational to myself and others on the trip.

Q. What will you change or do on farm as a result of going on the trip?

A. I think continuing to invest in irrigation infrastructure going into the future is something to implement, although some of the regulation in Victoria makes it much more expensive than for the Tasmanian dairy system.

Q. Do you have any other comments about the tour?

A. As the Tassie dairy farms are made up of a large proportion of corporate owned farms there is a significant amount of share farming and other private ownership models being used to give young farmers a pathway towards farm ownership. Pathways are important especially as average farm sizes are growing and land value is increasing.

James Maxwell, dairy farmer at Coorimungle

Q. What were your key learnings on the trip?

A. The key takeaway points from the Tasmania trip were:

1. The highly structured and huge popularity of share farming in Tasmania. We met



three young dairy farmers that had been in the industry for five plus years and had worked their way up to 50:50 share farming positions, two of which were on multiple farms simultaneously after starting from nothing. We also met and had the opportunity to talk to people involved in the Circular Head Farms group that partner with young and enthusiastic farmers to generate wealth for both parties. They use a four-step share farming model adapted from New Zealand and that gave people the opportunity to achieve farm ownership.

2. Tasmania has a similar climate but very different restrictions to land management, specifically almost every farm we visited was at least 70 per cent irrigated. Water was sourced from either bore or surface water which was still pristine and running freely in the driest month of the year. There was reportedly minimal cost and unmonitored access to water. Irrigation allowed for an abundant source of high quality of feed and a secure cost base for production.

3. Virtual fencing technology will have a huge impact on pasture-based dairy farming businesses in the future, allowing for efficient mustering of multiple groups at planned, staggered times to and from the dairy. It will also be extremely beneficial for pasture allocation and management as well as the already available animal activity monitoring.

Q. What was your favourite part of the trip and why?

A. Seeing the Virtual Fencing technology in action at P & N Dairies, Merseylea. It was amazing seeing the cows mustered up to the dairy without a motorbike and the break moved for the milkers - it's very exciting tech.

Q. Who did you enjoying meeting the most and why?

A. It's difficult to narrow it down to just one - all the speakers were passionate and enthusiastic about dairy and very generous with their time and answering all of our questions.

Q. What will you change or do on farm as a result of going on the trip?

A. We will get virtual fencing as soon as possible!

Q. Do you have any other comments about the tour?

A. I really appreciated this opportunity to attend this tour. It was well organised with time for networking and socialising as well as a great choice of farms to visit. Thank you, DemoDairy Foundation and WestVic Dairy!

Fresh cows

By Debbie Twiss, Extension Advisor – Animal Health and Performance

The success of a lactation depends on freshly calved cows increasing their dry matter (DM) intake as quickly as possible after calving in way that supports health and drives peak milk production.

Sixty years ago, scientists discovered that the amount of feed cows eat is determined by two factors:

Factor one – how quickly the liver metabolises (hepatic metabolism) digested starch in grain to produce chemicals which block the cow's hunger signal.

Factor two – the volume of feed consumed, which triggers fullness receptors in the rumen (the first compartment of their stomach).

The control of cow feed intake depends on the stage of lactation. In the first 21 days after calving, feed intake is controlled by hepatic metabolism. From day 22 to late lactation, feed volume controls feed intake. During late lactation, hepatic metabolism once again controls feed intake. Finally, feed volume controls feed intake when cows are dried off.

Since 2020, Dairy Feedbase research, collaboratively funded by Dairy Australia, Gardiner Foundation and Agriculture Victoria, has been investigating how to improve milk production and health of cows in the first 100 days of lactation. The goal was to find nutritional strategies which promote feed intake in cows being fed a pasture-based diet with grain supplementation, with the aim to increase annual milk production from an average of 6,000L per cow to an average of 7,000–10,000L per cow. This increase in milk production would result in a benefit of \$200 per cow for the first 100 days of lactation and a carryover benefit of \$100 per cow for the rest of lactation. In addition, improved health through reduction in disease, was valued at an additional benefit of \$50 per cow.

The feeding trial results showed that fresh cows (day 0 to 21 after calving) fed a diet which included maize grain with low fibre forage (e.g. lucerne hay with NDF 36 per cent) had an increased

DM intake compared with fresh cows fed diets with maize and pasture hay or wheat grain with a forage. When combined with low fibre forage, fresh cows consuming maize can graze more pasture before their hunger signal is blocked by hepatic metabolism compared to fresh cows fed a diet containing more rapidly metabolised wheat grain.

It is important that the maize is ground as finely as the auger can handle without getting clogged up. This is to ensure that the starch in maize grain is accessible for digestion by the rumen bugs. The forage needs to have an NDF between 36–42 per cent to ensure intake is not limited by fibre. (See Figure 1)

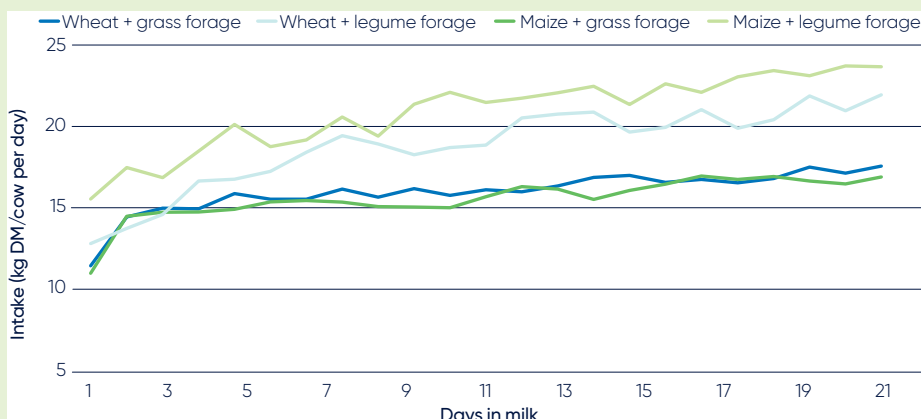


Figure 1 Fresh cow dry matter intake on four different diets fed from day 0 to day 21 of lactation

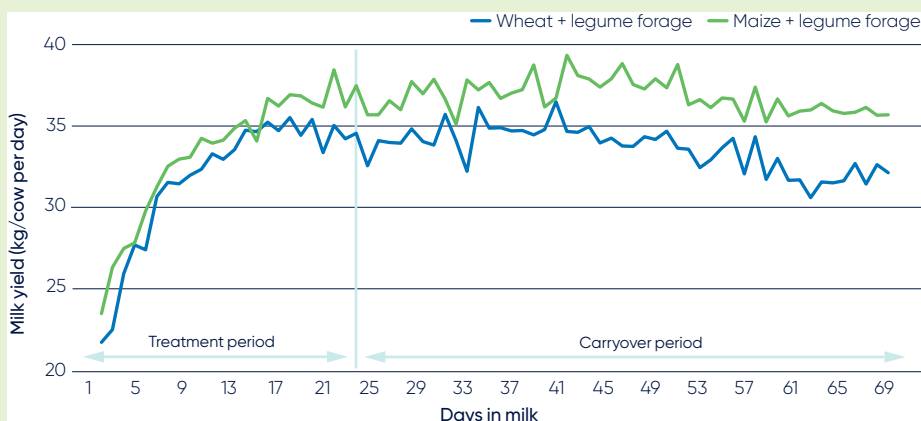


Figure 2 Carry over effect of fresh cow diet containing maize and low fibre forage

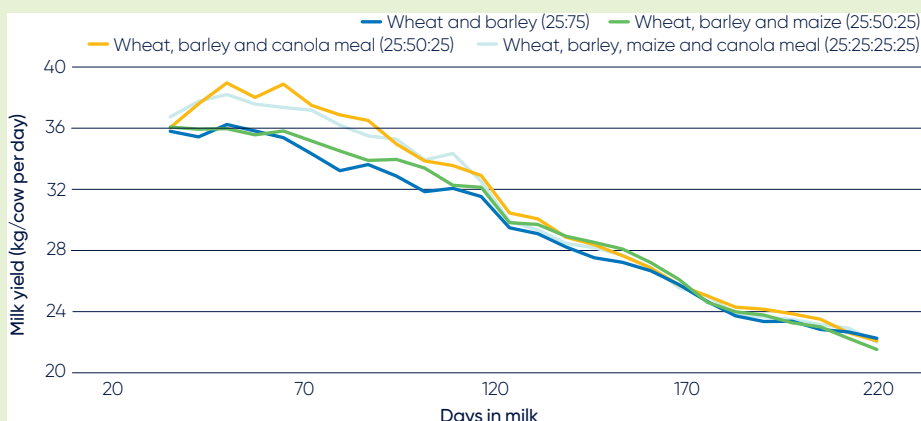


Figure 3 Milk yield on different grain mixes fed in early lactation

Showcasing careers in dairy

By Aylish Tobin-Salzman Communications Coordinator

Fresh cows fed maize grain with high quality forage increased milk production by 2L per day for the first 21 days. The effect of increased production persisted from day 22 to day 71 after calving. (See Figure 2)

In early lactation (day 22 to 100 of lactation), feeding a grain mix consisting of 25 per cent wheat, 50 per cent barley and 25 per cent canola meal was seen to be most profitable diet. Including maize in the ration beyond the fresh period (day 0-21 of lactation) did not improve milk yield. (See Figure 3)

The effect of different DM intakes of the wheat, barley, canola grain ration in early lactation were examined from day 14 to day 118 of lactation. Cows on the feeding strategy where grain intake was dropped from 9kgDM to 5kgDM per day at day 70 of lactation consumed the more pasture and were marginally more profitable than cows on a flat rate of 7kgDM grain per day.

In summary, the feeding trials demonstrated that grazing cows can produce more milk in later lactation when fed maize grain (6kg) and canola meal (1kg) with high quality forage (lucerne hay) in days 1-21 of lactation. Cows fed grain mix containing canola, wheat and barley in early lactation ate more pasture compared to cows fed wheat and barley only in their grain ration.

Further research will look to refine individual feeding strategies to improve per cow profitability and validate initial findings related.

Find out more

Scan the QR code for Early Lactation Resources. If you have questions or would like more information contact Debbie Twiss debbie@westvicdairy.com.au or 0467 528 111.



Emma Collins, WestVic Dairy Workforce Attraction Coordinator and Ella Dixon, Dairy Australia People Experience Lead, showcased the careers possible in the dairy industry at the Neil Porter Careers Expo in Warrnambool on Tuesday 4 March.

The Neil Porter Legacy is dedicated to showing the region's young people their many options so they can make informed career-based decisions. Over 1,200 secondary school students from across the region attended the Expo.

Emma said a highlight of the day was the conversations with curious young people.

"The students were engaged and asked great questions about working in the dairy industry.

"It was great having one-on-one conversations with students. One of the most pleasing was a student who realised he didn't have to have grown up on a farm, to work in the industry."

Engaging students at events like this is just one of the ways WestVic Dairy and Dairy Australia are building awareness of careers in the dairy industry.

Find out more

For more information visit dairyaustralia.com.au/promoting-australian-dairy.

Student feedback

"At the career expo today, I had a deep interest in all the dairy farming and agriculture stalls. The WestVic Dairy stall really helped me understand how to get into it [farming] without living on a farm and I think they really helped me with how to one day achieve my dreams."

"The WestVic Dairy stall gave me a good idea of what pathway I could follow and would love to follow. I also loved how they said by choosing a career in the dairy industry you are opening the door to a whole range of opportunities and employment options."



Image: Emma Collins and Ella Dixon at the Neil Porter Legacy Careers Expo

WestVic Dairy Focus Farm report

Bostocks Creek

Date	20/03/2025
Milking area	212 ha

Production

Cow numbers	132
Milk solids/cow/day	1.52kg
Litres/cow/day	17.3L
Fat	5.07%
Protein	3.70%

Grazing and supplementary feeding (cow/day)

Wheat costing 40c/kg DM (\$360/t)	5.0kg
Profeed costing 78c/kg DM (\$703/t)	2.0kg
Almond hulls 20c/kg DM (\$175/t)	5.0kg
Silage 26c/kg DM	5.4kg
Crop (kg DM)	2.0kg
Pasture (kg DM)	NA
Area in rotation	146 ha
Rotation length*	
Grazing area*	

Daily income over supplementary feed costs (IOSFC)

March Milk Price (\$/kgMS)	\$8.76
Income/cow	\$13.32
Supplementary feed cost/cow	\$5.49
IOSFC/cow	\$7.83
IOSFC/ha	\$4.88

Notes:

- Feeding three bales of silage to the milkers and grazing the last of the crop regrowth.
- Using a sacrifice paddock both night and day. Autumn resowing is underway now.
- Heifers were due to start calving on the Saturday 22 March, 20 have already calved. The cows are due to calve from Friday 4 April.
- Lead feeding the heifers and cows for two to three weeks prior to calving.

*No pasture in the dry conditions



Image: A group at the Bostocks Creek Focus Farm Open Day in March

Contact us if you would like know more about our services and resources

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