



Murray Dairy Achievement Report

2023/24



DELIVERING
for **DAIRY**

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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 workforce attraction and/retention and feedbase.

At the close of 2023/24, Murray Dairy had delivered over 102 events to 1,802 participants, including farm owners, managers, staff, students and service providers. Outlined in the report is a snapshot of some of those key achievements.



Courses, workshops and programs

Feedbase and animal nutrition



Feeding Pastures for Profit (FPFP)

33
people attended

The Feeding Pastures for Profit (FPFP) program aims to provide farmers with the underpinning knowledge, skills and tools to achieve the profitable balance between home grown feed harvest and supplement use. The program comprises of one classroom day followed by three on-farm seasonal days to reinforce the workshop concepts and how they apply throughout the season. Forages covered include grazing annuals, lucerne, fescue and crops.

Locations:
Corryong (14)
Numurkah (19)



Nutrition Fundamentals

62
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:
Milawa (13)
Corryong (19)
Numurkah (15)
Cohuna (15)



Maximising Silage Quality

62
people attended

A one-day workshop that has highlighted key features from the Top Fodder program delivered to farmers in a timely and targeted fashion. The focus is on how to make the best quality silage including cutting, time into pit/bale, how to preserve properly, what moisture level to achieve and implications of getting it wrong.

Locations:
Echuca (24)
Leitchville (18)
Dederang (20)



Fix Your Mix

56
people attended

A one-day workshop led by the Feedworks team, specifically designed for farmers operating Total Mixed Ration (TMR) or Partial Mixed Ration (PMR) systems. The workshop focused on the risks of Sub Acute Ruminant Acidosis (SARA) and suboptimal herd performance due to improper feed mixing. Participants were introduced to the Penn State shaker box technique as well as key areas of importance including auger timing, auger speed, and loading sequence, which are all crucial for ensuring efficient mixing and preventing feed variance.

Locations:
Yalca (17)
Bamawm (19)
Tallandoon (20)

Animal performance



Milking Mastitis Management (MMM)

93
people attended

The Milking Mastitis Management course 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:
Yalca (10)
Echuca (11)
Leitchville (23)
Tatura (17)
Numurkah (8)
Tongala (24)



Rearing Healthy Calves – Fundamentals

66
people attended

This program gives participants 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.

Locations:
Moyhu (10)
Yarroweyah (12)
Tatura (13)
Leitchville (10)
Kyabram (21)



Rearing Healthy Calves in Practice

13
people attended

Rearing Healthy Calves in Practice builds upon the Rearing Healthy Calves – Fundamentals in the Rearing Healthy Calves program. This course supports dairy farmers and experienced calf rearers in strategically reviewing their calf-rearing management decisions.

Rearing Healthy Calves in Practice utilises the Rearing Healthy Calves Checklist resource to identify opportunities for improving calf rearing management. At completion, you develop a farm specific action plan to support your calf rearing goals.

Locations:
Deniliquin (13)



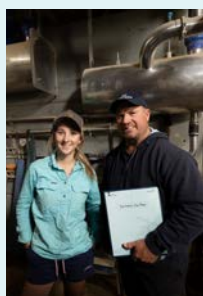
InCharge

11
people attended

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.

Locations:
5 farm businesses
One workshop, Tatura

Agribusiness



Our Farm, Our Plan (OFOP)

33
people attended

OFOP is an industry-led response that provides farmers with the 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 includes revisits to reviews for those who have previously engaged in strategic business planning, group sessions, 1:1 with consultants and delivery of checklist embedded across all program areas.

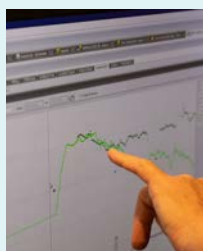
Locations:
Wodonga (10)
Deniliquin (7)
Kyabram (11)
Macorna (5)



Taking Stock – Flood recovery

75
farm businesses

Taking Stock is a long running support program that is funded and rolled out following incidents impacting farmers beyond what is expected in normal fluctuations in seasonal or market conditions. Due to the ongoing impacts of the 2022 floods, the Taking Stock program was continued following on from the previous year to support the recovery of impacted farmers.



Dairy Farm Monitor Project

6
farm businesses

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 and Outlook Report.

People



Young Dairy Network (YDN)

306
people attended

Designed to target people 'young in their career', the Young Dairy Network (YDN) is aimed at participants between 18–40 years of age who are working in dairy and who might need some help upskilling in areas on-farm. It also provides a networking opportunity with other like-minded farmers.

21 events



Managing People 1:1 Support

18
farm businesses

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.



Employment Starter Kit (ESKi)

25
people attended

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.

Locations:

Tatura (12)
Numurkah (13)



Safety Training

81
people attended

Safety training programs are offered in the region providing information on safety regulations and compliance. The Farm Safety Manual and the Farm Safety Starter Kit are explained and examples of safety checklists, safety policies and standard operating procedures are provided.

Safety training days were also incorporated into the Fix your Mix workshops held at Yalca (17), Bamawm (19) and Tallandoon (20).

Tatura (16)
Numurkah (9)



Succession Planning

50
people attended

Succession Planning provides dairy farmers with the tips and tricks to succession planning, business structures, tax implications, role changes and transferring assets.

Post floods was a great opportunity for dairy business to get succession discussion going in the right direction. This one-day workshop was run by guest speakers Rob Brown from - Peppin Family Consulting and legal advisor, Matthew Grogan.

Location:
Kyabram (50)



Motivating and Managing People with Nollaig Heffernan

69
people attended

Dr Nollaig Heffernan is an Independent Management Consultant from Ireland, specialising in Leadership and Organisational Psychology.

Nollaig visited our region to work with dairy farmers looking to improve their people management skills.

Locations:
Tallangatta (13)
Barooga (16)
Moama (13)
Echuca (27)



Farm Engagement Leads (FEL)

143
long visits
64
followup visits

Farm Engagement Leads are responsible for managing valuable farmer relationships as part of the Murray Dairy team. They regularly engage with dairy farmers to help build an understanding of their farm business needs, recommending the right services and resources to help support profitability, sustainability and best practice on their farms. After piloting the FEL program in early 2023, 2023/24 saw the successful engagement of FELs with farmers, resulting in increased attendance at workshops and courses, and improved understanding by farmers of what Dairy Australia does and offers. The Farm Engagement Lead team consists of:

1 x full-time - (Central) and 2 x half-time - (North East and West).

Feedbase and animal nutrition

C4Milk 2023/24



As a part of the broader national C4Milk program, a partnership between Dairy Australia, the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Gardiner Foundation, Murray Dairy is undertaking research to understand the role of break fodder crops in northern Victorian forage cropping systems.

This work builds on previous outcomes of the Accelerating Change project (2018) and the Fodder for the Future project (2023) which have tracked the performance, challenges and opportunities of feedbase systems in the Murray region.

One of the key outcomes of this work is understanding better the role of alternative forages such as winter cereals, legumes and summer forages.

Specifically how to improve crop and pasture rotations on dairy farms to maximise plant productivity and animal nutrition outcomes as well as reduce the impacts of weeds, pests and disease.

The aim of the Murray region activity is to determine crop effects (quality, yield, agronomic and environmental) in forage production systems in northern Victoria to gain understanding of the cumulative effect of the change to intensive fodder cropping rotations on profitability and sustainability of dairy farms. This includes looking specifically at how important break crops might be in these systems. We have engaged Birchip Cropping Group (BCG) and Irrigation Farmers Network (IFN) to run rotation experiments.

Experiments have been designed to test the impacts of two or three break crop strategies (single break, winter double break (winter-winter), summer double break (summer-winter)) and a range of crop types. The BCG site at Mitiamo will test the rotations in a dryland system, and the irrigated IFN site at Kerang will double crop.

Land, water and climate

Flood Response

Following on from widespread flooding in October 2022, which was estimated to impact 80 per cent of Murray region's dairy farms directly, Murray Dairy continued to support the recovery and planning phase in 2023–24.

With the support of the Gardiner Foundation, Murray Dairy delivered:

- Funding of 2 Commodity Reports
- Taking Stock consults
- InCharge Workshops
- Sponsorship: Flood Recovery
- Men's Health Event
- Succession Planning Workshop
- Presentation: Mental Health at the Young Dairy Network
- Regional Network Meeting
- Workshop Facilitation: Staff Training Day
- Fix your Mix Workshops

North East Fertsmart project



In collaboration with North East Catchment Management Authority (NECMA), Murray Dairy is delivering a series of Fertsmart Plans as part of the Lower Kiewa Stewardship Project through partnership with local agronomists.

In addition, Murray Dairy has also supported the project by volunteering as a 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 including two workshop, two media releases and a promotional video.

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 – formed 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 then identified farms and completed case studies covering these issues utilising AgVic and Dairy Australia developed and tested tools.

The case studies formed the basis for an irrigation report and two workshops delivered to farmers across North Eastern Victoria. Participating farmers utilised the material produced and existing support services to develop their own irrigation strategy.

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 workforce development provided the following programs to dairy farmers in the Murray Dairy region throughout 2023/24 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, payroll, legal and compliance.

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.

Participants learnt to understand the benefits that being a good leader will have on their team and assist in addressing workforce attraction and 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 via Zoom and consisted of six weekly sessions.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD)



Murray Dairy successfully secured funding from Agriculture Victoria (AgVic) to collaborate with GOTAFE on a significant project aimed at creating training opportunities in agriculture for the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) community. This initiative, named known as 'CaLD Pathways into Dairy', focuses on engaging diverse local communities and establishing clear career pathways in the dairy industry.

The primary objectives of this collaboration are:

1. Engaging with local diverse communities.
2. Piloting GOTAFE's new 'goLearn' online training platform.
3. Creating clear pathways to careers in dairy.

The CaLD Pathways into Dairy initiative is off to a strong start, with positive community engagement and support. Moving forward, the focus will be on expanding these efforts, leveraging the goLearn platform, and continuing to build robust career pathways for the CaLD community in the dairy industry.

Workforce Attraction

The Workforce Attraction initiative is a national program designed to increase the number of individuals entering roles on dairy farms, specifically targeting farm hands, and to support the retention of employees to reduce turnover rates. Achievements: included

- Expression of Interest (EOI): Generated more than 600 EOIs.
- Candidate Placement Support: Supported over 465 direct candidate placements nationally.
- Jobs Board Engagement:
 - Over 40,000 visits since commencement.
 - More than 500 direct on-farm placements.
 - Over 500 jobs board posts.
- Latest Marketing Campaign: Received 500 EOIs in the recent retargeting effort.
- Industry Networks: Developed strong networks within the industry.
- Cows Create Careers: Engaged more than 1,000 students interested in gaining farm experience.
- Onboarding Boost: Enhanced uptake of onboarding processes, now proactively included in communications.

Despite progress, labour shortages remain a top priority for farmers in most dairy regions. Although there has been some easing over the past 12 months, unemployment rates in the Murray Region remain particularly tight.

As the current phase concludes in September 2024, the initiative will transition to a more balanced approach combining localised and national strategies, with a comprehensive perspective covering the entire employee lifecycle, from attraction to retention.



Industry networks, events and partnerships

Young Dairy Network (YDN)



The Murray Dairy Young Dairy Network (YDN) is sponsored by the Gardiner Foundation and local sponsors, and delivered by Murray Dairy.

It's guided by a Steering Committee of representatives from across the region, comprising dairy farmers, processors, of dairy farmers, processors and extension providers. Membership continues to grow, with a range of programs on offer that provide opportunities for social networking, skill building and information sharing.

"The YDN remains a strong network for young dairy farmers and industry service providers across northern Victoria and southern NSW".

Murray Dairy Young Dairy Network has had over 300 participants attending a mixture of social and educational workshops, at low or no cost to participants throughout the year.

In 2023/24, a new project officer, Phoebe Dillon, and Steering Committee have driven renewed engagement in the YDN, reaching a broad audience across a range of technical topics and social events.

Feedback has been positive from attendees which has been reflected in the growth of attendees. The average number of attendances have doubled from the previous year with more farmers bringing their young staffing teams along and 'more experienced' farmers with little previous engagement with Dairy Australia and Murray Dairy now coming to Young Dairy Network events.

Workshops/events conducted over the past 12 months include:

- Trivia Nights – Kyabram, Numurkah x 2 and Echuca
- Christmas in July – Echuca
- Social evening – Kyabram and Corryong
- Christmas Party – Tallangatta, Gunbower, Numurkah, Kyabram and Rochester,
- Soils 101 – Come and get dirty! – Tongala
- Downer Cow First Aid – Echuca and Numurkah
- Mastitis 101 – Tallangatta
- Business 101 and Dealing with Curveballs – Echuca
- Rearing and Werning Calves Basics – Kyabram
- ABV, Understanding Genetics and Shed Tour – Tongala
- Mastitis Basics and Management – Echuca
- Personal Resilience: FUTURE proofing your career with Nollaig Heffernan – Moama.

Dairy Business Network (DBN) and Discussion Groups (DG)



Murray Dairy provides support to 12 groups across the region receive through 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)
\$1,000 funding	\$4,000 funding
Numurkah DG	Goulburn DBN
Saputo Ladies DG (previously Murray Goulburn Ladies)	North East Valleys DBN
Women in Dairy (WID) – North East	Milawa, Ovens, King DBN (Wangaratta)
Deniliquin (Long Neck) DG	Corryong DBN
	West DBN
	Central DBN
	Rochester DBN
	Kyabram DBN

Dairy Business Network Groups (DBN) are 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, Alpine Valleys Dairy Tour).

Murray Dairy looks to fund and encourage new active, engaged groups where there is demand as well as support successful long-term groups continue to deliver value to their members.

Major event – Dairy Australia, Annual General Meeting (AGM)



The Murray Dairy region was abuzz as it hosted the Dairy Australia AGM in November 2023 in Moama. The event brought together the Dairy Australia board, senior management, industry leaders, and a strong local dairy farmer presence.

The meeting featured the election of two new directors, Kären Moroney from North East Victoria and Paul Bennett from Tasmania, while Paul Roderick and Paul van Heerwaarden were re-elected. Retiring directors Rosanne Healy and Tania Luckin were honored for their contributions, and James Mann was re-appointed as Chair for a fourth year.

After the AGM, a farmer forum led by Murray Dairy Executive Officer Amy Fay highlighted the evolution of feedbase systems in the region, shaped by droughts and other extreme events, water policy, and volatile commodity markets. Current research and future plans to support both pasture-based and intensive systems were discussed. A farmer panel, moderated by Bec Wyper, featured dairy farmers Dustin Kemp, Jacob Gardiner, and Deanne Hore, who shared insights into their farming systems.

The evening dinner at Moama RSL included presentations from the Young Dairy Network (YDN). Murray Dairy Chair Rachael Napier introduced young speakers, including Andrew Rushton and Ebony Mull, who shared their experiences from a recent USA tour. The event celebrated the future of the dairy industry, with Allan Cameron, CEO of the Gardiner Foundation, awarding certificates to 20 young dairy farmers who had completed a 12-month development program, recognising their potential as the industry's next generation of leaders.

Collaboration and partnerships

Supporting the Next Generation of Researchers and Service Providers

Murray Dairy regularly hosts student internships and supports PhD students through funding and supervision to ensure that capacity and capability is built directly in the region, and the next generation of service providers and researchers have a strong connection with the Murray dairy industry.

Our students for 2023/24 included:

PhD Students:

David Palla – (Murray Dairy is co-sponsoring and Yvette Williams is industry consultant to the project)

Project title:

Conserved forage use for sustainable dairy production (University of Melbourne).

The project will be using the Murray Dairy Fodder for the Future database to model the implications of feeding conserved forage impact on dairy production in Murray Dairy region. Further, complementary forage quality and in vitro fermentation analysis will be performed to further understand the agronomy management effect on forage hay quality and rumen fermentation. This project is funded by Agrifutures and Murray Dairy.

Internships:

Hunter Xie – Hunter completed a four-month vocational internship with Murray Dairy from August–November 2023 as a part of his undergraduate studies at University of Melbourne at Dookie. He spent some time analysing data for Yvette Williams and attended a Nutrition Fundamentals course, along with seeing what the rest of the Murray Dairy team do.

Shanky Sungroya – Shanky completed a six-week professional placement with Murray Dairy in January–February 2024. Originally from India, with a background in agronomy, Shanky was completing his Masters in Agricultural Science with the University of Melbourne. He was specialising in Extension and Innovation particularly around crop monitoring, soil management, dairy and agribusiness.



David Palla – PhD Student



L-R – Daryl Poole, Qinda Xie (Hunter) and Bradley Younger



Shanky Sungroya – Intern

Governance and strategy

In 2023/24, Murray Dairy implemented a pilot project with Dairy Australia, part of which reviewed the role of CEO/Regional Manager for Murray Dairy following the departure of long-term holder of the position Jenny Wilson in October 2023.

Jenny Wilson contributed extensive skills and experience to the role since 2015. The CEO/Regional Manager role was split into two positions, Executive Officer (EO) and Regional Manager (RM), which were taken up on secondment by long-term Murray Dairy staff members Amy Fay and Lachlan Barnes respectively. As part of this process, the EO role is focused on Board matters, governance and strategy.

Key areas of focus for the Board in 2023/24 has been continued review and evaluation of this pilot model, including the split role and other proposed changes around governance and funding structures. The Board supported the development of a Murray Darling Basin Regional Strategy, which updates the previous strategy Murray Region Future Focus report developed by Murray Dairy in 2019. The Board have also worked to update Murray Dairy's Strategic Plan. An interim Strategic Plan will be released for 2024/25 in order to align regional strategic planning processes with Dairy Australia's five-year Strategic Plan update. This will ensure efficient coordination and collaboration.

The Board continues to represent Murray region farmers and the future of our industry by working closely with stakeholders including Dairy Australia and other funders to support the development of research, development and extension that is targeted to the challenges and opportunities specific to the Murray region.

Glossary

AGM	Annual General Meeting
AgVic	Agriculture Victoria
BCG	Birchip Cropping Crop
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
C4GS	Committee for Greater Shepparton
CaLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DBN	Dairy Business Network
DG	Discussion Group
EO	Executive Officer
EOI	Expression of Interest
ESKi	Employment Starter Kit Initiative
FEL	Farm Engagement Lead
FPFP	Feeding Pastures for Profit
FRRR	Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
GOTAFE	Goulburn Ovens Institute of Technical and Further Education
MMM	Milking Mastitis Management
IFN	Irrigation Farmers Network
NECMA	North East Catchment Management Authority
NSW	New South Wales
OFOP	Our Farm, Our Plan
PMR	Partial Mixed Ration
RDP	Regional Development Program
RM	Regional Manager
SARA	Sub Acute Ruminal Acidosis
TMR	Total Mixed Ration
YDN	Young Dairy Network
WID	Women in Dairy



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Disclaimer

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Acknowledgement

Dairy Australia acknowledges the funding from levy payers and contribution by Commonwealth Government.

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ISSN 2202-7647 (online) ISSN 1448-9302 (print)