

WestVic Dairy News

January 2025

DairyFeedbase research helps farmers to keep cows cool

By Debbie Twiss
Extension Advisor – Animal Health
and Performance

Exposure to heat stress can reduce milk production, fertility and result in deaths in the herd.

Dairy heat stress risk can be predicted from the Temperature Humidity Index (THI). The more humid the day, the lower the air temperature at which cows will be at risk of heat stress. A THI of 72 may occur when air temperature is 27°C with relative humidity of 25 per cent, or it can occur when air temperature is just 24°C with a relative humidity of 65 per cent. Exposing cows to THI of 72 can reduce fertility and calf viability. Milk production can be reduced at THI 78, and at THI 82 deaths may occur in the herd.

When the ambient temperature is above 25°C, cows redirect energy from milking production to panting, moving to shade and sweating to maintain their core body temperature between 38.6°C to 39.3°C. Hot conditions also reduce forage quality. Research by DairyFeedbase, a joint venture between Dairy Australia, Gardiner Dairy Foundation and Agriculture Victoria, observed that the fibre concentration (as measured by neutral detergent fibre or NDF) of forage plants increases by 0.2 per cent for every degree increase in temperature above 25°C. High fibre concentration and low forage digestibility limits a cow's total energy intake, in the same way that humans could consume 550 calories in a 100 gram block of chocolate but would need to eat 3.2 kilograms of lettuce to achieve the same energy intake.

Access to water and shade are critical for management of heat stress on fertility and milk production.

Shade can reduce exposure to radiant heat by 50 per cent. Sprinklers and fans are useful aids to increase evaporative cooling. Dairy Feedbase investigated the strategic use of forages and supplements to help farmers support milk production and feed intake in the face of heat events.

Feeding low fibre forages for milking cows

The Dairy Feedbase research team found lower fibre forages, such as chicory, were highly effective in minimising body temperature accumulation during a heat event, enabling cows to better maintain milk production during times of heat stress. When chicory was fed to cows during heat stress, they produced 4.7 kilograms more milk than cows fed pasture silage while consuming the same amount of total feed.

Betaine to lower body temperature

Betaine, a low cost naturally occurring supplement derived from sugar beet, was seen to reduce the rise in cow body temperature during heat events. Even small rises in body temperature can have negative impacts on immunity, feed intake and milk yield.

The research observed that cows at Ellinbank fed with betaine, through February to March, had a six per cent lift in milk production. This data estimated at \$30/cow benefit to feeding betaine through a 212-day heat stress period. Successful integration of betaine into a dairy ration requires planning with a nutritionist as metabolic adaption to betaine can take four weeks.

Fat supplementation for energy

When fat is digested in the rumen, it produces less heat than other dietary components, particularly fibre. This makes fat a strategy to increase the energy density of the diet without raising the total heat load of the ration. The limit to this strategy is that rumen microbes that do not function well with dietary rations containing more than five per cent fat. The Dairy Feedbase research found that canola oil could support milk production in short intermittent heat bursts but not when heat periods are long and intense. In longer heat periods canola may result in depressed feed intake due to raised body temperatures.

Find out more

Feeding strategy fact sheets and more information to mitigate heat stress can be found at dairyaustralia.com.au/issues-and-emergencies/hot-conditions-droughts

From fundamentals to analysis: a farmer's experience

By Sheeraz Ahmad
Extension Coordinator,
Farm Business Management



Image: Alex, Nelson and Neil.

Profitable and productive dairy farms of course rely on good business management.

This is why providing farmers with business management resources and the support to use them is a priority of WestVic Dairy's strategic plan. Alexandra (Alex) Freyer, who farms at Gorae West near Portland, recently took part in Dairy Australia's *Farm Business Fundamentals* and *Dairy Farm Business Analysis* workshops. Her journey from fundamentals to analysis has had a positive impact on her family's farm operations.

Alex and her partner Neil McLean bring dedication and expertise to the farm. They manage a herd of 241 cows milked through a 20-aside swing-over system. The operation spans 105 hectares of owned land, supplemented by leased acreage to support its activities. Neil, with over 12 years of share-farming experience, took ownership of the farm two years ago. With their nearly two-year-old son, Nelson, the family works together to ensure the farm's success.

Financial fundamentals

Alex's motivation to learn more about financial management stemmed from her recent completion of a Certificate IV in bookkeeping and accounting. Alex had implemented financial management tools into the business, and said *Farm Business Fundamentals* allowed her to further tailor her financial management to dairy operations.

"The workshop provided industry-specific insights and tools that I've already implemented in our business, like creating detailed accounts and sub-accounts tailored to dairy operations," said Alex.

"The workshop helped me start piecing together the numbers to understand where our business stands and the direction we're heading."

Diving deeper into analysis

The *Dairy Farm Business Analysis* workshop took Alex's understanding of farm performance to the next level.

"It was a great experience, and I came away with a much better understanding of the dairy business," she reflects.

During the workshop, time was spent understanding DairyBase, a free tool from Dairy Australia that helps farmers measure and compare farm business performance over time.

Although Alex is still building confidence in recording annual data, she is optimistic.

"I now feel much more confident navigating DairyBase and (the) more years we use DairyBase the better we'll understand it."

A key takeaway for Alex was focusing on her farm's unique goals rather than comparing with others.

"Every farm is different. It's about identifying where you want to improve and where your farm is heading."

A worthwhile investment of time

One of Alex's highlights was connecting with other farmers during the workshops.

"It was great to see what others are doing and to connect within the industry," said Alex.

With newfound confidence and practical strategies, Alex says she is better equipped to manage the farm and achieve her and Neil's goals.

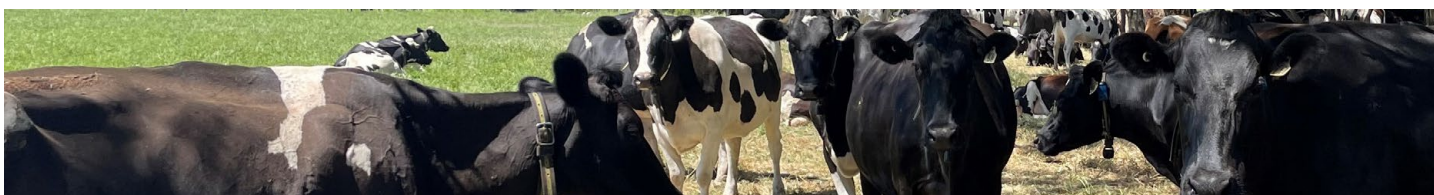
"The courses are an investment in yourself and your farm's future."

Alex provided much appreciated constructive feedback on the running of the workshops which WestVic Dairy will incorporate into future sessions to improve the value for farmers.

We look forward to continuing to support Alex and her family with their farm business and can't wait to see what the future holds.

Find out more

If you're interested in enhancing your farm business skills, explore WestVic Dairy's upcoming workshops. *Farm Business Fundamentals* is scheduled for March 2025, followed by *Dairy Farm Business Analysis* in May 2025 in Warrnambool. For more information contact **Sheeraz Ahmad**
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People update

By Matt Wood

Extension Advisor – Workforce

It's important to keep up to date with visa information and employment law so that you comply with your legal obligations.

We all know that things change frequently and quickly in the workforce area, and it can be difficult to keep up to date. Below are some of the most recent changes that affect employers, enjoy!

Sponsorship visas

In December last year, the Federal Government changed the structure for sponsoring overseas staff. The new Skills in Demand (SID) visa replaced the Temporary Skills Shortage visa (482 and 494) which were utilised by most longer-term overseas employees. The Government made the change with the aim of streamlining skilled migration pathways.

Whilst there are some changes regarding when a SID visa holder is eligible to apply for permanent residency, overall, there is little change. The 'Dairy Cattle Farmer' position remains on the Core Skills Occupation List and is accessible through the Core Skills Pathway. Farmers that are a Standard Business Sponsor (SBS) would use this route to employ more experienced staff – FLH7 and FLH8.

At the time of writing, there have been no changes to the Dairy Industry Labour Agreement (DILA) or Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA). These two agreements offer some significant concessions to both farmers and employees.

The DILA and DAMA are very similar, though the DILA is simpler to acquire and seen by most as the preferred method of employing any overseas employees. Farmers that are already a SBS can also apply for a DILA and benefit from the concessions it allows – most significantly around level of experience and minimum salary required.

Introductory pay rates

From 1 April 2025, Farm and Livestock Hand - Level 1 (FLH1) in the Pastoral Award can only apply for six months. Previously, employees with no dairy farming experience remained as FLH1 for 12 months before moving to the FLH3 classification. Inexperienced employees will now be classified as FLH1 for six months, then go to FLH2 for a further six months, before moving to FLH3 after a total of 12 months experience.

Q fever

Q fever, is becoming more of a focus for WorkSafe. It can be caught from farm animals, meaning those of us working with cattle are at risk of being exposed to the disease. If you employ people, you are responsible for managing this risk – as with any other threat.

The People in Dairy (PiD) website has been updated with a new Q fever policy template. Vaccines are available for Q fever, and it would be diligent of farmers to offer these to their employees. Vaccines cannot be mandated, and even if an employee refuses a vaccine, that does not reduce the responsibility of the business owner. However, having a policy in place with documented evidence could assist the farmer in the event of a claim.

Right to disconnect

As of August last year, employees of non-small businesses (15 employees and over) have the right to refuse to monitor, read or respond to contact (or attempted contact) outside their working hours, unless doing so is unreasonable. The law will apply to all businesses from 26 August 2025. The Pastoral Award has been varied to include the right to disconnect in clause 6A.

Further reading on this topic can be found on the thepeopleindairy.org.au.

As always, good communication and consultation with employees is the key to avoiding any issues.

Underpayment laws

From 1 January 2025, employers who intentionally underpay employees may now be found guilty of a criminal offence.

The Fair Work Ombudsman now has the power to investigate criminal underpayment and, if necessary, refer matters for criminal prosecution. Employers who are convicted may face fines, imprisonment or both.

Small business employers (fewer than 15 employees) must comply with a voluntary code but should be assured that honest efforts to pay the right wages and other entitlements to their employees can protect them.

Most farmers do right by their employees, however sometimes things such as missing pay rate changes or incorrect overtime payments happen. Therefore, all farm businesses, especially the larger ones, should ensure they are paying at least the minimum rates laid out in the Pastoral Award 2020.

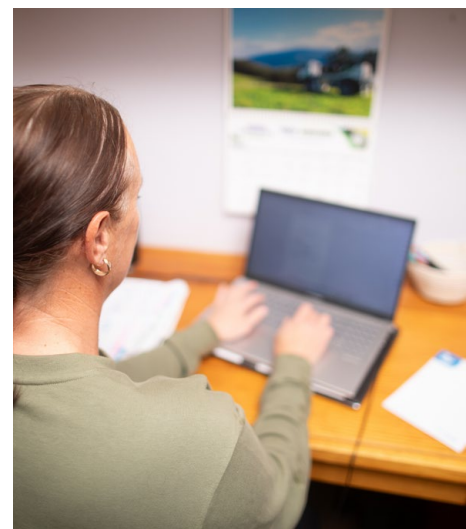
If you would like more information on any of the above, the PiD website is a great resource for all things 'people'. Alternatively, please feel free to contact me on the details below.

Find out more

- thepeopleindairy.org.au
- worksafe.vic.gov.au
- fairwork.vic.gov.au

Or contact Matt Wood

Email matthew@westvicdairy.com.au
Call 0417 669 597



Grounds for Growth – a soil health and pasture biodiversity event

By Libby Swayn, Extension Team Lead



Image: Mixed species.

In a first for the Australian dairy industry, Dairy Australia is hosting an event focusing on soil and pasture biodiversity – Grounds for Growth 2025.

The event will take place in Warrnambool on 4–6 March this year.

The three-day event will focus on the benefits, challenges and practical dairy farmer experiences of adopting soil and pasture systems to improve soil health and function.

The event has been driven by farmers, with a farmer Think Tank in the initial planning stage, followed by the establishment of a farmer advisory group to guide the program development. The group has provided advice on the themes of the forum and suggested farmer and expert speakers.

The forum aims to provide information that farmers can take away to better equip them to make informed decisions about the soil and pasture systems that are right for their individual farming needs.

The first day of the event will be site visits to farms that have adopted practices to better improve their soil health. Included in this will be Simon Scott's farm at Barongarook. Over the past eight years Simon has moved from a high input conventional farm to now being a fully certified organic farm.

The farm is converting to multi-species of annual summer crops and perennial pastures. Simon has been a participant in the Dairy Farm Monitor Project for more than 12 years and has high quality economic data for his business.



The second and third day of the event will be a forum held in the Matilda Room at the Warrnambool Racecourse.

Themes of the event include:

- Productivity, profitability and quality considerations
- Improving soil organic matter, soil health and function
- Transitioning to a multispecies pasture – opportunities and challenges
- Incremental strategies to achieve better soil health – steps in the right direction
- Designing a multispecies pasture – mixes and proportions
- On farm practices to manage multispecies pastures and improve soil health.

The speakers will include local and international farmers, experts and scientists who will share their knowledge and experiences.

Speakers include:

- Dr John Finn (Teagasc, Ireland)
- Professor Danny Donaghy (Massey University NZ)
- Associate Professor Lucy Burkitt (Massey University NZ)
- Dr James Hills (Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture)
- Professor Lyn Abbot (University of WA)
- Dr Pauline Mele (Biome Services)
- Cam Nicholson (Nicon Rural Services)
- Gillian O'Sullivan (Irish Farmer)
- James Mann, Kate Mirams and Peter Neave, Simon Scott, Bradley Collins, Mark Lambert, Adam Forbes, Karringjeet Singh–Mahil (Australian dairy farmers).

The forum is not only for those that have just started thinking about soil health or testing some multispecies pastures, but also for those that have extensive experience. It will provide an opportunity to network with likeminded people and to learn from others.

Find out more

For more information on the program and presenters, and to register online, visit dairyaustralia.com.au/groundsforgrowth or scan the QR code.



The Cook family farm

By Sam Andrews, Farm Engagement Lead



Image: Ashley, Allison and David

When you hear the phrase “dairy farming is in the blood”, you don’t need to look any further than the Cook family.

David is a fifth-generation dairy farmer and his wife, Allison, is a fourth-generation dairy farmer. Together with their young adult sons, Ashley and Jesse, they farm the original Cook family farm at Laang.

The original farm, “Laurel-Dale”, was native bushland and was purchased in 1877 by David’s great, great grandfather, Robert Bennett. The farm started with 66 hectares and has now expanded to 276 hectares of adjoining properties, with a total of 340 cows being milked.

Allison grew up on a dairy farm just five kilometres away from the Cook family. Allison enjoys the flexibility that farming gives her. She and David set their own schedules so they can attend their sons’ sporting events. Allison does all the book work for the farm, rearing calves and the biggest job of all over the years – keeping the boys in line! Allison believes one of the greatest things about working together as a family is the ability to set goals and achieve goals together as they continue to build on the progression of their herd and the farm business.

Allison is particularly fond of the jerseys as, not being very tall, they are a lot easier for her to handle. Allison says while they are temperamental little creatures, they are well worth it when they are thriving.

David looks back on the past with deep respect for the work that those before him have done to develop the land.

Some of the biggest changes he has seen for the better include automation, improvements in herd and pasture genetics and improvements in machinery.

David enjoys the ever-changing seasons, and this past season has definitely been a different one. In terms of the farm he believes that the family working together has allowed the business and farm to progress. He hopes that the farm can continue to evolve and be sustainable into the future.

Ashley, who is 24 years old, enjoyed growing up on the farm with his younger brother Jesse.

Jesse will be helping work around the farm for most of this year, before moving up north later this year to continue pursuing his career in engineering. Ashley is passionate about working with his family towards shared goals for the farm business.

When it comes to dairy farming, Ashley enjoys that each day brings a new challenge and there is always something different to do and new ways in which to solve any issues. As the sixth generation of dairy farmer on the farm, Ashley would like to look at ways in which new technologies can make the farm more efficient and productive.

The farm has had many changes over the years, from hand milking in the wooden two head bail walk through dairy, to a four aside herring bone, then a 14 aside herring bone, to the 50-unit rotary in use today.

The generations of Bennetts and Cooks on “Laurel-Dale” have gone from using horses in earlier generations, to now using the horsepower of modern machinery.

While there has been a lot of change, one thing that has remained constant is the passion and dedication of the Cook family farmers. Always interested in the latest farming research and insights, the Cooks keep themselves informed and tap into WestVic Dairy resources as needed.

Young Dairy Network



Image: Young Dairy Network Field Day at the Kermond's family farm in Nullawarre.

Getting into farm business ownership, a Young Dairy Network Field Day

By Matt Wood

Extension Advisor - Workforce

Young Dairy Network (YDN) Leaders Sam Kermond and Zoe Greenslade took centre stage at our YDN Field Day in November 2024.

Held on the Kermond's family farm at Nullawarre, the topic was getting into farm business ownership. Recent increases in land values have made the hopes and aspirations of young farmers to own land more difficult. However, you don't need to own a farm to run a successful dairy business as management is always a possibility. Additionally, share farming and shared equity arrangements are great ways for people to get into ownership or part ownership of their own business, then grow their assets and equity.

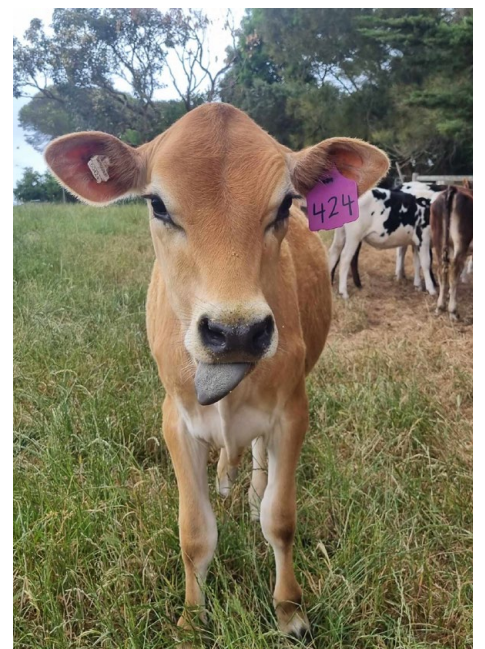


Using Sam's family situation as an example, Extension Advisor Matt Wood talked through how shared equity arrangements can work in succession planning or enabling employees to have 'skin in the game' and grow wealth.

A farm walk then gave attendees the chance to see and hear how Sam, along with parents Craig and Cheryl, run their business that milks 540 Jersey cows – with plans to grow numbers to 600. Farm infrastructure includes a 30-a-side double up dairy, feedpad, centre pivot irrigators and cow shelter.

The afternoon session focused on share farming, with Zoe talking through her and partner Mark's experience. They now milk 280 cows at Peterborough on a 50:50 agreement, after moving through farm management and lower order share farming.

Holding these events on-farm and hearing others' stories brings everything to life. A huge thank you to Sam, Craig, Cheryl and Gemma for hosting the day and to Zoe and Mark for sharing their journey.



Dairy Farmers Ball a night of community and charity

By Aylish Tobin-Salzman -
Communications Coordinator

Dairy farmers from across Victoria's south-west have gathered at the Warrnambool Golf Club to celebrate the industry.

The annual Dairy Farmers' Ball was held on Saturday 30 November and dairy farmer Renee Mugavin won the raffle prize – a trip to the Netherlands, courtesy of sponsor Lely.



Image: Renee Mugavin

This will see Renee fly to Amsterdam in 2025 to spend a week attending farm visits, plus she will receive a behind-the-scenes tour of the Lely Headquarters.

Renee was thrilled when she heard her name called out of the raffle draw.

"I did not think I would win at all! I thought I'd get three raffle tickets to support a good charity, and was so excited when my name was called," Renee said.

"I'm going to see things I've never seen before on the other side of the world. On the farm where I work, we don't have robots – so I can't wait to see the Lely machines. I also can't wait to see how things are done in the Netherlands and the farming systems they have there."

Renee works on a dairy farm in Purnim and has been there for nearly six years.

"I made the decision to make dairy farming my career because I'm passionate about it and it's the best thing I've ever done. It's so much fun and I just love it," said Renee.

Charity partner

This year, the Dairy Farmers' Ball raised \$6,500 for the Neil Porter Legacy Foundation. The foundation champions career education in South-west Victoria, and highlights the significance of all careers, including dairy farming.

Neil Porter Legacy Foundation representative, Matt Porter, said he was grateful for the support of WestVic Dairy and its Young Dairy Network leadership team.

"The Foundation relies on generous community support to continue its work and we're so grateful for the donation from this event," Matt said.

"We are even more grateful for the opportunity to showcase the important work the Neil Porter Legacy Foundation does to encourage students to pursue their interests and industry of choice."

The Dairy Farmers' Ball is an event initiated by the WestVic Dairy Young Dairy Network leadership team. The Young Dairy Network's purpose is to connect, develop and support young people to excel and prosper in their dairy careers through engaging events and programs.



Being the best with a diverse workforce

A culturally diverse workforce can deliver many benefits to a dairy farm business. We're wanting to work with farmers looking to improve how they attract, lead and develop a diverse team.

Dairy Australia has partnered with the Gardiner Foundation to develop a one-to-one service supporting farmers who employ people from overseas.

For more information contact Matthew Wood, WestVic Dairy Extension Advisor at matthew@westvicdairy.com.au or register your interest via the QR code.



Delivering *for* Dairy

WestVic Dairy Focus Farm report

Bostocks Creek

Date	13/01/2025
Milking area	212 ha

Production

Cow numbers	270
Milk solids/cow/day	1.76kg
Litres/cow/day	22L
Fat	4.56%
Protein	4.42%

Grazing and supplementary feeding (cow/day)

Wheat mix costing 40c/kg DM (\$360/t)	5.0kg
Profeed costing 81c/kg DM (\$703/t)	2.0kg
Almond hulls 24c/kg DM (\$200/t)	5.0kg
Silage 26c/kg DM	6.0kg
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)

Jan Milk Price (\$/kgMS)	\$8.48
Income/cow	\$14.93
Supplementary feed cost/cow	\$5.81
IOSFC/cow	\$9.11
IOSFC/ha	\$11.60

Notes:

- Feeding seven bales of silage to the herd plus almond hulls and summer crop (mainly millet).
- Seven ha of crop is left to graze. Having to select paddocks with good water supply to help cope with the hot weather. Minimal pasture is available.
- Will start drying off cows in the next few weeks for April calving.
- Weighed calves in early December and the lighter calves have been grazing crop since.
- All calves have continued with grain and silage, considering applying effluent on summer crop for regrowth.

*Rotating around summer crops and sacrifice paddock at night.



Image: Focus Farm meeting at Bostocks Creek on 16 January 2025

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

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