

DairySA Project Update

03

EFFLUENT – PROFIT OR LOSS

‘Resource not waste – the new dairy shed effluent paradigm’ is a program funded by the National Landcare Program that aims to provide practical assistance to dairy farmers, enabling them to implement best management practice for dairy shed effluent, taking them beyond compliance with current EPA legislation.

Historically the design of dairy shed effluent systems has been about how effluent can be captured and stored. Frequently designs have resulted in the need to spread stored effluent during the winter, when plant uptake is poor or when soils are waterlogged and the danger of run-off is at its greatest. The new approach to designing dairy shed effluent storage and management systems is to firstly address the question “How is the effluent going to be spread?”.

“Dairy shed effluent contains valuable nutrients, but if spread on paddocks at the wrong time of year these nutrients can leach into water resources and become potent pollutants,” explained Dairying for Tomorrow State Natural Resource Management Coordinator, Monique Aucote.

“The aim of this new project is to build on the experience gained in the South East and to develop effluent management guidelines for the Mount Lofty Ranges, Northern and River Murray dairy regions.”

The guidelines will be developed with a consultative committee from each region and will be designed to meet specific issues faced by the three regions.

However, the project goes beyond the development of the guidelines. It also provides producers with valuable free consultancy from leading advisors in the design of dairy shed effluent systems and the implementation of best management practice.

The consultancy process, which is especially important to producers who wish to upgrade their system, addresses all aspects of the effluent management system.

“To develop a system that results in effluent being used as a source of fertiliser, rather than waste, it is necessary to look at the whole business.

“The aim is to end up with a system in which effluent is only spread when pasture is actively growing during the spring and summer period, or spread at a time when it can be used in a cropping programme,” explained Trevor Clark, Rural Solutions SA, who has worked on much of the research that will underpin the best management guidelines.

“To achieve that we need to look at how much effluent is entering the store, not just from the cows but also from washings and rain water, and how many hectares the effluent can be spread across.

“We are looking at ways of minimising clean water entering the effluent store and ways to maximise the fertiliser benefits from the nutrients in the effluent.

Over 70% of SE dairy farmers have received technical advice on their effluent systems. Some producers have had to make changes to management, such as increasing the area over which effluent is spread. Others have had to make capital investments of up to \$100 per cow, but those investments can facilitate improved use of nutrients, reducing fertiliser costs and providing a return on investment.

“We would expect this spread of zero to \$100/cow investment and the benefits will be similar in other regions,” said Trevor Clark.

‘Resource not waste’ is part of Dairy Australia’s program Dairying for Tomorrow and coordinated in SA by DairySA, the South Australian Dairyfarmers’ Association (SADA), the EPA and PIRSA.

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BUS TRIP MOVING TOWARDS BECOMING “EMPLOYERS OF CHOICE”

In December, a bus trip took both farmers and prospective dairy industry participants from Mt Compass to the Adelaide Zoo, to gain an insight into attracting, training and retaining employees within the industry.

The group was addressed by Peter Both (Project Manager, Futures Connect, Department of Education and Children’s Services), Ruth Hall (Education Unit Manager, Adelaide Zoo) and Jane Bartlett (Education Project Officer, Rural Skills Australia/SAFF).

Peter Both spoke to the group about the legal, professional and personal requirements for having work experience students, work placement students and first time employees. Job and Person Specifications, selection and induction processes were covered by Ruth Hall. Jane Bartlett spoke about the need for more communication between industries and educators, as well as the benefits of defined career paths. In her role, Jane aims to promote the career opportunities within agriculture.

Group members were impressed by the zoo’s professional approach and focus on creating a long term learning environment, with a culture of individual development leading to better business development. One of the participants summed up the day by saying that it was a great learning experience, especially for those willing to look a little outside the square.

The bus trip was organised as part of the Dairy Careers Project and was supported by DairySA, Dairy Farmers, National Foods and Warrnambool Cheese and Butter.

For more information on the Dairy Careers Project, please contact Kym Mathew on (08) 8556 1192.

FOCUS ON FORAGE – PHASE 2 IS ABOUT TO START!

Dairy farmers around SA have been patrolling paddocks over the last 12 months, as part of the DairySA Focus on Forage Project. The majority of farmers involved have found the project to be very useful and want to continue for another year. So DairySA has increased its support and Phase 2 will start soon.

Geoff Williams from Meningie initially went along to a Focus on Forage meeting to support his son. However Geoff soon discovered that there was plenty more to learn and that new information was available in the area of forage management. Geoff said he found the program really worthwhile in sharpening his focus and providing the support to follow up on practices which he knew he should be implementing.

Phase 2 will give dairy farmers and service providers who have not yet been involved in the project the opportunity to join in, while continuing to support the regional Focus on Forage groups which have been established.

There will be a few changes with the start of this next phase. Common session plans will be set for the groups, focussing on skill development. However there will be some more flexibility in terms of group numbers and groups will have the ability to move around farms, rather than focussing on one host farm.

The Focus on Forage project aims to help farmers to develop a range of forage management skills, including: forage planning, grazing management, fertiliser management, forage quality and conservation, milker rations and soil management.

The Phase 2 Focus on Forage groups will also give farmers an opportunity to hear about the progress and findings of the 30:30 and Future Dairy projects, which will be applying new and different forage practices on commercial farms.

To find out more about sharpening your focus on forage, please contact Kirstie Murphy on (08) 8536 3958.

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