

DairySA Project Update

02

SMOOTHING OUT THE PEAKS AND TROUGHS

Being part of the Focus on Forage program has helped Birdwood based dairy farmers Craig and Tamara Zilm develop forage production systems that should plug the late summer / autumn feed gap and will hopefully improve farm productivity.

Since April 2005, Craig and Tamara Zilm and Craig's parents Kevin and Lorraine have worked with consultant Peter de Garis, Cattle Production Consultants, as part of the Focus on Forage project. They started by producing a feed budget that highlighted the need to produce more forage in the late summer – early autumn period. The budget also confirmed the importance of gaining maximum value from their irrigation allocation.

The 200 hectare property supports a milking and dry herd of 240 predominantly Holstein cows; all young stock are agisted. 130 hectares is allocated to the milking herd, 40 hectares to the dry cows and the remainder is under remnant vegetation. Of the dairy pasture, 40 hectares is irrigated by solid-set sprinklers or travelling irrigators, whilst 30 hectares is irrigated by travelling irrigators only between March and the opening rains.

Until the start of the Focus on Forage project, the majority of the forage was produced from ryegrass/white clover pastures. The combination of heat and slightly saline irrigation water has resulted in reduced productivity from these pastures, especially from late spring to early autumn. In the past this feed gap has been filled by purchased hay, as the Zilms are opportunistic in their forage conservation.

Four changes in the forage production program have been introduced in 2005. Several paddocks under the solid set irrigation, which applies 16.5mm per irrigation, have been sown to a mixture of Advance™ fescue and several white clover varieties, with the aim of developing a more heat and salt tolerant pasture. Other members of the Focus on Forage group have tested a range of pastures for greater salt tolerance and found fescue, cocksfoot and lucerne perform well in the Birdwood area.

A further 7 hectares of irrigated land have been sown to a mixture of millet and forage brassica, part of which was undersown with ryegrass. Without ryegrass, the millet was sown at 20kg/ha and the forage brassica at 3kg/ha. With the ryegrass, seeding rates were reduced to millet 10kg/ha and forage brassica 0.75kg/ha. Craig explained that the aim of this mix was to provide fresh pasture in the late summer period and to maximise pasture production per unit of irrigation.

The very late break resulted in the focus group discussing their forage production options in that situation and resulted in two other changes for the Zilms. They successfully produced some early grazing by sowing Winter Star ryegrass (35kg/ha) and oats (65kg/ha), reducing their reliance on purchased forage. Part of the area was irrigated, weeds were allowed to germinate and then killed and then the area was direct seeded; whilst part was dry seeded and given a starter irrigation. The dry seeding worked exceptionally well, especially in paddocks with a low weed burden.

Craig has experience with round bale silage but this year tried his first pit silage, produced from 6 hectares of Marloo oats (100kg/ha plus 120kg/ha of DAP plus top dressed urea) cut as whole crop cereal silage. Half was cut, wilted and precision chopped and ensiled in the pit at about 30-40% dry matter. The remaining 2.8 hectares produced 69 round bales of hay.

Craig is pleased with the pit silage; he is still waiting for the feed analysis but when cored in December it smelt good, which pleased him as they had found it hard to roll the silage. In future Craig thinks he will grow triticale rather than oats, as triticale suffers less than oats from a drop in energy levels at mid-dough, the recommended cutting time. He will also try to directly cut the cereal silage as wilting left it a little too dry.

Involvement in the Focus on Forage project has helped give Craig and Tamara the confidence to try new pastures and techniques such as greater nitrogen inputs to improve pasture regrowth.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON DAIRYSA CONTACT: VERITY INGHAM, EXECUTIVE OFFICER
T: 08 8766 0127, F: 08 8766 0005, DAIRYSA@BIRDPOND.COM PO BOX 235 LUCINDALE, SA 5272

DAIRY AUSTRALIA
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SA Dairy Network Extension Roundup



DIARY INNOVATION DAY

Dairy Innovation Day at Murray Bridge is getting close! Thursday 9th March, Murray Bridge Race Track, 10am

Key Topics: Climate change and dairy farm technology

Dairy Farm Fertiliser courses coming up in March for the Fleurieu Peninsula & Mt Gambier

For more information and to register, contact Kirstie Murphy on (08) 8536 3958.

MAKING THE DAIRY FARM A SAFE WORKPLACE

Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) workshops were held on farms in the Fleurieu and South East regions in 2005. Some of the key messages from SafeWork SA are as follows.

The **Hierarchy of Control Measures** for OH&S hazards, roughly in order of preference, is:

- Eliminate the hazard – by removing the risk or changing work practices
- Substitute the hazard – eg. replacing equipment or substances with lower risk equipment or substances
- Engineering measures – eg. by covering moving parts with a guard
- Isolate the hazard – separating people from the hazard
- Administrative controls – eg. signs, training, policies, procedures
- Personal protective equipment

The control measures which are higher up in the hierarchy are more “foolproof” than the measures lower down in the hierarchy.

Colin Stephan from SafeWork SA emphasises the importance of training (running through key risks on the farm and measures to reduce those risks) and documentation of training (eg. employees signing off that they have received training on specified risk areas). Colin reminds employers that, “There’s no such thing as common sense” and it is better to rely on thorough training than assumptions.

Key issues raised at the recent workshops have included: on-farm storage of chemicals; children on farms; the importance of safety guards on machinery (moving parts) at all times; four wheel motorbikes; confined spaces (eg. milk vats and grain silos) and fragile roofing (particularly older, brittle skylights).

The national Dairy Employment Management Committee is soon to produce a Human Resource Management Toolkit, similar to the Dexcel toolkit developed in New Zealand. This toolkit will include OH&S management tools and should be available in May.

Fact sheets and information are currently available from:

- SafeWork SA – www.safework.sa.gov.au (under OHS>Safeguards and Resources>WorkCover Publications>Codes of practice/Safety guidelines/Hazard alerts/Information sheets/Work safety signs)
- WorkSafe Victoria – www.workcover.vic.gov.au (under Publications>General Publications>View Publications>Publications by Industry>Agriculture – this includes the recent and quite comprehensive “Dairy Safety: A Practical Guide” 1.2Mb)
- Dexcel (New Zealand) www.dexcel.co.nz – (under People On-Farm>Human Resource Management>Dexcel HR Toolkit – you will probably need to register your details to access the toolkit, but it is free of charge)

*Please note that legislation in Victoria and New Zealand will be different from South Australian legislation.

You can also contact Steve Dohnt from SafeWork SA on 0427 013 971 and SafeWork SA inspectors can respond to OH&S enquiries.



D a i r y S A
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

SA DAIRY NETWORK IS A SUB COMMITTEE OF DAIRYSA AND OFFERS SUPPORT FOR DAIRY EXTENSION, DISCUSSION GROUPS AND TRAINING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA. SA DAIRY NETWORK IS FUNDED BY DAIRYSA AND PIRSA.

SA DAIRY NETWORK CONTACTS

KIRSTIE MURPHY
SADN EXECUTIVE OFFICER T: (08) 8536 3958, E: KMURPHY@ADAM.COM.AU .

AMY WILLIAMS
SADN COORDINATOR T: (08) 8226 1928, E: WILLIAMS.AMY@SAUGOV.SA.GOV.AU

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