

CHAIR'S REPORT

2019/20 was a year of sharp contrasts, with a number of events which challenged the industry along with important developments which see us on a stronger footing.

In the first half of the season we experienced a continuation of very dry weather conditions in most areas of the country, which culminated in damaging bushfires that impacted dairy regions in East Gippsland, parts of NSW and South Australia.

The industry's response to the bushfires saw our supply chain working together at its best, providing on the ground support to affected farms alongside government agencies. The support between farmers in different parts of the country keen to lend a hand to those in need was also fantastic, along with the assistance provided by local communities.

Conditions improved dramatically in the back end, with consecutive monthly year on year production increases from December to the season's close. National milk production finished the year down only 0.2% on the prior year, at 8.8 billion litres – a tremendous result given the difficult start to the season. Good rainfall also helped soften key input costs and provided the opportunity for farms in many regions to make decent profits.

Strong collaboration was seen again as our industry bodies pulled together to provide effective support to the supply chain during the COVID-19 pandemic, with Dairy Australia playing an active role in coordinating the industry's response. As with the bushfires, our Issues Management Framework was key to keeping key stakeholders from farmers, processors, government and broader industry informed and supported as events unfolded. This included working with government to ensure recognition of dairy's essential service status, developing a range of information resources for farmers and manufacturing businesses to help navigate potential implications for their businesses.

Improved industry collaboration is at the heart of the Australian Dairy Plan and Dairy Australia has played a significant role in the plan's development. We are already locked in behind the implementation of the Dairy Plan's five commitments through our program delivery, in key areas like attracting new people and investment to the industry, building skills, supporting improved business and risk management capabilities and an increased focus on industry marketing.

Dairy Australia has been 'at the table' working towards reform of industry structures. We see the opportunity for greater streamlining of industry services and the strategic alignment of our industry organisations which can benefit dairy as a whole.

There have been exciting developments in our research and innovation activities during the past year and we are looking forward to commercialisation outcomes in the near future that can deliver real benefits on farm.

DairyBio has planted demonstration plots of the world's first F1 Hybrid ryegrass at Hamilton, which are targeting yield improvements of 10-20%. The forage program is now looking at future forages for our changing climate, including rapid genetic improvement of short term and C4 grasses.

Our animal programs continue to make good progress and eight new Australian Breeding Values have been adopted into DataGene's improved genetic evaluation service.

DairyFeedbase programs are already getting traction. Pasture Smarts is readying for a pasture utilisation commercial release which will be game changing. While the First 100 days project promises around \$200 per cow, per lactation, with some simple feed tweaks.

We encourage everyone to read the DairyBio/ DairyFeedbase annual progress report, to see how bioscience and our applied research can deliver the profitability improvements that our industry continues to seek.

Dairy Australia's national network of eight Regional Development Programs remains a source of real strength for our organisation. It keeps a two-way conversation going with local farmer groups across the country and ensures we provide targeted and relevant services. Our regional teams have done a good job continuing to provide services and keep people connected during COVID-19 restrictions.

Our new five year Strategic Plan has been built on the substantial industry engagement that took place as part of the Australian Dairy Plan. It sets out 6 priorities and outcomes that contribute to delivering improved profitability and a more sustainable dairy industry, and a seventh priority that gives focus to organisational drivers of our performance. These priorities are aligned with the key commitments of the Australian Dairy Plan and will guide our delivery of this vital work on behalf of the industry.

The Board is also engaged in identifying opportunities for dairy to support Minister Littleproud's national innovation agenda for agriculture, in particular a cross sector approach to R&D investment.

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held online only due to continued restrictions and we hope you will be able to participate. Graeme Nicoll has announced his retirement from the Board and we thank him for his dedication to both Dairy Australia and GippsDairy over many years.



J. R. Odgers.

Jeff Odgers Chair



James P. Mann.

James Mann Acting
Chair from 25 March 2020
Permanent appointment
on 30 July 2020

