

The Milk Flow

SUMMER EDITION - 2025

Update from the Board

We are pleased to announce Andrew Smith as the new Chair of Dairy NSW.

With extensive experience as both a veterinarian and a dairy farmer, Andrew brings valuable expertise and a focus on sustainable agricultural practices. His previous roles as Board Director and Deputy Chair have prepared him to lead with a strategic vision that supports NSW dairy farmers.

We extend our gratitude to James Neale, who served as Chair for four years, and as an active Board member for six years. His leadership, especially during challenges such as the 2022 floods, demonstrated his commitment to the industry and its resilience. His contributions leave a lasting impact.

We also welcome Donna Salway as Deputy Chair and Michael Cole as a new Board Director. Donna's strategic insights complement Andrew's leadership, and Michael's expertise in sustainability and corporate strategy will help guide Dairy NSW as we tackle emerging challenges and opportunities.

Reflections on Industry Conditions

The Australian dairy industry is navigating both challenges and opportunities. While the 2023/24 season brought strong on-farm profitability, this season has seen a drop in farmgate milk prices, increasing pressure on profit margins. However, this shift has improved the price competitiveness of Australian dairy products, contributing to better export conditions and a recovery in domestic retail sales.

Weather conditions have varied across regions, with some areas enjoying favourable conditions and others, particularly in southern Australia, experiencing dry spells.

This has strained feed inventories and increased fodder costs, presenting challenges for the 2024/25 season.

Globally, lower grain prices and reduced urea costs have provided some relief, but rising demand for supplementary feed and water has added financial strain. Dairy Australia forecasts a slight decline in national milk production to 8.3 billion liters for 2024/25, although improved rainfall could stabilise these projections.

Export markets remain strong, with growing demand from Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Domestically, retail sales of cheese, yogurt, and dairy spreads have increased, while eased grocery inflation has improved consumer access to dairy products.

Strategic Goals for 2025

Dairy NSW is focused on several priorities to support farmers and the wider industry:

- 1 Improving Farm Profitability:** Providing business planning tools, new technologies, and better access to skilled service providers to boost financial resilience.
- 2 Supporting People:** Developing leadership skills, engaging young professionals, and fostering inclusive work environments to secure the future of dairy farming.
- 3 Promoting Sustainability:** Encouraging resource optimisation and climate adaptation to ensure long-term environmental and economic viability.

4 Driving Innovation: Accelerating the adoption of cutting-edge research and technologies to enhance productivity and competitiveness.

5 Building Collaboration: Strengthening partnerships to address regional challenges and amplify the voice of NSW dairy farmers in shaping policies and market strategies.

Completion of the SFIRP Program

We are proud to announce the successful completion of the **Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program (SFIRP) Program 3** in December 2024. This program delivered significant outcomes, including Leadership development, Workforce strengthening, Succession planning, Service excellence, Sustainability tools, and Public awareness.

These achievements highlight the dedication of the SFIRP team and Dairy NSW staff. Their work has strengthened the industry's resilience and capacity for innovation. For a detailed overview of the program's outputs, please refer to the article further on.

As we look to 2025, Dairy NSW remains committed to supporting innovation, collaboration, and sustainable growth. We aim to address emerging challenges while embracing new opportunities. For a detailed overview of our progress and initiatives, please visit our **2023/24 Annual Report** at dairyaustralia.com.au/dairynsw.

Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication to the NSW dairy industry, we look forward to supporting you throughout 2025.

Sincerely,

Dairy NSW Board of Directors



Staff spotlight

Andrew Smith



Andrew was elected Chair of Dairy NSW in October 2024, a role he steps into with extensive experience and an unwavering commitment to the dairy sector. Andrew has been an active and influential member of the Dairy NSW board since 2019, serving as Deputy Chair since 2021, where his leadership and vision have

contributed strongly in advancing the mission of Dairy NSW to support and strengthen the dairy community across New South Wales.

As an active dairy farmer, Andrew manages his family business, Myall River Pastoral Co Pty Ltd, in Bulahdelah, New South Wales. His expertise as a registered veterinarian and dairy manager is grounded in a lifelong connection to dairy farming. Andrew graduated with first-class honours in veterinary science from Charles Sturt University in 2018, tailoring his studies to dairy production with international experiences in New Zealand and the United States that broadened his perspective and enriched his understanding of global best practices.

Andrew's approach to his new role is forward-looking and transformative. With a strong focus on the profitability, sustainability, and resilience of dairy businesses, he sees Dairy NSW as a catalyst for innovation and continuous improvement.

Under his guidance, Dairy NSW will continue to prioritise delivering of high-quality extension services, supporting impactful research, and fostering a culture that values growth and adaptation within the industry.

Andrew's dedication and passion for the New South Wales dairy industry shine through in every facet of his work. His influence as Chair promises to advance the sector, promoting a prosperous future for dairy farmers in New South Wales.

Michael Cole



Michael, a fifth-generation dairy farmer, joined the Dairy NSW Board as a Farmer Director in October 2024. With deep roots in the dairy industry and a rich corporate background, Michael brings a unique blend of practical farming expertise and high-level financial acumen to the Dairy NSW Board.

Operating on a 100-hectare grass-based, dryland farming operation at Terragong Swamp in Jamberoo, Michael currently manages Coleville Dairies, where 200 cows are milked. His commitment to sustainable farming practices is woven into the legacy of Coleville Dairies, which he re-established 15 years ago after an extensive and successful corporate career.

Prior to returning to his agricultural roots, Michael held influential roles in the finance sector, most notably as an Executive Director at Bankers Trust Australia. Following this, he contributed his leadership as Non-Executive Chairman at State Superannuation Board, IMB Bank, and Platinum Asset Management. His corporate expertise continues to thrive, as he currently serves as Chairman for two ASX-listed companies, Regal Partners Ltd and Ironbark Capital Limited. This high-level experience provides him with a strategic perspective that he now aims to leverage for the benefit of New South Wales dairy farmers.

As a Dairy NSW Board Director, Michael's primary focus is helping farmers establish, monitor, and update their farm carbon footprints. By supporting producers in understanding and optimising their environmental impact, he aims to position the New South Wales dairy industry at the forefront of sustainability.

With environmental challenges mounting, Michael's vision is to create a resilient dairy sector ready to meet the demands of the future while enhancing productivity and profitability.

Michael's appointment signifies a valuable convergence of industry knowledge and business foresight, enhancing Dairy NSW's mission to support sustainable growth and innovation in the New South Wales dairy industry. His background, expertise, and commitment to environmental stewardship represent a significant asset to New South Wales dairy farmers as they navigate the evolving landscape of modern dairy farming.





Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program Completion of Program 3: Supporting Industry Development in Dairy

Dairy NSW has achieved a pivotal milestone with the conclusion of Program 3 in the **Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program (SFIRP)** in December of the previous year.

Initiated in response to the devastating meteorological events of early 2021, the SFIRP has been a foundational framework for restoring and enhancing the structural and economic resilience of the NSW dairy sector. Over its two-year tenure, this program has not only addressed immediate recovery needs but has also established a framework for enduring stability, economic vitality, and developmental progress across the sector.

Program 3: Supporting Industry Development in Dairy

Integral to the overarching objectives of the SFIRP, **Program 3: Supporting Industry Development in Dairy** has catalysed transformative advancements by concentrating efforts on six strategically defined focus areas. These initiatives have been meticulously designed to respond to acute and systemic challenges within the dairy sector, thereby fostering resilience and fortifying the industry's foundations.

Below, each initiative and its associated outcomes are delineated:

1 Leadership Development

The **Leadership Development** initiative has been instrumental in cultivating a cadre of future-oriented leaders poised to navigate the complexities of the contemporary dairy industry. By delivering tailored leadership training, individualised mentoring, and specialised coaching, this initiative has empowered participants to galvanise their networks, drive systemic improvements, and fortify industry cohesion. The resulting leadership ecosystem is anticipated to play a critical role in ensuring the industry's agility and preparedness for emergent challenges.

2 Workforce Attraction and Retention

Confronting the perennial challenge of workforce shortages, this initiative has systematically examined and addressed the dynamics influencing workforce sustainability. Through empirical research and strategic interventions, Dairy NSW has identified key factors motivating workforce engagement and has implemented measures to enhance career longevity and job satisfaction within the sector. The tangible impact of these efforts is reflected in the placement of **252 employees on dairy farms** and the extensive engagement of prospective workers through structured career workshops.

3 New Entrant Support and Succession Planning

Recognising the imperative for generational continuity and the influx of new talent, this initiative has focused on constructing accessible entry pathways and facilitating effective succession strategies. By equipping new entrants with requisite competencies and providing existing stakeholders with robust succession frameworks, the program has bolstered the sector's capacity for sustained economic and operational viability. These efforts are pivotal in preserving the intergenerational legacy of the NSW dairy industry.

4 Supporting Excellence in Service Provision

To optimise the support infrastructure available to dairy farmers, this initiative has engaged service providers across a spectrum of complementary industries. By facilitating upskilling opportunities and fostering inter-industry collaborations, the program has established a more cohesive and reliable service ecosystem. This initiative ensures that dairy operations are supported by a dynamic network of skilled professionals capable of responding effectively to routine and extraordinary challenges.

5 Supporting Farm Business Feeding System Decision-Making

Acknowledging the critical intersection of profitability, sustainability, and environmental stewardship, this initiative introduced a decision-support tool to guide farmers in optimising their feeding systems. Emphasising strategic investments and compliance with environmental standards, the tool has been instrumental in mitigating financial risks, enhancing resilience, and aligning operations with regulatory mandates.

6 Promoting the Ongoing Value of the Dairy Industry

Public perception and societal engagement are indispensable to the dairy sector's sustainability and growth. This initiative has amplified the industry's profile through targeted communication campaigns and community outreach, thereby fostering consumer confidence and stimulating interest in dairy-related careers and investments. By highlighting the sector's contributions to economic and environmental sustainability, the initiative has engendered broader societal support.

Program highlights and achievements

The cumulative achievements of the SFIRP exemplify its transformative impact on the NSW dairy sector. Key accomplishments include:

- **252 on-farm placements** realised through workforce attraction initiatives.
- **66 school and career workshops** conducted to introduce young talent to dairy career pathways.
- A **two-day Young Dairy Network Conference**, which facilitated professional networking among over 100 participants.
- The **Mentoring the Future of Dairy Program**, fostering skill development and knowledge transfer through 20 mentor-mentee pairings.
- Collaboration with 'A Smart Farmer' engaging rural audiences via milking demonstrations at **11 agricultural shows** and school events.
- The listing of **32 NSW dairy businesses** on the Dairy Destinations website, significantly increasing visibility and consumer engagement.
- **23 local dairy farms** hosting educational excursions, inspiring future industry participants.
- **207 individuals** receiving targeted skill development training, ensuring a pipeline of qualified professionals.

A vision for the future

The completion of the SFIRP marks a watershed moment in the trajectory of the NSW dairy sector. Encompassing **330 farms across 78 impacted Local Government Areas**, the program has transcended its initial recovery mandate to establish a resilient, innovative, and interconnected industry landscape. Its enduring legacy includes enhanced workforce competencies, strengthened leadership structures, optimised service provision, and an elevated public profile.

As the sector transitions into a post-SFIRP era, its stakeholders stand equipped with the tools and frameworks necessary for sustained growth and adaptability. The collective efforts of the dairy community and its partners have not only facilitated recovery but have also charted a course toward a vibrant and sustainable future.

For further insights into SFIRP activities or to explore the programs and services it has delivered, stakeholders are encouraged to connect with Dairy NSW, at dairyaustralia.com.au/dairynsw, or access resources provided by the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

Unlocking Dairy Service Excellence in NSW: Insights from the University of Melbourne Study

A recent study by the University of Melbourne, funded by the NSW and Australian Government's Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program, has highlighted significant challenges and opportunities in dairy service provision across NSW.

The study emphasises the urgent need to improve service accessibility and effectiveness for dairy farmers, especially in both routine operations and during natural disasters like storms and floods.

The study paints a complex picture of the current landscape of service provision for dairy farmers in NSW. Key among the identified barriers is the diminishing number of dairy-specific service providers. This reduction is attributed to various factors, including the declining number of dairy farms and the challenges in sustaining a viable service business. Service providers also expressed concerns about the disconnect between their operations and the broader industry, which often leads to difficulties in providing cohesive support across the sector.

In times of crisis, such as storms and floods, the lack of a coordinated response further exacerbates these challenges. Service providers cited poor communication systems and a lack of adequate training to manage crises and trauma as significant issues. This gap leaves both farmers and service providers unprepared when natural disasters strike, leading to inefficiencies and delays in recovery.

Despite these difficulties, the study revealed that many service providers experience high job satisfaction. This is largely due to the autonomy they enjoy in their roles, opportunities for professional growth, and the strong relationships they maintain with the dairy farming community. Service providers reported a sense of fulfilment in knowing that their work positively impacts dairy businesses, helping farmers enhance business performance, manage risks, and build resilience against both everyday challenges and extraordinary crises.

To address these challenges and strengthen service provision, the University of Melbourne report offers several recommendations. One of the most critical is the development of a state-wide network of dairy service providers. This network would help bridge the gap between public, private, and industry sectors, ensuring better coordination and information sharing across the industry.

The report also calls for increased professional development opportunities for service providers. This includes a structured mentoring system, fostering collaboration, and creating a comprehensive register of service providers to streamline access to expertise across NSW. Another priority is the development of specialised training for service providers, equipping them to handle natural disasters more effectively and offering support to new entrants to the sector through internships and mentoring.

These strategies aim to build a more resilient, well-supported dairy service provider network, capable of delivering effective support to NSW dairy farmers in both business-as-usual and emergency contexts.

The NSW and Australian Government's Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program (SFIRP) has actively funded several initiatives to address key findings from the University of Melbourne's recent study on the dairy service provision in NSW. Through these efforts, the program demonstrates a strong commitment to fostering growth, resilience, and effective collaboration within the NSW dairy industry by supporting both new and established service providers:

1 Building new service provider support: By identifying and training new service providers, the SFIRP ensures the industry has access to emerging expertise. Eight service providers have been offered funded facilitation training to build their skills, with three already attending, while others benefit from mentorship opportunities.

2 Skill development for established providers: SFIRP provides skill advancement opportunities such as specialised presentation training (scheduled for 14 November 2024, with eight attendees) and the Graduate Certificate in Succession and Transition Planning from the University of New England.

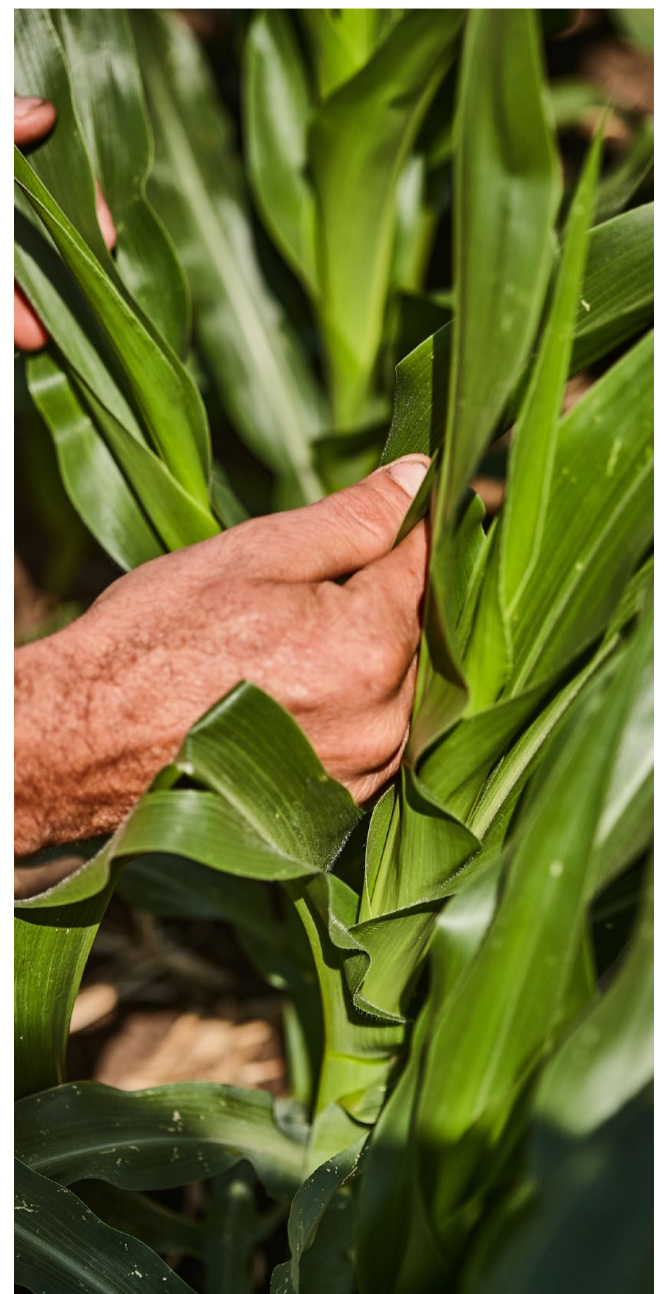
3 Disaster preparedness training: On 19 November 2024, community leaders will engage in natural disaster response training to strengthen regional resilience. Additionally, service providers have been consulted across program phases to incorporate their insights into a well-rounded response framework.

4 Gro Rural registry: The Gro Rural registry serves as a dedicated platform for NSW dairy service providers, facilitating connections between service providers and farmers, promoting business growth, and enhancing accessibility for farmers seeking support.

5 Future of facilitation: NSW service providers are invited to contribute to the National Extension Practice Plan, guiding the future of facilitation within the dairy industry.

Together, these initiatives show a tangible commitment to addressing the barriers and opportunities identified in the University of Melbourne's report. By establishing structured mentoring, enhancing training for disaster response, and fostering collaboration, the SFIRP paves the way for a more resilient dairy sector in NSW. Insights from experienced service providers, such as Phil Shannon, underscore the value of broad skill development, mentorship, and clear career pathways to attract and retain skilled service providers. Through these concerted efforts, the NSW dairy industry is poised to create a well-coordinated, future-ready service network capable of supporting both farmers and advisors in navigating industry complexities and future challenges.

This Activity was funded by the NSW and Australian Government's Storm and Flood Industry Recovery Program.





Insights from industry service provider Phil Shannon

To add a practical perspective to the findings, NSW dairy industry service provider Phil Shannon shared his experiences.

Can you share your journey as a service provider in the NSW dairy industry? What initially sparked your interest in this field of dairying?

"I'm lucky to come from a generational farming family and have spent most of my career working in the dairy industry in some way. I was involved in the family farm before working in dairy extension and then moved into my own independent consulting/advising business."

What impact and value have you observed in the dairy industry through mentorships and traditional education or skill development pathways?

"I certainly benefited from traditional training and skills development on the journey – but to develop the depth of skills and knowledge needed to 'pull the components together into a system' and be a farm advisor, my main source of support were mentors actively working in that field. My key mentor relationships were mainly informal as there wasn't a lot of structured mentoring in my time. I was very fortunate to have a number of highly skilled and respected independent consultants that were willing to provide me with the training and support I needed – and that has continued on for my career."

The NSW Storm and Flood Recovery Program recently funded a report by the Rural Innovation Research Group at the University of Melbourne. The report identified barriers for maintaining service excellence, including the lack of opportunity to plan and resource service provider succession and the gradual loss of generalists. How do these challenges affect your work, and what strategies do you think could address them?

"At this late stage in my career, I am unlikely to be impacted by the loss of generalists – but by default I'll be adding to the increasing loss. Put simply, it is the 'generally' older, experienced consultants (generalists) that are more likely to be ideal mentors for the next generation. They have the lived experience. At the same time, their services are in demand, and it's hard to give up paid work to spend time professionally mentoring the next generation."

The report suggests that we need generalist service providers in the dairy industry, especially in NSW due to a decline in farm numbers and the vast geographical spread of farms. However, it also mentions that the entry point for starting a career in dairy service provision is unclear. In your view, what skills or education are essential to becoming a generalist advisor in dairy?

"You can't become a generalist until you have gained the foundational knowledge that is required – and this knowledge needs to cover the wide range of fields that make up a dairy business (agronomy, cow nutrition, economics, labour management etc). This takes time and there are structured courses available to help build these. The weak link is identifying the path by which an emerging generalist gets the opportunity to work with farmers across a wider range of fields."

Considering the future challenges for the dairy industry—such as increasing input and transport costs, climate change, labour recruitment and retention, and a shift to more intensive operations—how do you see the role of consultants and service providers evolving? What do you think will be crucial for their success?

"There are many area/topic specific specialists that can provide quality support to farm businesses as they evolve. These are often linked to product sales – and there is nothing wrong with that. The gap is often access to the generalist advisor that can stand back and see the 'big picture,' and support and assist the farm owner/operator as they make changes that will impact on multiple aspects of the business."



NSW dairy industry set to benefit from major investment in Tocal Agricultural College

In a significant step forward for dairy education and industry advancement, Tocal Agricultural College in the Hunter Valley is poised to become a premier hub for dairy training, research, and technology.

This follows a major NSW Government investment of over \$60 million, directed toward upgrading seven regional research facilities and five emergency response sites across the state.

At the heart of this initiative is the planned transformation of Tocal's dairy facilities. Senior leadership from Dairy Australia, including Chair James Mann and Regional Services General Manager Verity Ingham, visited the site in late 2024 to explore these exciting developments alongside Education Director Darren Bayley and Farm Manager Matt Brett. The visit highlighted the potential of these upgrades to bolster the future of the NSW dairy industry.

A state-of-the-art learning hub

The centrepiece of the Tocal upgrades is a cutting-edge dairy facility designed to accommodate 450 cows in a modern free-stall system. The inclusion of a robotic milking system will enable students to gain firsthand experience with advanced dairy technology while also learning traditional methods. This blend of innovation and heritage ensures graduates are well-equipped for diverse farming environments.

The new facility will significantly elevate Tocal's educational offerings, positioning it as a sought-after destination for students aiming to develop practical, industry-ready skills. Furthermore, the facility's expanded research capabilities will benefit dairy farmers throughout the Hunter region and beyond, delivering insights into productivity, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability.

Prioritising animal welfare and sustainability

A key focus of the Tocal upgrades is enhancing animal welfare and sustainable practices. Loafing barns, designed to shield cattle from extreme weather, will feature large fans for temperature control, protecting milk production during heatwaves or wet conditions. These barns also incorporate biodigesters for energy production and advanced solar systems, showcasing a commitment to reducing the carbon footprint of dairy operations.

Automated milking systems within the facility will allow for precise monitoring of individual cow health, enabling early intervention and improved herd management. These advancements underscore Tocal's dedication to integrating sustainability into every aspect of its operations.

Preparing students for a tech-driven industry

Each year, Tocal Agricultural College trains approximately 140 students in dairy operations. The upgrades will further enhance their learning experience, incorporating advanced tools such as drones for digital mapping and tractors with automated steering. This exposure to modern technology ensures graduates are prepared to lead in an increasingly sophisticated and tech-driven industry.

Education Director Darren Bayley emphasised the transformative impact of the upgrades.

"These investments mean transformative change for our students and the broader dairy industry," Darren said. "By exposing students to both manual and robotic milking systems, we're preparing them to embrace and adapt to an evolving technological landscape."

Enhancing industry resilience

In addition to educational advancements, the NSW Government's investment will bolster the state's emergency response infrastructure. Upgraded facilities will improve readiness for crises such as floods, bushfires, and biosecurity threats, safeguarding dairy farmers' livelihoods during challenging times.

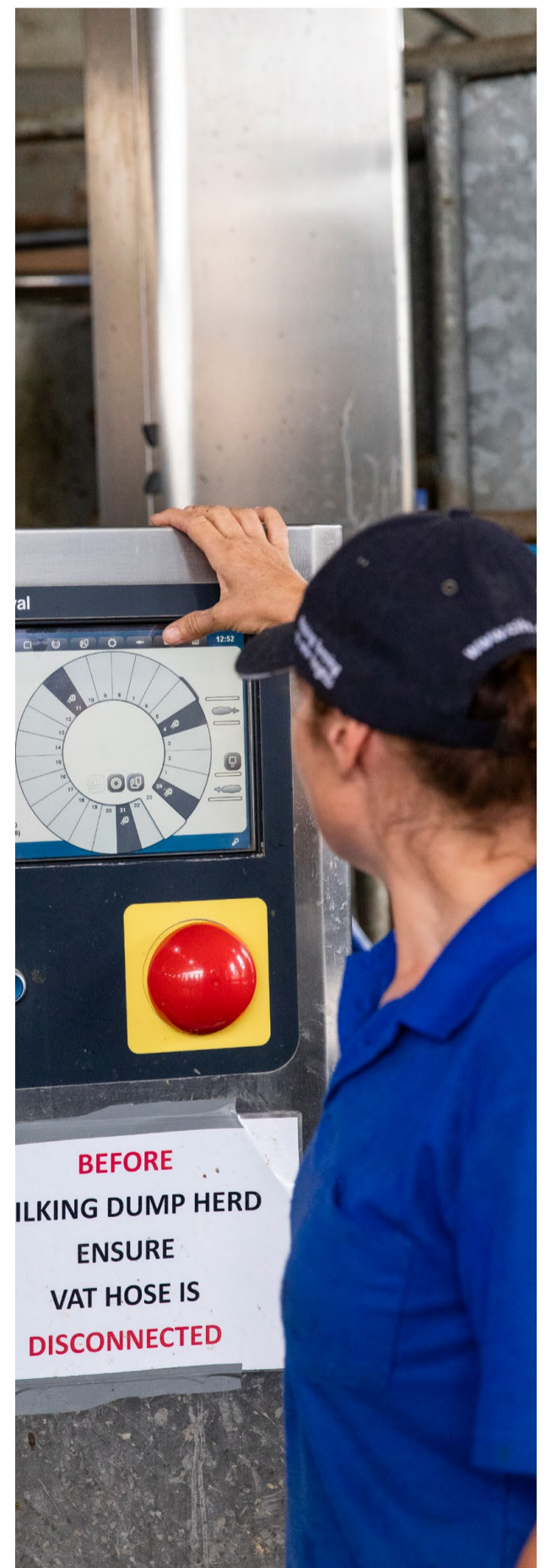
This resilience-building approach is essential for ensuring the industry's ability to withstand environmental and economic pressures, a critical factor in maintaining a thriving dairy sector.

A vision for the future

The NSW dairy industry, the second largest in Australia, plays a vital role in the state's economy, supporting approximately 6,000 jobs. By prioritising education, research, and emergency preparedness, the NSW Government has demonstrated its commitment to the sector's long-term sustainability and growth.

Dairy NSW is eager to collaborate with the Department of Primary Industries and the State Government to bring these transformative changes to life. As Darren Bayley aptly noted, "We're not just producing milk; we're producing the future of agriculture in NSW."

For dairy farmers, this investment offers a vision of a prosperous future—where tradition and innovation combine to create a resilient, sustainable, and forward-thinking industry. The upgrades at Tocal Agricultural College mark a pivotal moment in realising that vision, paving the way for a thriving dairy sector in New South Wales.



Elevating dairy farm management

The Dairy Business Support Services (DBSS) program has returned for a third consecutive year, offering a timely opportunity for New South Wales dairy farmers to enhance their management practices, streamline their operations, and fortify their businesses.

Running until 30 June 2025, DBSS delivers expert guidance – at no cost to dairy farmers across the entire state of NSW – to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced in business and operations.

DBSS takes a comprehensive view of dairy farm management, aiming to bolster profitability, productivity, and resilience. Whether you seek to optimise herd health and performance, refine financial processes, or develop a robust, forward-looking business strategy, DBSS provides the tools and expert insights needed to foster long-term growth. As a participant, you will benefit from:

- 1 **Individualised, One-on-One Support:** Experienced consultants will offer personalised guidance to pinpoint areas for improvement, helping you make data-driven decisions that can transform daily operations and strategic planning.
- 2 **Group Workshops:** Group sessions—offered both online and in person—you will have the chance to engage with fellow dairy farmers, share common challenges, and explore new perspectives. These workshops cultivate a supportive network that can enrich your learning and future collaborations.

DBSS Round Three targets several critical aspects of dairy farm management, ensuring that

participants receive tailored assistance aligned with their specific needs:

- 1 **Profitability and Productivity Analysis**
By utilising resources such as DairyBase and the Knowing Your Numbers toolkit, participants can gain deeper insights into their financial performance. Armed with this data, farmers can pinpoint opportunities to streamline production and maximise returns.
- 2 **Business Planning**
Experienced consultants help craft a forward-looking, comprehensive business plan. This strategic roadmap enables confident decision-making and provides a framework to navigate evolving market conditions and industry challenges.
- 3 **Specialised Support**
Farms have diverse needs, ranging from herd health and reproduction to employee management and data analytics. DBSS pairs you with experts who can offer advice and solutions that align with your farm's specific objectives and operational scale.
- 4 **Financial Management Training**
Through hands-on training in accounting software and financial tools, DBSS empowers farmers to gain greater command of their finances. Better financial oversight and accurate forecasting not only improve operational efficiency but also support more robust long-term decision-making.

One of the defining advantages of DBSS lies in its forward-thinking approach. Beyond solving immediate issues, the program equips farmers with enduring strategies and methodologies. Past participants report:

- **Refined Operational Insight:** Detailed reviews of day-to-day processes and key performance

indicators have led to significant performance improvements.

- **Heightened Financial Confidence:** Gaining expertise in budgeting, forecasting, and cost management translates into more secure business trajectories.
- **Enhanced Resilience:** From adopting new technology to fine-tuning herd management, participants have found themselves better prepared to respond to emerging trends and challenges.

By working closely with seasoned consultants, you will develop critical competencies that strengthen your enterprise's foundation, enabling adaptability and sustained growth in an ever-evolving sector.

DBSS Round 3 is limited to just 50 consultations, creating an environment for intensive, tailored support. For those looking to embrace innovation, refine financial frameworks, or plan more effectively for the future, this is an opportunity not to be missed.

How to apply

- Visit: bit.ly/DBSSinfo
- Contact Natalie Campbell, DBSS Project Manager, Dairy NSW at natalie@dairynsw.com.au or on 0438 261 912.

Given the high demand for this program, places are filling quickly. Reserve your spot now to embark on a journey toward more profitable and productive dairy farming.

DBSS is proudly funded by the Farm Business Resilience Program (FBRP) and supported by the Future Drought Fund and DPI Regional Development.



Virtual fencing update for NSW dairy farmers: Progress, potential, and the path forward

In recent years, virtual fencing and herding technology has emerged as a groundbreaking innovation in livestock management.

Although this technology has gained significant traction in regions like New Zealand and Tasmania, its adoption remains restricted in New South Wales (NSW), South Australia, and Victoria due to legislative barriers. Encouragingly, growing support from industry stakeholders and recent parliamentary discussions suggest that NSW could soon join the global movement toward virtual fencing. This shift would equip dairy farmers with a powerful tool to enhance productivity, promote animal welfare, and advance environmental sustainability.

Virtual fencing technology enables livestock management without the need for physical boundaries. Using collars or ear tags equipped with sensors, livestock are guided through audio and vibration cues to remain within designated areas. This stress-free training ensures cattle adjust quickly, allowing for seamless movement and containment.

In New Zealand, where virtual fencing is fully operational, over 200,000 cattle are managed using the technology. Farmers report improved labour efficiency, better grazing management, and enhanced animal welfare outcomes. As the technology matures, it promises similar benefits for NSW dairy farmers, particularly in an industry grappling with rising costs and labour shortages.

The potential advantages of virtual fencing span numerous aspects of dairy farm management:

1 Labour efficiency and cost savings

With regional unemployment in NSW at just 2.9 per cent, sourcing labour for demanding tasks like fence maintenance and livestock herding is a persistent challenge. Virtual fencing significantly reduces these labour-intensive processes, saving time and costs while allowing farm staff to focus on other critical tasks.

2 Optimised pasture management

Virtual fencing offers precision in grazing management, allowing farmers to allocate pastures strategically. This enhances productivity by maximising forage utilisation and controlling grazing intensity, especially in areas where traditional fencing is impractical.

3 Improved animal welfare

Modern virtual fencing systems prioritise cattle wellbeing. The non-invasive cues guide livestock without stress, while built-in health monitoring features provide real-time insights into animal health, enabling early detection of issues.

4 Environmental and biodiversity benefits

Dynamic, adjustable boundaries help protect sensitive ecosystems, such as wetlands and waterways, by

preventing livestock from accessing these areas. This minimises soil erosion, water contamination, and habitat disruption, aligning with sustainable land management goals.

5 Workplace safety enhancements

Reducing the need for motorbike and vehicle-based herding improves workplace safety by minimising exposure to potential accidents.

6 Emergency and biosecurity preparedness

Virtual fencing simplifies livestock containment during emergencies, such as floods or fires, and enhances biosecurity by enabling rapid response to potential outbreaks.

Momentum is building in NSW to legalise virtual fencing. A recent parliamentary inquiry, led by the Member for Orange, examined its feasibility, resulting in a recommendation to permit the technology.

In May 2024, Dairy NSW, in collaboration with Dairy Australia, provided a submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee advocating for virtual fencing. Dr. James Neal from Dairy NSW described the technology as a "game changer" for the dairy sector, while Dr. Andy Hancock, Dairy Australia's Sustainable Animal Care Manager, highlighted its potential to alleviate labour shortages and support sustainable practices.

These testimonies underscored the safety and efficacy of virtual fencing, drawing on successful implementations in other regions to illustrate its transformative potential for NSW dairy farmers.

As NSW progresses toward legalising virtual fencing, farmers are encouraged to stay informed and engage in ongoing discussions. Here are some recommended actions:

- Review the Inquiry Report: Familiarise yourself with the Committee's findings and recommendations, which can be accessed [here].
- Stay Updated on Legislation: Follow updates on changes to animal welfare laws and related legislation.
- Engage with Industry Bodies: Dairy NSW and Dairy Australia will continue advocating for virtual fencing and providing updates on its implementation.

Virtual fencing represents a significant opportunity for NSW dairy farmers to modernise their operations. By enhancing productivity, improving animal welfare, and supporting sustainable farming practices, this technology has the potential to redefine the future of the dairy industry. As legislative changes unfold, Dairy NSW remains committed to equipping farmers with the tools and knowledge needed to thrive in an increasingly competitive and resource-conscious agricultural landscape.

For more information and updates, visit dairyaustralia.com.au/dairynsw



Upcoming events:

Jan

1 Dairy Business Support Services (DBSS) Consultations - NSW Available now until 30 June 2025.

March

4-6 Grounds for Growth - Soil & Pasture Biodiversity Event - Warrnambool, Victoria

6, 13, 20 Employment Basics EXPRESS - National online program

13 Understanding Farm Carbon Workshop - Tocal, NSW



Visit the Dairy NSW Events Calendar on our website at dairyaustralia.com.au/dairynsw for events taking place in your local region.

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