



Focus Farm - The Field family, Montagu

DairyTas Focus Farm Project 2017-2019

by Jacki Hine Magee, Project Manager, REO for Dairy Tas

The 2017-2019 Tasmanian Dairy Focus Farm project has concluded after 24 months. In this time the project monitored focus farmers, Field Agri - Dave and Jane Field. The Fields put themselves and their business under the spotlight and microscope. All this while transitioning their business to an OAD system and developing a farm, including installing a large irrigation system and pasture renovation. They faced challenges at times but did not back away from the limelight. Congratulations for putting yourself out there! They have highly recommended the project to anyone in the future.

During the 2 years there was input from Support Group members. The group met every second month during the project, sometimes more often if needed. I would like to acknowledge the support of each member and thank them for their contribution. For two years the following people regularly attended meetings, Bob Bush, Aaron Robertson, Sam Flight, Hugo Avery, Wayne Hansen, Gerard Mulder, later Jeffery Gijsbers and Richard Duniam also joined the group after others resigned, they were Rhys Palmer, Wolfie Wagner and Leigh Schuurung) - All added gems of wisdom from time to time.

I would also like to acknowledge the support from the Dairy Tas team, Liz, who was a sounding board, drawing on her vast extension experience, and of course Linda who worked tirelessly in the background to support as well as all focus farm events. Linda also stepped in as minute recorder at meetings and is car packer extraordinaire.

Over the 2 years it has been great to work with the team from Macquarie Franklin. Consultant Basil Doonan, who could be relied on to always add a little extra to his presentations! Mentee Consultant for the project was Georgia McCarthy was been a capable and helpful support person who capably handled the bulk of the minutes, data collection and development over the life of the project.

In all there were 8 Open days held over the project's life with a total of over 420 attendees over the 8 events. This compared with the inaugural DairyTas focus farm (Limberlost) where a total of 3 open days were held and a total of 175 attendees. Each event for 2017-2019 project had a theme and engaged guest speakers relevant to seasonal topics and challenges on the focus farm throughout the project. The bottom line was the focus.

September 16, 2019 – “And that’s a wrap”

- A comparison of the data set from beginning to 1 year ago and at the conclusion.
- Farmers came along to hear what has been learned by Fields.
- Farmers saw a virtual tour of the farm footage was taken by drone and video, 5 days prior to the event.

Guest speaker and farm consultant Basil Doonan

Attendance: 48

July 24, 2019 - "Focus on Finance and the Future"

"Failing to plan = Planning to fail"! Even in a higher pay out price this can be a trap!

The focus farmers successfully made a profit under an OAD system. Together with the Fields; Basil Doonan and Aaron Robertson formed a panel and gave a presentation based on the farm business figures for FY 2018/19 actuals VS budget and FY 2019/20 forecast, taking questions from the floor.

Guest speakers also included:

- John Droppert from Dairy Australia – gave an update on the situation and outlook report
- Adrian Dixon from ANZ - gave an insight the importance of planning and budgeting, in a higher milk pay out price season – what are the watchouts?
- Adrian also provided an update on the financial market.
- Basil Doonan drew on his experience providing the audience with tips, tricks and traps in a higher milk payout season

Attendance: 45

March 6, 2019 – "Minimising Risk/ Maximising Opportunity /Minimise Risk"

Practical tips and tools to create a safety 1st farm culture

A packed agenda saw almost 30 people attend on a windy day

The safety aspect of the program involved guest presenters:

- Sarah Thompson – Dairy Australia- who introducing the Farm Safety Starter Kit
- Kate Gofton- shared a personal experience of an on-farm tractor fatality on their dairy farm near Scottsdale.
- Phil John – Facts and figures along with what can Farm Safe Tasmania do for you to help embed a safety-first culture on your farm.

The next part of the program included. "Maximising the opportunity to build capacity in your team"

- Denise College – Tas TAFE- increase staff capacity through training
- Ali Dawson – MGET - navigating government incentive schemes.

Bus farm tour with Fields and Jason Lynch

Jason Lynch – Maximise next season now with Autumn Agronomy Actions

- Pest Identification
- Pest management guide
- The DA pasture guide
- Pasture condition scoring and Pasture renovation
- Hump and Hollow – what works' well when developing new ground

December 5, 2018 – “WIFM” - Take stock of your situation

Topics covered include:

- Dairy Situation and Outlook (Global Market Indicators) - John Droppert
- Future grain/input prices (How long will the pain last?)- Profarmer and Australian Crop Forecasters
- Feeding cows profitably (marginal approach)- Basil Doonan Macquarie Franklin
- Assessing your options (Taking Stock)- Basil Doonan, Fields and Liz Mann
- Taking care of the team (Mental health)- RAW – Ruth Fisher
- Keeping creditors informed (Bank view)- ANZ – Donna Avery

Attendance: 66

October 3, 2018 - “On the front foot”

Presenters identified mating and irrigation practices for optimum performance.

Guest presenters included:

- Joyce Voogt (Technical Manager LIC, New Zealand)
- David McLaren and Mark Freeman (TIA–Smarter Irrigation Program)

Attendance: Almost 50

June 14, 2018 - “Review and Plan”

On a horrible Winters Day 30 people came out to the farm to see firsthand how the Focus Farm team are managed some challenges around pasture, grazing and animal health.

Hands on topics included:

- Pasture walk
- Teat scoring
- Background of herd and cell count
- Vaccination program at dry off – and correct Lepto program for young stock
- Practical Demonstration of teat scoring technique as well as the and theory of teat seal and dry cow therapy – selective dry cow in the dairy

March 7, 2018 - “BYO team”

This day saw in excess of 80 people in attendance.

Topics discussed were around the challenges of employing staff, be it 1 or 150 and tips on how to do it well. Industrial Law and employing under the Pastoral Awards information was given by Andrew Cameron Industrial Lawyer and Primary Employers specialist, Primary Employers Tasmania (PET). Hugo Avery also gave insight into the softer skills of employing people as well as the importance of policy and S.O.P.'s.

November 1, 2017 - The Inaugural Open Day

The crowd of more than 60 heard about the focus farm project, Dave and Janes story and saw what's been happening on the farm. Also covered were the results of the Fert\$mart and drainage plan that has been developed for the farm. Guest speaker Bill Cotching came along to discuss the Fert\$mart plan and provide some in-depth information around a drainage issue the farm is facing.

The project has been well supported by industry partners and sponsors, thank you one and all.

I would like to acknowledge the support of sponsors for lunches and guest presenters. Without their valuable support then project would not have been as successful or had the ability to engage with as many farmers:

- Livestock Improvement Corporation
- Roberts Limited
- Zoetis
- ANZ
- Rural Bank
- Rural Alive and Well
- Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture
- Farm Safe Tasmania
- TasTAFE
- MGET
- Macquarie Franklin
- We have also had additional support from Dairy Australia (guest presenters)