



WORKFORCE

## Cows Create Careers Pilot Program at Fulham Correctional Centre

By Stacey Alfred, GippsDairy

This year, GippsDairy has partnered with Gardiner Foundation and Jaydee Events to deliver the Cows Create Careers program at Fulham Correctional Centre, operated by The GEO Group Australia, in Gippsland.

The pilot program – delivered as a workforce attraction initiative – ran for five days per week for three weeks during Autumn and focussed on developing skills that would help participants find work in a rural setting after release. The six participants were part of Fulham’s Nalu Community Transition Program – a minimum security unit that helps with release planning and access to community-based activities.

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## Cows Create Careers Pilot Program at Fulham Correctional Centre

The Cows Create Careers program covered a wide range of topics, including:

- The Australian Dairy Industry and why it matters
- Farm safety and biosecurity
- Technology on farms
- Sustainable farming
- Dairy industry careers
- Marketing dairy products
- Dairy nutrition for the dairy cow and humans

All participants completed two industry-recognised courses during the program. Lauren Clyne (Denison Farm Vet) delivered Dairy Australia's Rearing Healthy Calves and Milking and Mastitis Management (Cups on, Cups off) courses. The second day of both courses were completed on-farm, with participants keen to experience milking cows for the first time. A third excursion was completed to visit a robotic dairy and explore the differences involved when using robotic technology on a dairy farm.

Along with classroom-style learning and farm excursions, two three-week old heifer calves were on site for the duration of the program and cared for solely by the six participants.

The program was delivered by Veronica McLeod (GippsDairy Extension Team Lead), with support from Deanne Kennedy and John Hutchinson (Jaydee Events). Veronica found the experience to be rewarding for everyone involved, with participants showing high levels of engagement and enthusiasm throughout the program. "Everyone was respectful, polite, and engaged," she said. "They asked good questions and were willing to learn and give it a go."

Participants were enthusiastic to be involved in a program that would allow them to gain hands-on experience on a local dairy farm prior to their release. Four of the six participants are now actively seeking out work on a dairy farm as part of their release plan in the coming months.

The program will be run again at Fulham with six new participants in July 2024.

The success of this first pilot program would not have been possible without the support and contributions of everyone involved. Special thanks to the host farmers that welcomed the group on-farm during excursions, those that kindly provided calves for the three-week period, Fulham Correctional Centre, Gardiner Foundation, Jaydee events and Denison Farm Vet.

### We asked the six participants - What did you enjoy about the program?

Participant one	People (farmers) willing to give us a go when we get out.
Participant two	I liked classroom activities going to farm milking the cows. I had never seen a cow before and drinking milk straight from the cow was my first experience.
Participant three	From start to finish I enjoyed it all. I've been messing up for around 13 years and this program has made me realise things can be different.
Participant four	It's the best programme I've done in gaol in years. I really enjoyed feeding the calves morning and afternoon, the excitement of the calves when they saw us. I am more a hands-on learner and enjoyed picking up new skills.
Participant five	I most enjoyed milking the cows.
Participant six	It was great to achieve something out of the programme it was good to keep my mind busy and not sitting around doing nothing.

### MORE INFORMATION

If you would like further information about the pilot program, please contact **Karen McLennan** on **0409 179 706** or [karen.mclennan@gippsdairy.com.au](mailto:karen.mclennan@gippsdairy.com.au)



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**Love Support Thy Neighbour**

By Davina Warman, RFCS Gippsland

In recent years, (thank you COVID,) we have had to 'unlearn' some of our normal social behaviours of connectedness.

As a society, we have become rather disjointed, ironically, in a world where technology facilitates instant connectivity making us more obtainable than ever before. Yet we continue to move metaphorically speaking further apart when we know from all the previous and current literature on mental health and wellbeing that we need real connectedness to fulfill our basic societal needs.

Now, we are not saying that we should all gather daily at the community hall, hold hands and share our feelings, no, but we do need to make a conscious effort to listen and reconnect; relearn how to care and support each other. A reset of acceptable normal social behaviours. Recently, I was made aware that a senior dealing with health issues was ignored when they took a nasty tumble in a public place with not a single person coming to help. You might say "That wouldn't happen in my town" but ask yourself honestly, would it?

Being out of touch with others combined with the pressure of busy lifestyles and constantly faced with disasters (locally and worldwide), and the impacts of increasing costs of living – all can have huge ramifications on our wellbeing and social connectedness.

According to a Mental Health Australia's Report to the Nation (2023) over half of Australians cite the rising cost of living as a significant detriment to their mental wellbeing, and this continues to be a huge problem with a recent media release from Suicide Prevention Australia, in the March 2024 quarter the cost-of-living and personal debt distress are well beyond typical levels. These alarming statistics combined with a shortage of mental health services in Australia, especially in rural and regional areas, may see a sharp increase in the number of people seeking help with both financial and personal distress.

**So what should we do?** We relearn the social edict that was written a long time ago 'Love Thy Neighbour' by supporting those around us: **know the signs, start the conversation and engage the support.**

RFCS Gippsland is a not for profit agency supporting rural and remote communities across Gippsland with financial counselling, and more recently with wellbeing services proving a unique support system for client to recover or implement change. RFCS Gippsland implemented the



DETECT & PROTECT wellness program in 2020. The program is uniquely developed for farmers and their families and provides critical health and wellbeing support tailored to the individual needs of clients, focusing on creating positive outcomes and ways to overcome unique challenges faced within our remote and rural communities.

The success in delivering the DETECT & PROTECT wellness program to farming communities is due to the embedded referral pathways and relationships that RFCS Gippsland has built with other support agencies working alongside farmers and attending various social events to ensure connectedness of remote communities. Through these connections, farmers get to know us and learn about RFCS Gippsland from trusted sources and community members. So, when a farmer needs assistance with financial or personal wellbeing, they know where to find us.

The DETECT & PROTECT wellness program allows our team to spend time with farmers and their families in their home where they are comfortable. Being invited to the kitchen table, talking face to face, helps us

connect with and get a deeper understanding our client's situation. Our Wellbeing Team uses behavioural activation models which moves the conversation away from feelings to focus on a person's *behaviour and environment*, and the things that they have control over. When a person improves their habits, goals, actions, and living conditions, their overall wellbeing improves too. Whilst majority of clients first seek support due to financial distress, this is often the just the *symptom* not the *cause* of their distress.

If you are struggling emotionally and financially (or know someone who is), protect them and yourself by referring to the **free confidential services of RFCS Gippsland**. Our specialised rural financial support team will work on improving your finances whilst a dedicated wellness support officer will focus on you.

**MORE INFORMATION**

Call **1300 045 747** or visit [rfcsgippsland.org.au/wellbeing](https://rfcsgippsland.org.au/wellbeing) to find out more.

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## Resilient forages and soils: Reaping the benefits of what you sow

By Meghan Lodwick, Gardiner Foundation

Soils and pasture are the backbone of the dairy farm. Grant and Leesa Williams, who milk 570 cows on a 240-ha milking area in the small West Gippsland town of Hallora, have always been open to innovation on their farm and saw this area as an opportunity.

“I have always been interested in building healthy soils on our dairy farm and started using some multispecies plantings 10 years ago on small areas of the farm,” Grant said.

“For the last three to four years, we have ramped up our plantings to roughly 50% of the farm in autumn and 50% in spring. As a result, we have reduced most of our fertiliser inputs and recent soil tests show no decrease in soil nutrient levels.”

Over the last 20 years, Victorian farmers have been facing increasingly hot and dry summers and reductions in water availability for both rain-fed and irrigated agriculture. This has been exacerbated by escalating nitrogen fertiliser costs, resulting in significant pressure for farmers across Victoria and other temperate regions of Australia to find more sustainable alternative forage options.

Grant and Leesa are keenly interested in the recently funded DairyFeedbase Resilient Forages project, that aims to produce scientific evidence demonstrating how multispecies forages can increase sustainability to prepare for future challenges, including changing climate and fluctuating input costs while maintaining productivity.

DairyFeedbase 2023-28 is a joint venture between Agriculture Victoria, Dairy Australia and the Gardiner Foundation. It is also one of the dairy industry's leading innovation programs designed to improve on-farm profitability.

Resilient Forages project leader, Dr Anna Thomson from Agriculture Victoria says the project's goal is to offer greater resilience and productivity long-term, by growing more nutrient-dense multispecies forage while relying on fewer input resources.

“Previous research highlighted that perennial ryegrass performs poorly under hot and dry conditions with a decrease in biomass and nutritive quality and therefore a detrimental effect on milk production and farm productivity.”

“This project aims to equip dairy farm businesses with knowledge on diversifying their forage systems in ways that will help them remain profitable into the future while meeting community expectations regarding agriculture's impact on the environment.”

Anna says it's important for farmers to start their own journey towards making their farms more sustainable and adaptable by experimenting with their feedbase, that can, in turn, improve business productivity.

“The important thing to note about this research is that it's not only about making positive, measurable impacts on the planet, it's also a tangible business move because reducing input costs is going to help farmers with their bottom line,” Anna said. Neil Joiner, who lives in a high rainfall farming area near Orbost, has been experimenting with mixed species for over 15 years. One of his first experiences was adding plantain to his seed mix.

“Initially, I used plantain. One of the agronomists said it was cheaper per kilogram per hectare. I also noted that New Zealand was advertising the use of plantain and I thought, I'd give it a go. It worked well from a sustainability standpoint,” Neil said.



Leesa and Grant Williams

After working with plantain, Neil moved on to chicory, red clover and lucerne. He says it has been a trial and error process on the farm to find what works best.

“Chicory is resilient in dry seasons and holds on through pasture renovations. The more plants you have you tend to have less bare patches, meaning far less room for weeds.”

“I don't tend to view this as science; it's more about doing practical things on the farm to improve your output,” Neil said.

Anna says many in the dairy industry tend to understandably “play it safe” and rely on tried and tested traditional pasture types.

For Grant and Leesa and Neil, playing it safe wasn't meeting their goals for their feedbase and now they are reaping the benefits of what they've sown.

For those who are waiting for more scientific evidence before taking the plunge into multispecies mixed pastures, the Resilient Forages research will aim to provide data-driven, practical guidance to help farmers successfully adopt these new practices.

“People need to learn more about the plants they are growing. In my experience, it not only benefits my business, but it has created new networks because you've got more people talking about it,” Neil said.

“I helped a farmer out recently. It took him about four months to get the hang of grazing mixed species paddocks, but he's managing it, and it's improving his pastures,” added Neil.

“Give it a go, don't do the whole farm straight up. You must first learn how to manage it as it grows differently. Start with a smaller portion of the farm and learn as you go.”

#### MORE INFORMATION

Visit <https://dairyfeedbase.com.au/> to learn more about the easy-to-use digital tools and real-time information available to improve decision-making in the paddock and strategically allocate feed at an individual cow level.



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## Reducing Lameness in Dairy Cattle – Managing in wet conditions

By Richard Smith, Agriculture Victoria Tatura

**Do you find that your dairy cows have a higher incidence of lameness on your farm than you would like? By taking a strategic look at your individual farm situation you can identify areas for improvement and help to reduce the incidence of lameness in your dairy herd. You should aim to have no more than five per cent of the herd lame per month.**

Farmers are using prevention, early detection and treatment of lameness to achieve better outcomes in cow comfort, improved milk production, and better reproductive performance of their dairy herd. Lameness in dairy cows in Australia can be caused by a range of environmental, nutritional and infectious causes.

Farm conditions can result in damage to cow's hooves, including stone bruises and thin soles. To minimise the incidence of lameness are good laneways, reducing time spent on concrete and reducing pressure on cows during movement, are all important.

### Managing wet conditions

Most farmers find that extremely wet conditions result in a lot more cows that are lame.

Prolonged exposure to moisture causes the hoof to soften, making bruising, penetration injuries and white-line disease more common. The skin between the claws and around the foot also softens and macerates, leaving the skin more prone to infections such as footrot.

The higher bacterial loads present in wet muddy environments add to the problem. Larger stones and sharp gravel are also exposed after the fine topping materials are washed from track surfaces.

The cost of an individual case of lameness is estimated to be between \$200 - \$500. If a herd outbreak occurs, the costs can increase across the herd.

For more information visit the Dairy Australia website at [www.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au) and search for 'Managing lameness in wet conditions.'

### Good laneways

A good laneway should be built by selecting a suitable foundation and with suitable surface materials, so they stand up to the constant cow traffic and damage by rain and excess water. Select a material for the surface layer that won't damage the cow's hooves, which will also repel and run water off the laneway, helping keep it dryer and to last longer. The surface layer needs to be crowned to assist with water runoff.

Good drainage for your laneway is also very important. It needs to collect water runoff and divert it correctly to increase the life of your laneway. The drain should be fenced off so cattle can't walk in it and pug it up, which will reduce its effectiveness.

Farmers find that regular maintenance to the laneway surface is best as it helps increase its life and avoid costly repairs to the foundation layer.

A detailed technical note 'Building blocks for good laneways' is available on the Dairy Australia website at [www.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au).

### Reducing time on concrete

Most dairy farmers already follow the practice of minimising the time cows are spending on concrete which helps to reduce stone bruises and the wearing away of the sole on the cow's hooves. Any further reductions in time spent on concrete for cows will assist to reduce the lameness of dairy cattle.

### Reducing pressure on cows during movement

When cows are allowed enough time to move slowly at their own pace, the cows can look and place their feet and avoid uneven surfaces or stones and thus avoid stone damage to their feet. This will in turn, help reduce the incidence of lameness in the dairy herd.

### Nutritional Factors

Acidosis can result in lameness in dairy cattle. Acidosis can cause laminitis, paint brush haemorrhages and white line disease, reducing the cow's ability to walk freely.

To help reduce the incidence of acidosis ensure cows are receiving adequate effective fibre, and precise allocation of grain.

A well-balanced diet for the dairy cow will include adequate fibre, which helps to buffer the rumen pH. Rumen buffers and/or modifiers may also be required depending on the level of grain feeding to reduce the rumen pH and reduce the incidence of acidosis in the dairy herd.

For more information visit the Dairy Australia website at: [www.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au) and search for 'Acidosis'.

### Infectious Factors

Your cows can have infections on their hooves, including footrot and hairy heel warts. The use of footbaths and reduction of mud in high traffic areas can help reduce the incidence of lameness in some cases. It's also important to consult with your veterinarian to develop a strategy for your farm.

### Benefits of reduced lameness

Reducing lameness on your farm will assist to improve profitability. Lame cows will usually produce less milk and be culled sooner from the herd. Lameness will also result in additional costs of veterinary treatment. Most cases of lameness are foot associated and the rear feet are more commonly affected than the front.

Lameness in individual cows can have an impact on their reproductive performance, depending on the timing of the lameness episode relative to the mating period. The higher the incidence of lameness in the herd, the greater the potential impact this condition will have on the herd's overall reproductive performance.

### InCalf research identified the following reproductive impacts through lameness

Type of Lameness	Reproductive performance measure	Impact of lameness in an individual cow
Mild lameness - little interference with cow movement as defined by the farmer	6 week in calf rate	2 - 7 % decrease
Mild lameness	Not in calf rate	3 - 12% increase
Severe lameness - little weight carried, or cow movement severely affected	6 week in calf rate	6 - 17% decrease
Severe lameness	Not in calf rate	11-12% increase

So if the answer is Yes, and you would like assistance to reduce lameness on your farm, start by visiting the Dairy Australia website: [www.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au) and search for 'Lameness'.



## Gippsland farmers join ambassador program

By Stacey Alfred, GippsDairy

**Gippsland has recently gained two new Farmer Ambassadors for the dairy industry, Sarah Kelly and Ellie Field.**

Sarah and Ellie are also the current Chair and Deputy Chair respectively of the Gippsland Young Dairy Network, and they share a strong passion for dairy that began in very different ways.

As a sixth-generation dairy farmer, Sarah has farming in her blood. She was raised on the dairy farm that she now manages with her father in Skye, one of the closest dairy farms to metropolitan Melbourne with a herd size of over 250 cows.

In contrast, at 21 years of age, Ellie decided to travel around Australia. In order to work as she travelled, Ellie sought out farm jobs to learn some new skills that she could use around the country. Ellie ended up learning how to milk cows on a dairy farm in Heyfield and nine years later, she is the Herd Manager on a 520-cow farm in Tinamba.

Both Sarah and Ellie feel strongly about supporting young people to enter the industry and develop long-lasting careers.

Sarah recognises the need to share with the broader community the role that the dairy industry plays.

“Representation of what we do and why we do it is very important,” she says.

“I believe I am able to exemplify a positive future in dairy.”

Sarah hopes the ambassador program will help her gain the ability to understand and relate better to the public, and further develop her leadership skills.

Coming from a non-farming background, Ellie hopes to use her role as an ambassador to show others the pathways available to them within the industry.



Sarah and Ellie

“I feel like a lot of young people want to work with animals but don't know that this career exists,” she said.

“I hope to be able to spread the word on what a great industry we have – all the amazing families and people involved that live to produce such a great quality product.”

## AGRIBUSINESS

### International Market Insights

By John Droppert, Dairy Australia

**As new season farmgate milk prices soak up the attention in Australia, international dairy prices have been slowly gaining ground since bottoming out in August last year.**

It has been a bit of a Bradbury-style recovery, in the sense that global demand remains weak, but supply has contracted by relatively more, leading to higher prices.

Importers in key markets continue to operate with full warehouses, while economic pressures are dampening purchasing power and risk appetites. Rapid growth of Chinese milk production in recent years has put a significant dent in demand from the world's largest dairy importer. At the same time, milk production in each of New Zealand, Europe and the United States has contracted between 0.5 and 1 per cent since July last year. In addition, disruptions to ocean freight caused by Yemeni Houthi rebels attacking shipping in the Red Sea have blown out delivery schedules for product from Europe to Asian markets, leading to an uptick in demand for product from closer sources such as Australia and New Zealand.

Higher dairy commodity prices are always good news, and a rising market builds the potential for increases to farmgate prices, but the recent improvements should be considered in the context of a shaky global economy and impending New Zealand spring. It's likely that milk buyers will want to see some firmer signs before making decisions that they have to stick with until next June.





# Upcoming changes to How Now Gippy Cow

GippsDairy would like to inform you that, after 25 years, our monthly How Now Gippy Cow newsletter will be changing to a bi-monthly publication with six editions per calendar year. This change will take place after the July 2024 edition.

We will continue to strive to deliver a newsletter that is informative, timely, and relevant to Gippsland's dairying community.

## We value your input

If you have any feedback or suggestions for content you would like to see in future editions, please contact our Communications Coordinator Stacey Alfred at [stacey.alfred@gippsdairy.com.au](mailto:stacey.alfred@gippsdairy.com.au), or scan the QR code to complete our short feedback form.



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# Hoofing around Gippy town



DATE	TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
Monday 8 July 2024	11:00am-2:00pm	Young Dairy Network MID – Calf Rearing	Newry
Thursday 11 July 2024	11:00am-2:00pm	Young Dairy Network West Gippsland – Calf Rearing	Yannathan
Monday 15 July 2024	11:00am-2:00pm	Young Dairy Network South Gippsland – Calf Rearing	Foster
Monday 15 July 2024	12:00pm-1:30pm	Dairy Farm Business Analysis – Day 1 National	Online

## SAVE THE DATE

Wednesday 4 – Thursday 5 September 2024	South Gippsland Dairy and Farming Expo	Korumburra
Thursday 28 November 2024	Gippsland Women in Dairy Ladies Lunch	Morwell
Wednesday 12 February – Friday 14 February 2025	Australian Dairy Conference 2025	Gold Coast
Wednesday 12 March – Thursday 13 March 2025	Herd '25	Bendigo

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## Upcoming events

To view and register for any of our upcoming events, visit the GippsDairy events calendar:

<https://bit.ly/GippsDairyEventsCalendar>  
or scan the QR Code.



## Hay and Grain reports

Scan the QR codes or visit the Industry Statistics page of the Dairy Australia website to view the most recent hay and grain figures.

### Hay Report



### Grain Report



Contact us 

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