

Subtropical Dairy

Annual Report 2004-2005

Malanda



Kempsey

Subtropical Dairy Program Ltd

Annual Report 2004-2005

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For more information about Subtropical Dairy contact the Program Manager

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Whole Farm Management - Vacant

Annual Forum in Central Qld



Subtropical Dairy Project Manager Philip Chamberlain at the annual forum in Rockhampton with John Miller, DPI&F



Central Queensland farmer John Keleher discusses pasture management with Casino farmer and Subtropical Dairy Board member Terry Toohey



Subtropical Dairy Program Ltd

Projects Budget 2004-05 (\$ x 1,000)

	Subtropical Dairy	Other contributions
1. FEED SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT		
DAQ10785 Mutdapilly Farmlets	100	840 (DPI&F)
DAQ11004 Contribution to Protein Plus	15	63 (DPIs & Processors)
2. NATURAL RESOURCES		
Dairying Better n Better II Extension	20	200 (CMAs, EPA)
NRM Coordinator	25	80 (QDO, DAFF)
3. WHOLE FARM MANAGEMENT		
Dairy Moving Forward	3	31 (DA)
4. HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT		
SDP003 SRT Development		Included in program conduct
REC001 Monitoring & Evaln		Included in program conduct
SDSP008 Annual Forum		Included in program conduct
5. ANIMAL MANAGEMENT		
Tick/Fly control extn	13	20 (DPI&F)
Tick-fungal control (Turner)	5	150 (DPI&F)
Tick genetic marker (Turner)	5	420 (CSIRO/UofQ/QDPI&F)
Heat Stress / reproduction project (Tranter)		9 (DA)
SD Funds to DA - extension of national projects	35.8	120 (DPIs, Processors)
6. PROGRAM CONDUCT		
SDP006 Program conduct		
Administration	18	16.4 (Processors & DPIs)
Program Leadership		
Board, TAG & Man Com	10.3	25 (Processors & DPIs)
Regional Groups	9	10 (Processors & DPIs)
Farmer representation	2	
Annual forum	24	21 (Processors & DPIs)
Monitoring & evaluation	16	61.3
		5 (Processors & DPIs)
Program Management	62.95	
Industry consultation & communication		
Annual report	3	
Contribution to national projects	8.3	2 (Processors & DPIs)
Newspaper/newsletter	18	2 (Processors & DPIs)
Dairyinfo.biz	40	69.3
		204 (DPI&F)
Project development	28	7 (Processors & DPIs)
Learning Skills & Development- (Small Projects)	50	289.5
		80 (Processors & DPIs)
Total	\$511,350	\$2,305,400
DA allocation to Subtropical Dairy 04/05		\$511,656
Total Project Value		\$2,816,750
Value adding on R&D funds	x 5.5 times	



Subtropical Dairy Program Ltd

Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended June 30, 2005 (on funds handled directly)

INCOME	\$	
SDP001 – Administration	69,899.09	
SDP003 – Sub Regional Teams	50,000.00	
SDP004 – Project Development	28,000.00	
SDP008 – Annual Forum	24,386.36	
REC001 (M & E)	16,000.00	
SDP I I055 - Dairyinfo.biz	103,200.00	
Program Management	62,950.00	
National Projects	18,299.18	
Dairying Better n Better I I	19,358.52	
NRM Coordinator	35,972.46	
Protein Project - UQ62A	13,750.00	
Dairy Moving Forward	31,493.42	
Sabah trade development project	8,691.59	
SDCA soil project (Condamine Alliance NRM Funding)	55,800.00	
SEQNR01 (SEQ NRM body funding)	60,000.00	
Total Income		<u>\$597,800.62</u>
EXPENDITURE		
SDP001 – Regional group expenses	11,819.97	
– Communication, Annual reports etc	20,240.00	
– Administration	18,189.18	
SDP003 – Small projects	23,777.25	
SDP004 – Project development	26,000.00	
SDP008 – Annual forum	23,301.11	
REC001 (M & E)	16,000.00	
SDP I I055 – Dairyinfo.biz	44,058.18	
Program management	52,996.00	
National projects	17,762.48	
Dairying Better n Better II	36,948.18	
NRM Coordinator	97,387.42	
AFFA targets		
Protein Project – UQ62A	4,329.83	
Dairy Moving Forward	34,043.36	
Sabah trade development project	8,689.15	
SDSC01	603.00	
SDNR02 (NRM project manager)	5,047.18	
SDCA soil project (Condamine Alliance NRM Funding)	19.09	
SEQNR01 (SEQ NRM body funding)		
SDCT01 (computer training)	52.57	
Total Expenditure		<u>\$441,263.95</u>
NET INCOME		<u>\$156,536.67</u>



If farms are profitable, dairying has a future

Chairman's Review

Shane Gittins



It is my wish that one year I will be able to start this report saying that we have had good widespread rain across our whole region. Once again this is not the case. While some of our regions have had reasonable rain, the weather conditions in other areas have deteriorated into one of the worst droughts in 140 years. The implications of this for our individual farming businesses do not need to be spelt out, nor the implications for our whole industry. Not only have we seen a continuing contraction in farm numbers, but also now we are seeing a contraction in our processing capacity. The long-term effects of this I believe will have an impact on the farm sector, limiting future growth and raising the costs of transporting milk when normal weather patterns return. One of the major issues being continually hammered is access to water and the price of water. If we do not have substantial rain across our region this summer and full

underground and surface reserves, severe restrictions on the use of water for agriculture will be put in place that will affect farmers long into the future. The filling of these water reserves this summer will give us breathing space to bring about some rational debate with government and the community. I believe that it is the business of Subtropical Dairy to ensure that our farmers have the skills and tools needed, or access to those skills, to run profitable and sustainable dairy enterprises and to meet the day to day challenges of running their business. The programs that Subtropical Dairy has put in place over the last 12 months coupled with past initiatives have worked towards the goal of giving our farmers the necessary skills to meet the challenges facing them. The work of Phil Chamberlain, Di Gresham and Bronwyn Fisher has to be commended. Over the last twelve months the second stage of Dairy Moving Forward, called Taking Stock, has been rolled out across the region. This one-on-one review of individual farm performance has many benefits with one of those being that we have identified the current issues facing farmers. The number one issue across our region is running a profitable business with adequate cashflow. A profitable farming businesses is essential to compete for labour, employ skilled professionals, compete for water, and enjoy a decent lifestyle. If dairying is profitable there is a future for the younger generation and the benefits that will flow on into the community. We continue our work to try to ensure a viable processing sector that has the ability to purchase our milk at a price that can ensure profitability. Currently farmers are in a quite good position with milk being sought by processors and good competition for supply. This must continue. Subtropical Dairy with the QDO, NSW Farmers Dairy Division and DIDCO have formed an alliance to bring together a strategic plan for our region that addresses issues arising across the whole industry. We must work towards ensuring that dairying in this region has a future. Over the last couple of years I have had the opportunity to visit and speak with farmers who seem to be very profitable, with well-run enterprises. There are lessons to be learned from these businesses which will help all farmers. I would like to thank all of those working within Subtropical Dairy and the Regional Groups for their commitment and hard work. A special thanks to Phil Chamberlain, Laurie Dunne and the Management Committee on supporting me and Subtropical Dairy in our endeavours.



Making effective use of seed funding

Program Manager

Philip Chamberlain

Like all other sectors of the dairy industry, Subtropical Dairy is in the process of adapting to the changing industry needs as well as funding shortages.

Traditionally, we have focused on the development and delivery of large research projects to produce outcomes that address the issues raised by the dairying community. Some of these projects have been extremely successful and we are now reaping the rewards of these initiatives. For example, some of the ryegrasses and other temperate grasses and legumes that are now in use have resulted from this type of long term research.

Although this has been a very resource hungry process and taken time to deliver results, the use of DRDC/DA money as seed funding to promote the development and funding of robust R&D projects by other organizations has made the most effective use of farmer levies.

Even though funding to Subtropical Dairy by Dairy Australia has reduced incrementally over the last five years, and further decreases are expected, Subtropical Dairy has been able to oversee projects to the value of more than three million dollars annually. Larger R&D projects that are funded now entirely by other organizations like government departments, universities, CSIRO, and milk processors, are also currently underway.

Many of these have resulted from Subtropical Dairy committing seed funding in response to farmer demand. For example, the current tick research projects developed in this way will provide long term practical solutions to the tick control dilemmas facing farmers. However the funding of large, long term research projects by the Regional Development Programs is becoming less viable. Demand is now greater for projects

that deliver prompt and appropriate information to help farmers adapt to changing economic, social, technical and compliance conditions in the short term.

In the last few years we have been focusing on this type of delivery with the development of projects such as:

- MilkBiz that has delivered business management training to farmers, especially those in expansion mode.
- Dairying Better n Better to assist farmers understand their NRM position and responsibilities
- Regular information delivery on current project results in the Northern Dairytimes and on the website dairyinfo.biz.
- The provision of simple decision support tools on dairyinfo.biz.
- Advice and assistance to receive on farm NRM grants.
- Field days on buffalo fly control programs that do not rely on the use of chemicals.
- The provision of one-on-one farm business assessment and advice on future direction through the Taking Stock process.
- Practical advice for farm systems decision making from the M5 project.
- Development programs for Regional Groups and assistance for individuals to attend conferences and tours of other regions.
- Protein Plu\$ that provides practical advice on nutritional and other aspects of producing high quality milk.
- Programs that provide practical advice on the technical aspect of mastitis control, reproduction, milk harvesting, and silage making.
- Advice on climate and weather, and how to access and use appropriate information.
- Development of Tropical Feed Libraries.
- Labour management workshops.
- Vaccination protocols.

Other projects are in the pipeline, and information will soon be available on:

- Lameness prevention and management
- Basic and advanced dairy cattle nutrition
- Heat stress and reproduction.
- Practical tools for tick and buffalo fly control
- Decision support tools from the M5 Farmllet Project.

In conclusion, Subtropical dairy has implemented and completed many successful and industry relevant R&D projects over the years, but these are proving to be very expensive and long term. The focus has changed to promote the prompt delivery of appropriate information and training programs that empower farming enterprises to adapt to changing conditions.



Project Reports

Human Resources Management

Technical Coordinator

Kate Roberts

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Participation is valued

Feedback from farmers in Subtropical Dairy regional groups indicates they value their participation with over 80 percent reporting they gain new ideas which are helpful to their business. More than 60 percent of members were involved in project management and almost 75 percent involved to some extent in research

Members suggested the process of identifying and prioritising research could be improved by:

- having more involvement by producers in the process
- allocating more funding towards research
- improving communication regarding research priorities
- better extension of existing research to producers

The Annual Forum was rated excellent by most participants with useful reports and valuable contact to learn from other farmers. Members seem to be invigorated and enthusiastic.

Developing research ideas

- Ask team members for ideas. The Far North Coast regional team asked each member to identify five areas about running or managing the farm that make it more productive or better run or an activity that would benefit all dairy farmers.
- Ask members to phone three dairy farmers for ideas who are not in the group For example, ask "What is worrying you?; What problems do you want researched?"
- Members who go away to other forums or dairy farming events bring back ideas
- The Subtropical Dairy survey of farmers every second year asks for research ideas and they are in the evaluation reports

How to involve members

- Ask for research ideas and then put those people in charge of progressing the idea with advisers
- Involve members in research by putting them in charge of projects
- Nominate people for jobs but with the intention of recognising them for their particular skill not just to spread the workload

Motivating members

- Talk to the other members
- Treat them like friends
- Build the skills and confidence of members

People are motivated by a range of factors including achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth. The motivational regime may need to be different for groups who have not met for a while. For these groups, there needs to be a period of reintroduction to Subtropical Dairy.

For example:

- First meeting: Explore again what people want out of their involvement
- Second meeting: Discuss what should be the next steps
- Third meeting: Develop a plan for the future, goals and objectives
- After that: Take some action

Building computer skills

Farmers have embraced a new opportunity to build their computer skills through a series of one day internet and email training workshops organised by Di Gresham, coordinator of the dairyinfo.biz website.

Approval for the project was received in May with plans for a total 19 workshops through Subtropical Dairy regions in Queensland and NSW.

The first 8 workshops held during the year attracted 64 participants, 75 percent female.

The program assumes participants have some computer familiarity and has been designed to take them beyond the basics. It endeavors to make browsing through their own computer and the internet an intuitive experience, providing enough skills to make people comfortable.

The need to manage your information in your computer and how to do that is reinforced.

Producers learn to access milk production and payment information from their processor and use tools such as Dairyinfo and how to find others sites.

It also covers issues such as viruses, security, connections, and internet banking.

Participants were asked before the workshop about their internet use and after the workshop about their intended future use of the internet.

Feedback from the first workshops rated them very informative, helping to build confidence in computer use and raising awareness of the possibilities of the internet.



David Kemp said CRC research at the University of Queensland clearly showed that farms with ultimo resistance could use amitraz products again in the future. Research is now looking at how many times an alternative treatment must be used before amitraz products including Amitik, Amitraz and Taktic can be used effectively.

Co-researcher Nick Jonsson said an important element of effective tick control on individual properties was knowing if there was resistance before deciding on the class of chemical to use for the season. Most farmers did not test for resistance and would know their status.

Resistance tests take eight weeks, but the researchers believe they can develop a precise 24 hour test within two years. A project is looking to develop rapid diagnostic tests for amitraz, synthetic pyrethroid and macrolytic lactone resistance.

Other current research into future effective controls of tick and buffalo fly includes:

- Further work to increase the efficacy of the TickGard vaccine and to reduce the number of vaccinations required.
- Identifying genetic markers for tick resistance in cattle and a rapid test for those markers.
- Continued work on a fungal biopesticide to control both ticks and buffalo flies.

Investigation of the potential role of essential oils in tick control. Subtropical Dairy is looking at developing an industry plan to provide dairy farmers with the most up-to-date information and recommendations about tick and buffalo fly control every season. A working group has been formed to progress the plan.

InCalf project delivering

InCalf is a major dairy industry research project which is now helping farmers examine the reproductive performance of their cattle to help improve bottom line profitability.

An InCalf Fertility Focus Report allows quick and easy access to a herd's reproductive performance and addresses three critical questions:

- What is the current reproductive status?
- What improvements are realistically achievable?
- What areas should be focused on?

Herd assessment pack tools can be downloaded from the internet site www.incalf.com.au to help explore specific management areas such as calving pattern, heifer rearing, body condition and nutrition, heat detection, AI practice, bull management and individual cow health.

Assistance in using the tools is available from InCalf-trained advisers in dairy regions.

The Fertility Focus Report provides standard measures of herd reproductive performance, allowing a comparison from year to year and with other herds to see what is achievable. This overcomes risks of using different software packages in trying to achieve a meaningful comparison.

Fertility Focus provides a herd-level summary report which is an ideal starting point for identifying management areas that require attention.

Heat affects conception

A detailed analysis of data from dairy farms on the Atherton Tablelands has revealed a significant link between heat stress and lower conception rates.

The investigation of the effects of heat and humidity started with farmer concern that a number of herds had conception rates below 30 percent during hot summer months.

Bill Tranter of Tableland Veterinary Service compiled a report for the North Queensland Regional Group on the research for the Subtropical Dairy annual forum. Scientific papers have also been prepared for submission to the Journal of Dairy Science.

The research involved breeding records from 26 Tablelands dairy herds. Data from automated weather stations was to compile a temperature humidity index. Two measures of heat load were defined for each day – the maximum index reading and the number of hours when the index was greater than 72.

Conception rates reduced when the daily maximum index rose above this level.

The research revealed the effects of heat stress can be cumulative with a moderate heat load over a longer period having a greater impact than a high heat load for a shorter period near time of service.

Chances of conception were affected by the heat load on days at least a month before service and up to two weeks afterwards.

Weather conditions in the week after service had the most depressing effect on conception, followed by conditions in the week before service.

Artificial insemination and natural service were equally susceptible to the effect of heat load, with a larger decline in conception rate in high producing cows.

Development of a web based real-time alert system for farmers could be a future option.



Regional team reports

NSW Mid North Coast

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Focus on feed supply

Improving feed supply has been a big focus in the past year with a series of on farm trials and demonstrations with maize, forage peanuts, oats, barley and triticale. Maize trials were held at three sites -- Taylor's Arm, Hyde's Creek and Crossmagle. Six maize and two sorghum varieties were replicated and statistically analysed. Measurements taken included plant density, dry matter, milk line score, crude protein, metabolizable energy and dry matter digestibility. Top crops yielded 26 to 27 tonnes of dry matter per hectare.

Forage peanuts

Trials with peanuts were sown at three sites -- Taylor's Arm, Moonebah and Hyde's Creek. They grew well at Taylor's Arm and Moonebah but poor establishment was recorded at Hyde's Creek. Dry matter testing is ongoing and performance will be monitored over the next two years as a possible dry run feed. Oat, barley and triticale demonstrations were established at

multiple sites across the region. Oats performed well, but barley was not encouraging and triticale results were variable.

Buffalo fly trap

A trap purchased in conjunction with Norco and installed in Spring 2004 on a farm at Hyde's Creek. Buffalo fly are a problem during warmer months from November to April and while the trap was showing promise it needs realigning to stop sunlight entering.

New generation forum

The initiative to hold an annual forum for young farmers continues to go from strength to strength. This year 120 delegates attended, about double the previous year. They travelled from as far as Western Australia, and throughout NSW with southeast Queensland well represented. The forum was well supported in sponsorship with 16 trade exhibitors contributing about \$15,000.

NSW Far North Coast

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Regional team reports

Soil health under scrutiny

A range of issues affecting soil health in the region are being addressed in a project launched with a successful workshop in June 2005. A range of presenters from NSW DPI covered aspects such as soil science and chemistry and two follow-up workshops are planned in the coming year.

Issues addressed include:

- Characteristics of a healthy soil.
- How nitrogen, phosphorous and carbon store and cycle in the soil.
- How nutrient budgets can be used to ensure that sufficient nutrients are supplied.
- How farmers monitor their soil health and determine the effectiveness of non-conventional products.

Establishing ryegrass

A project has also begun looking at the critical factors in oversowing rye in tropical pastures. With failures not uncommon in over sowing, the aim is to determine how to successfully establish ryegrass in Kikuyu, Rhodes and Setaria. Trials were carried out on 8 participating farms from the upper

to lower Richmond on various soil types with 15 paddocks monitored and a glasshouse study conducted.

Among the key findings:

- Tetraploids established easier and quicker than the diploids.
- Sowing depth and mulch height were critical.
- Sowing depth below 3 cm gave a much lower establishment as did a mulch height above 5 cm.

Maize for silage

The Richmond valley average yield is 18 tonnes of dry matter per hectare compared to the Lockyer Valley which averages 25 tonnes. Water is a limiting factor to achieving higher yields.

Interest in composting

A proposed collaborative project with National Landcare and Southern Cross University will compare heat composting with vermicomposting using dairy manure on a local farm. Several members are involved in a three year trial with a company that commercially composts green waste in the Ballina area. The company also specialises in soil enhancers which are applied as liquid fertiliser.



Darling Downs

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Regional team reports

Lack of funds threaten legume research

The Downs region has been in almost continual drought since 1991 and a good wet season is well overdue. Some areas had less than 300 mm of rain for the year, with half that falling in June-July. There was a good summer crop planting, but with little or no follow-up rain crops did not reach their full potential. Regional team meetings were addressed by David Lloyd of the DPI and Ross Walker who spoke on the Mutdapilly M5 Project. David has been working on the development of new pasture legumes Serradella Sulla and Burgundy beans with trial plots on David Vonhoff's property near Oakey. Some of this research may not continue if further funding cannot be found and the Downs group has recommended that the Subtropical Dairy management committee investigate how funding support may be obtained.

A labour management workshop was held over 3 days in April-May led by Rod Strachan of Jabiru Human Resources. Feedback

from those attending rated it highly. A feed sampling project was completed during the year with about 60 samples tested. Samples analyses have been added to the Feeds Plus database at Mutdapilly. This is an extremely good resource for the industry. A new project application was approved to hold two climate workshops at Toowoomba and Warwick in November with Katrina Sinclair from NSW Agriculture and Dave McRae from QDPI as presenters. The regional team is investigating the potential to use by-products from the new ethanol plant to be built near Dalby. An internet search into environmentally friendly vermin control systems was also conducted to scare pests such as birds and ducks. Among future challenges for the Downs region is the need to focus on the issue of succession planning with a number of older farmers due to retire in the next few years..

Burnett

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Regional team reports

Meeting farmers' needs

Members are dedicated to keeping a local presence and organizing workshops, information days and training to meet the needs of Burnett farmers. The weather has, in general, been a little kinder in the past year. Most farmers have been able to grow moderately yielding winter crops. Farmer numbers slowly but steadily fell in the Burnett during 1904-05. Sadly many were progressive, informed farmers that the industry could ill afford to lose. Large asset replacement costs loom and are difficult to fund at current payment levels.

Increasing land values

Another impact on local farms is increasing land values. In the Tansey area, for example, values are in the order of \$1500 per acre for pretty ordinary grazing country and \$3000 to \$4000 for good cultivation. This makes it financially unviable to buy local farms to expand production.

Future projects

Projects planned for the next twelve months include:-

- Information Day -- firstly presenting elements of Taking Stock, processor feedback re future requirements , industry issues etc. Secondly to present solutions that farmers have come up with to make life easier and save time.
- PMAV'S. Following the popular information day last year on Veg Management, groups of farmers who wish to organise their own PMAV's will be assisted with a facilitator to guide them through the process.
- Technology Days. It is planned to provide information on latest technology available including real-time satellite imagery and ways in which this can benefit farmers on an individual basis.
- Succession planning This is a very popular topic and periodic revisiting is beneficial.
- Computer Training Included in this will hopefully be an opportunity for rural software producers to display and explain their products.



Project Reports

Whole Farm Management

Technical Coordinator
Position vacant

Portfolio objectives

1. Change the culture of the dairy community to one of a systems approach to decision making on farm.
2. Identify and develop guidelines, decision support tools and demonstrate models that enable farmers to make effective whole farm management decisions.
3. Make available and continually improve decision support tools, information and learning packages to enhance business decisions.
4. Build the capacity of farm owners, managers and employees, to enable them to adopt appropriate strategies to effectively manage their business as an integrated system.

Taking Stock of business

Taking Stock is a national program designed to help farmers get an overview of their business enterprise through free, confidential one-on-one consultations. A key objective is to gain an understanding of their current position. Through discussion and analysis, issues and opportunities are identified. Then the process of addressing them begins. A Taking Stock Action Plan identifying the issues, actions and resources required specifically for that farm business is completed. Follow-up client management takes place within four weeks to gauge the level of action taken. A longer-term sense of adviser and service provider support is developed.

Project Reports

Animal Management

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Chemical shows potential

A chemical used for lice control on sheep is showing potential for tick and buffalo fly control on dairy cattle.

Debt and financing costs have been highlighted in a large number of Taking Stock visits, often short-term debt as a result of drought, or long-term debt from investments during good years. Taking Stock assists farmers to understand their current debt and financing position, identify options for better managing their liabilities and discuss these options with their financiers. Feedback from Taking Stock shows that business management and information and communication are really important. In Queensland there are 19 trained program deliverers and 18 in NSW, a mix of independent consultants, processor staff and government officers.

Key issues identified

- Cash flow & profitability
- Fodder production
- Fertiliser use & planning
- Grain & Concentrate Feeding
- Pasture production & utilisation

Most contracts have been renewed with industry bodies to deliver Taking Stock until June 2006.

Milk Biz rolling out

Development of the farm management training program Milk Biz has proceeded well in the past year with initial training of service providers complete and farmer contact occurring. Milk Biz is improving farmers' awareness of the need to improve business management skills, and has for some, empowered them to make better management decisions. Continuation of MilkBiz will utilize DMF funding through QDPI&F and NSW DPI – to continue momentum of the process that will empower farmers to manage their business better. This will also be coordinated with the M5 extension process and Nutrition Plus.

The positive news in the on-going battle was provided at the Subtropical Dairy annual forum in a special session devoted to updating tick and buffalo fly control for producers. CSIRO researcher David Kemp told the forum the chemical produced bacteria and registered for use on sheep was currently being trialed as a potential spray for dairy cattle. The product Spinosad appears not to be absorbed and to be suitable for milking stock.

It has proved very effective against buffalo fly and provided 85 to 90 percent control of ticks. Alternated with an amitraz product, it could be an effective part of an economical treatment program. The forum heard that for the first time researchers have shown that using acaricides in rotation can help avoid resistance. This could allow products that farmers been forced abandoned to be used again.



Some key findings:

- Profitable farming systems can be developed.
- Intensive systems reliant on raingrown tropical pastures within low rainfall environments are unlikely to be profitable.
- Maximise home grown forage.
- Exploit payment system.
- Rate of expansion is critical.
- Systems need to match natural resources of the farm and payment system.
- Flexibility of systems important to adjust for season and available water.
- All farmlets met milk production targets ranging from 6400L – 9500 litres per cow.
- Single cut forages have better WUE than grazed forages
- High forage yields achieved - 30t dm/ha

Warm season legumes

This project due to be completed in June 2006 aims to measure the contribution to farm productivity of established legume pasture on dairy farms in north and southeast Queensland and northern NSW

It is designed to improve seed viability and sustainability of pasture legumes, as well as to reduce nitrogen fertilization and cost of milk production.

It is examining the relationship between the proportion of Aracharis and other tropical species in the summer and winter components of a dairy production system and monitoring the environmental impacts of the 2 pasture systems.

The farm and research information is being used to develop an extension program to highlight successful production systems Some findings:

- Milk production similar for grass N and Amarillo/ grass pastures
- Slightly lower soil pH and higher soil nitrate in grass N pasture
- Direct drilling best establishment method
- Rye grass can be successfully sown into Amarillo/ grass pasture
- Estimated 50 farmers have planted Amarillo
- Technical reference manual and farmer reference manual available
- Case studies have been documented

Focus on nutrition

As farms increase in size nutrition is becoming very critical. Larger farmers are seeking out information on

supplementation from private consultants and directly from DPI&F staff. TopFodder has been very successful in the last year in reaching a lot of service providers and farmers and will improve silage quality over the next year.

There has been a general increase in awareness of the importance of nutrition and feeding systems knowledge and feed risk management and this has led to the development of the program Nutrition Plu\$ over three years from January 2006. The objectives include improved financial efficiency of dairy farms in the SDP region through increased basic nutritional knowledge and problem solving skills and increased efficiency of feed conversion and production per cow. Basic nutrition courses will be offered with a one day follow-up session, written extension material and a two day advanced nutrition course. It is aimed to target 100 to 120 farmers a year and service providers.

Protein Plu\$ project

This project which aims to increase summer milk protein levels by 0.15% units includes Subtropical Dairy regions in Queensland and northern NSW as well as Western Australia. Protein Plu\$ is reaching farmers and service providers and the main message is to get the nutrition right. Farmers are becoming much more aware of the effects of nutrition and the need for optimum nutrition to remain profitable.

Work on the three-year project has involved seven intervention farms in Queensland and two in NSW with monitoring since October 2003 and interventions recommended in April 2004 by an expert panel. Most farms recorded higher summer milk protein in the 04/05 summer period compared to previous years The expert panel also visited an additional 17 farms and made specific recommendations.

Training for advisers, farmers

Three courses designed to update dairy advisers were conducted at which 31 advisers attended. Over 100 farmers have attended a series of field days throughout the regions with plans to conduct more.

There has also been keen interest in running Protein Plu\$ training for farmers in a discussion group format with introductory sessions for three groups held.

A manual of the main factors affecting milk protein has been compiled, primarily based on nutritional principles On-farm management practices affecting milk protein have been identified and solutions offered for improving milk protein percentage



South East Qld

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Regional team reports

Valuable nutrients in effluent

In response to a lack of knowledge on the nutrient content of effluent ponds, a reliable data base was established to take out the guess work. This has also helped raise farmer awareness that effluent irrigation provides a valuable nutrient source for pastures.

Another project completed during the year involved the compilation of a data base on the feed value of by-products used by dairy farmers in the region.

The SEQ group were also very active in the buffalo fly project.

New projects

A range of ideas have been put forward for new projects including an examination of mycotoxins which might affect milk as a result of animals eating mouldy feed.

Works needs to be done on which crops or by-products could pose a risk, the effect on milk production and health implications.

Healthy soils workshop

This project has been suggested from farmer feedback to help producers develop a better understanding of the keys to developing healthy soil and how to maintain soil health.

Central Qld

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Regional team reports

Annual Forum a highlight

There are currently 61 dairy farms in the region producing an average 40-41 million litres. All milk is supplied to Rockhampton factory. It comes from Eungella, four and a half hours travel north, to Biggenden three hours south, and to Monto, two and a half hours inland.

The majority of product is liquid milk with some cream. Producers still operate with a milk quota system that is owned and administered by the Port Curtis Supply Co-operative. About 25 percent of farms are predominately dry land with the remainder having at least partial irrigation. Feed sources are essentially grain sorghum, whole cottonseed and molasses.

A highlight for the central region this year was playing host to the 2005 Subtropical Dairy annual forum in October. A special Forum session on cattle ticks proved very successful.

As part of the event, two properties with contrasting farming systems were visited.

Bradley and Beth, Steven and Fiona Jepson, Barmoya, dry farm 415 hectares. Original vegetation was standing scrub and spear grass. Pasture development involved clearing and sowing with Rhodes grass, corn and pumpkins. Better scrub soil is sown to Rhodes grass and green panic. Poned pastures contain pangola,

parrot grass and hymenache. They run 200 head of cattle, including about 100 milkers.

The second farm visited belonged to John and Chris Keleher, Milman. The property is 440 hectares with 112 hectares under centre pivots. They had 28 hectares under semi-permanent pasture with 84 hectares planted to either cash crops, grain or silage crops depending on requirements.

The milking herd, wet and dry, is 170 head with production peaking at 24.7 litres a cow a day.

National projects

Farmers in the Central region have been involved with several on-going national projects during the past year including Topfodder, Milk Business, Protein Plu\$ and Dairying Moving Forward.

At the local level there has been a focus on computer skills development, encouraging young producers and combating cattle ticks.

Nutritional courses are on the agenda as is an evaluation of the potential of leucaena.



North Qld
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Regional team reports

Tropical Dairy Training Hub

The establishment a Tropical Dairy Training Hub in the far north was just one of many initiatives during a busy year for the regional team on the Atherton Tableland.

A workshop was staged in March 2005 to progress the concept of tropical dairy training as an export strategy for the region. With significant commitments made by other parties, a working group was established to pursue the concept.

Livestock identification

A dairy specific NLIS workshop was staged in April looking at various scenarios, including the use of the animal ID system as a management tool. There were practical demonstrations of the technology.

Dairying Better 'n' Better

A group of farmers have been meeting regularly under the Dairying Better 'n' Better program looking at a range of on-farm issues from disposal of effluent to boom spray use and soil nutrient levels.

Wet soils project

The aim of this project is to evaluate the effects of fertilising under different weather conditions to achieve optimum benefits.

It includes a literature review and will determine whether nitrogen loss is excessive during wet periods. The outcome will be knowing when to apply or not apply fertiliser.

Pasture and soil sampling

Work has continued to determine the nutrient level of soils in the region. Sample results will be discussed, with an emphasis on the benefits of lime.

Pasture samples are being collected and sent for analysis to help predict and understand the feed values of tropical pastures.

Information gathered will form a tropical pasture library.

Grow Malanda

This joint initiative looking to future options for dairying in the region has continued with the development of the Profit through Protein project proposal which was approved in March 2005.

Heat affecting conception rates

In response to farmer concerns, a research project was launched to study this issue. A paper was presented at the Subtropical Dairy annual forum and findings are discussed in the Animal Management section of this report.

Core Project Reports

Natural Resource Management
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Portfolio Objectives

1. Develop regionally defined and nationally consistent targets for natural resource management, to be achieved by 2010.
2. Define better management NRM practices that improve environmental and economic sustainability.

3. Facilitate the development and uptake of products and packages that enhance farmers' ability to improve resource management practices and productivity.
4. To make significant and continual progress, measured annually, towards regional targets that are nationally consistent.

NRM attracts funding

Natural Resource activities and projects in the Subtropical Dairy region have successfully attracted a total investment of more than \$3 million. This excludes the Queensland Rural Water Use Efficiency Program and riparian projects. NRM co-ordinator has been joined by Roslyn Arthy in Queensland and Jess Jennings in NSW.



Many farmers are now more aware of opportunities for them to participate in NRM, and feeling a sense of ownership of the regional NRM plans, because they took considerable time providing comments into the draft plans.

Farmers are also becoming increasingly aware of funding available for environmental purposes that they can utilise for improved management practices on-farm. Enthusiasm has also been created for the roll-out of Dairying Better N Better for Tomorrow – with the only limitation being the lack of resources to support the roll-out.

The program tackles a diverse range of on-farm issues from effluent management and water use efficiency to energy savings, chemical use, pest and weed control and riparian zone management.

A Dairy Self Assessment Tool originally developed at Gippsland in Victoria is used by farmers to help them identify their own property priorities for natural resource management. Farmers set their own goals and are encouraged to learn from the experience of their neighbours in small group meetings.

Need for external communication

Promotion of the NRM projects is largely concentrated on internal-industry communications. More time and resources need to be put into highlighting and promoting the program to external stakeholders, particularly regional NRM groups, Landcare and other community groups and Government agencies. Obtaining stakeholder support and then coordinating and working through Government negotiations for Dairying better

for Tomorrow is a priority to ensure that the program has credibility and support.

NRM achievements

- Targets for Change pilot was implemented in the Bremer catchment.
- Piloted the National DairySAT in Kerry and on the Atherton Tablelands.
- Conducted a pilot of Dairying Better 'n' Better for Tomorrow in many sites.
- Negotiated four contracts for the rollout of this program through the region.
- Negotiated the Dairying Better 'n' Better Plus program with NSW Agriculture.
- Supported the implementation of the DA-QDPI&F Riparian Management project through steering committee membership.
- Acted as secretary for the implementation of the Rural water Use Efficiency Initiative II project.
- Coordinated dairy farmer input into draft regional planning documents and project proposals, submitted numerous funding applications on behalf of the industry to support the extension and adoption of better management practices.
- Supported the submission of more than 40 funding applications to support the implementation of on-farm environmental works.
- SEQ Nutrient composition of dairy effluent.
- Dairy Sat Qld is now complete and being used.

Project Reports

Feed Systems Management
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Project objectives

- Identify and encourage adoption of practices to improve sustainability of feed systems.
- Improve the development and availability of more efficient grasses, legumes and crops.
- Improve the availability and efficient use of supplements within feed systems.

- Facilitate the development and uptake of extension products and packages that enhance farmers' ability to improve the sustainability of feed systems.

Farming systems research

The M5 farming systems project at Mutdapilly is testing the feasibility and profitability of different farming systems in order to be able to give the best advice for each farm, to be able to utilise resources most effectively.

The physical models of future farming systems provide an interactive learning environment for farmers and advisors. Extension programs are now in place and the project is generating decision support aids that farmers find useful in developing profitable and sustainable farming systems.