

AUTOMATED DAIRY FARMING

Dennis and Ros Galt, with sons Darren and Ashley

Dairy farmers, Shepparton East

Take home messages

- **Investing in technology is investing in people**
- **We feel proud about where we work**
- **Keep it simple, keep it modern and use the latest technology**

With two sons keen to come home to the family dairy farm, Dennis and Ros Galt have put a plan in place to make it all possible. With the belief that by pooling their resources and labour they could achieve this dream, the Galts have been through times of purchasing more land and more cows, building a bigger shed and creating more cashflow to build and develop a successful dairy farming business focussed on people. The business now showcases an array of modern technologies. This is their story.

The people

Dennis & Ros Galt dairy farm with their sons Darren and Ashley, at Shepparton East on what was Dennis father's original property. Darren has been home farming for the past twelve years while Ashley has been involved in the business for the past eight years. They all work together as a team and as part of a successful family dairy farming business.

The farm system

The property is 100% lasered and is made up of 102 effective grazing ha of mostly perennial pasture. There are 13 ha for the calves on the home farm while the heifers are kept off farm. The soil type is predominantly Shepparton East fine sandy loam and last season 12.6 tonnes DM pasture/ha was harvested.

The herd

While the herd is predominantly Friesian now, twenty years ago the Galts started crossbreeding their herd. This season the Galts are milking 400 spring-calving cows and will aim to produce 108,000 kg fat and 86,000 kg protein (485 kg milk solids/cow/year) from a pasture-based system. Feeding grain to the herd initially started in 1984 and last season 1.2 tonnes DM grain per cow was used. An additional 400 tonnes DM of hay and silage was also purchased and fed to the milkers last season.

The dairy

Spending nine hours a day milking 250 cows through an 8-aside double up was a good enough reason to build a new dairy for Dennis and Ros. Dennis recalls that the first milking in the rotary was quicker than the last in the 8 aside double up! The new 50 bail rotary went in in 1998 and today milking takes about an hour and fifteen minutes from cups on to cups off. The installation of automatic cup removers in 2004 has also facilitated this.

The Galts prefer to have two people milking in the dairy. Milkings are shared amongst Dennis, Ros, Darren and Ashley so that everyone in the business enjoys some mornings not having to get up to milk.

The job of picking up cows on heat is made easier by the addition of electronic identification and pedometers five years ago. This has been a labour saving in itself, as no one needs to be down the paddock visually checking the cows at different times of day. While it took a bit of getting used to initially, the Galts now trust the computer to detect the cows on heat as it seems to pick up more cows than you would expect. The automatic drafting system allows cows on heat to be drafted off and automatically weighed if needed. An automatic teat sprayer is next on the wish list for the dairy.

Automatic irrigation

When lasering the farm began in 1983, so began the installation of the automatic irrigation system. Automatic timers with clocks are set on channel stops that regulate the height of the water in the channel. The bay outlets are sills, which are set at different heights along the length of the channel. When irrigating, as one bay finishes, the next channel stop opens to allow the channel level to fall and letting water to flow out onto the next bay. The water level is dropped just enough so that no water flows out onto the first bay watered.



Channel stops with timers are used to regulate the height of the water

100% of the farm now has automatic irrigation installed and it takes four to five hours to water the bays. Other than that the job of watering the farm really only involves setting up the different sections to be watered, setting the wheel going, opening the doors and shutting down afterwards.

The thinking behind automating the irrigation system was to take the drudgery out of irrigating, to have a flexible system so that anyone can irrigate and to eliminate getting up in the middle of the night. The Galts now never have to get up in the middle of the night. The best piece of advice the Galts would give someone who is thinking about automating their irrigation system is to do your homework and look at different systems that other people have already put in and learn from them. You might be sick of looking at different systems by the end of it, but it will pay off in the end.

Automatic calf feeders

To help with the rearing of 120 calves each year, four DeLaval automatic calf feeding units were installed in 2005. Two of the four units need to be used just to train the newly born calves to drink. But once they are trained they tend to look after themselves. A benefit of the system is the option to adjust milk intakes and concentrates. While it still takes time to train the calves onto the automatic calf feeder, the units have paid for themselves many times over by producing well-grown and even calves.

The future

Spend some time on the Galt's farm and you will be impressed. They are very proud of where they work and have invested in the latest technologies to create a spectacular workplace. In the future, the Galts aim to continue to make it easier on themselves, enjoy a good lifestyle, produce more and build a quality herd. The dairy farming journey for the Galt family continues. Eventually Dennis and Ros would like to step back and see the boys step up in the business.



Dennis, Ashley and Darren Galt