

3030 Farmlets do it again at DemoDairy!

How does a Return on Asset of over 20% in dairying appeal to you? The 3030 Farmlets at Demodairy in SW Victoria have returned very good profits in the 2007/06 season, backing up the “healthy” profits in 2005/06 and 2006/07 achieved despite severe pasture growing conditions.

One farmlet, Ryegrass Max, based solely on ryegrass, is being managed to maximise pasture growth and utilisation. The other farmlet, Complementary Forages is also based on ryegrass but also includes some area under tall fescue and winter/summer cropping (forage cereals/brassicas to date).

The 2007 rainfall (RF) at Terang averaged 780 mm RF (784 mm long term average) compared to 705 mm for 2005 (late break) and 465 mm for 2006 (drought). The 2007 autumn RF was below average (after a well above average January rain) and well below in October but well above in November and December. Increasingly, when and how much rain is received is becoming much more important in recent (and probably future) years than the annual total rainfall.

The Project 3030 farmlets at DemoDAIRY returned operating profits in the top 1 - 2% of profit for farms in SW Victoria over the 2005/06 and 2006/07 difficult seasons. Profit was between \$1,020 and \$1,320 per hectare (compared to about \$760 for ‘top 10%’ farms), and return on assets was 6.1 – 8.2% (compared to 5% for ‘top 10%’ farms).

However, now with a reasonable 2007/08 season under their belts, and receiving high milk prices, these 3030 Farmlets have returned between 22 – 24% return on assets and operating profits of \$4387 and \$5049/ha. The data for the top 10% farms is not yet available but should be for the upcoming Project 3030 Field Day on 20th. May at Demodairy.

How has the Project team achieved these results – even in tough seasons? There were no silver bullets, just putting many things into practice when and where required.

From the 3030 Farmlet performances, farmers can be assured that many have the potential to increase the productivity and profitability on their farms from ryegrass alone. There are further improvements available by introducing cropping and pasture species which add to “shoulder” feed as being achieved on the Complementary Forage Farmlet, a work in progress to examine the effect of season and risk on their long term feasibility.

“Pasture and grazing management plays a major part” said project leader Prof. David Chapman of the University of Melbourne. He says “Three principles adopted at the beginning of the trial in 2005 are particularly relevant to explaining the pasture and profit story”.

These are:

1. **Maintain pastures in a productive state throughout the year.** This was achieved by grazing as close as possible to 2.5 - 3-leaf stage and leaving 5 cm (1500-1600 kg DM/ha) behind. The farmlet grazing management principles align closely with the principles used in Feeding Pastures for Profit (FPFP).
2. **Use pasture first and maximize its consumption.** This can be achieved by adjusting Nitrogenous fertilizer, rotation length, and areas conserved for silage. Certainly use concentrates

but ensure that all pasture offered is consumed and leaving the correct residual. However, regularly check whether an extra kilogram of concentrate is being converted to milk or is resulting in excessive residuals (i.e. substituted for pasture).

3. Make decisions and take actions at the right time for maximizing forage utilisation on the farm. Not always easy, especially if relying on others or the weather, and the Farmlet management was not perfect. But, as an example, despite pasture growth stopping at the end of October in 2007, the same amount of silage as would be expected for an 'average' year was conserved on the Farmlets because paddocks were nominated for silage at least a month earlier than normal due to management to improve spring growth. Silage quality was excellent (12 MJ ME) producing extra milk when fed.

The 3030 research has been very important in highlighting the importance of pastures in profitable feeding systems and also the opportunities to use other forages to progress beyond what ryegrass can do. A Field Day is to be held at DemoDairy, Terang, on 20th May, 10.15 am – ~2.30 pm. Further details, Contact Frank Mickan,, DPI, Ellinbank, 03 5624 2259