

Consultation playback

Dairy Australia Annual Investment Plan 2026-27

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Introduction

This report provides a clear playback on Dairy Australia's Annual Investment Plan (AIP) consultation, which was undertaken in March 2026.

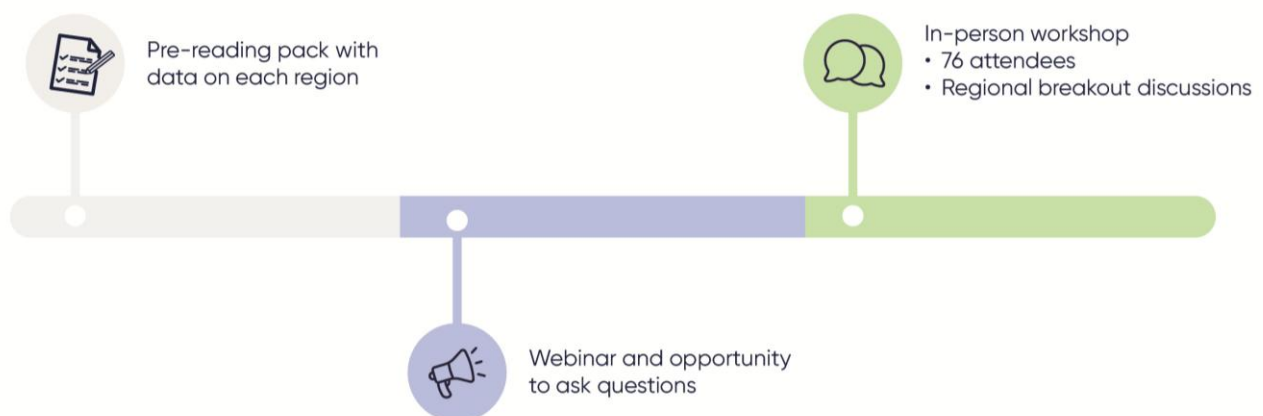
What this report aims to achieve:

- Summarise the key themes raised by the farmers and industry representatives who were consulted.
- Outline how these themes informed Dairy Australia's strategic investment priorities for financial year 2026-27 (FY27).
- Close the loop by connecting industry input with regional priorities and Dairy Australia's key investments when it comes to achieving industry goals.

For more detail on Dairy Australia's key investments for FY27, please refer to the Annual Investment Plan available on the Dairy Australia website.

The consultation process

Consultation on the FY27 Annual Investment Plan gathered informed input from farmers and key industry stakeholders on Dairy Australia's proposed investment priorities.



Feedback

The consultation process identified the need to strengthen how Dairy Australia closes the loop with participants. This report has been developed in response to that feedback.

As this is the first time we've produced a consultation playback report for the AIP, we welcome further feedback so that we can improve the process next year.

Thankyou

The Dairy Australia team would like to thank everyone who contributed to the AIP consultation, whether directly or indirectly. Your input is valuable and helps us to better understand your views on challenges, opportunities and priorities so that we can work alongside you to shape a strong future for Australian dairy.

What we heard - National themes

Industry goal: Return on total assets (ROTA) and profitability

Theme	Strategic Priority	Investment
Keep profitability central by strengthening whole-farm systems thinking, financial literacy, and focus on the key drivers of performance. Make data capture and benchmarking easier to use and act on, and leverage technology and artificial intelligence to turn data into timely, practical decisions.	1.1 - Uplifting farm business performance	- Expand Dairy Farm Monitor Program (DFMP) sample size to support data-driven decision making and benchmarking insights. - Improve the DairyBase user experience. - Increase farm business delivery focus on cash, profit and wealth. - Enhance the Dairy Farm Business Analysis program. - Detailed analysis of the key features associated with top performing profitable farms using longitudinal DFMP data. - Evidence-based insight into intensive dairy farm systems profit metrics.
Invest in leadership, people management and workforce skills, and build clear pathways into management and ownership.	1.3 – Creating pathways for people	- Progress the Dairy Capability Guide. - Redevelop Dairy Australia’s Industry People strategy.
Support practice change, not just understanding, by tailoring extension to region and performance, using peer learning and trusted independent advisers, especially for lower performing farms.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations	Regional extension and engagement that supports practical, regionally relevant delivery of key messages, peer learning and trusted adviser networks to drive practice change on farm. Supporting farmers ‘beyond the workshop’ by connecting them to further information, key contacts, and each other.
Build resilience by helping farmers manage climate, water and energy risks, and strengthen industry confidence by clearly communicating dairy’s economic and community value.	2.3 – Adapting to a changing operating environment 3.3 – Driving community trust and support	- Deliver DairyFeedbase research, to support better pasture growth, more efficient fertiliser use, stronger soil health and more resilient feedbase options. - Initiate 12 new research projects with researchers across Australia to improve pasture growth, utilisation and feed quality, supporting more productive and resilient feedbase systems. - Drive feed innovation through supporting further adoption of the Forage Value Index. - Develop a soil health framework and benchmarking approach to support sustainable soil management, informed.

Industry goal: Feedbase productivity

Theme	Strategic Priority	Investment
Improve pasture management and feedbase efficiency to lift feed productivity while controlling costs and managing climate risk. Tailor support and tools to regional conditions and different production systems so farmers can apply guidance with confidence. Build technical and business skills through applied learning and independent advice, and prioritise practical capability that directly improves feed outcomes. Strengthen workforce pathways and business resilience with simple, regionally relevant support that helps farmers build feed reserves and manage risk.	2.1 – Building feedbase productivity 1.2 – Enhancing farm operations	Deliver Dairy Feedbase research, to support better pasture growth, more efficient fertiliser use, stronger soil health and more resilient feedbase options. Initiate 12 new research projects with researchers across Australia to improve pasture growth, utilisation and feed quality, supporting more productive and resilient feedbase systems. Drive feed innovation through supporting further adoption of the Forage Value Index. Develop a soil health framework and benchmarking approach to support sustainable soil management, informed decision-making, and resilient, profitable production systems. Improve knowledge on the benefits of virtual fencing for pasture management. Refresh extension materials for Feeding Pastures for Profit and Top Fodder. Deliver extension programs such as Pasture Fundamentals and Irrigation Management.

Industry goal: Herd productivity

Theme	Strategic Priority	Investment
Improve system design, grazing and feed management, and stocking decisions to lift herd productivity while managing costs and climate risk. Provide simple, trusted and timely data and tools that help farmers make better breeding, feeding and herd decisions without adding complexity. Design programs, benchmarks and advice around regional conditions so support stays credible and useful. Strengthen technical and financial skills through applied learning, research translation and independent advice so farmers can implement profitable practice change. Keep profitability central and broaden participation by using peer learning and practical engagement approaches that reach less-involved farmers.	2.2 – Building herd productivity 1.2 – Enhancing farm operations	- Continue to focus on genetics by increasing use of the Balanced Performance Index and initiating the new Australian Breeding Values Predictive Powers project. - Implement the next phase of Dairy Up research, focusing on mastitis and pinkeye. - Redevelop extension materials on nutrition, mastitis, heifer management and reproduction programs including InCalf, Countdown, Better Heifers and Advanced Nutrition in Action. - Investigate which disinfectants are effective against avian influenza - H5N1.

Industry goal: Supporting herd longevity and other sustainable practices

Theme	Strategic Priority	Investment
Increase focus on herd management practices. Lift lifetime herd productivity by improving fertility, nutrition and young-stock management and by matching cow type and genetics to local conditions. Use herd testing, genetics and simple decision tools to improve breeding, heifer rearing and culling decisions without over-complicating management. Close knowledge gaps by providing clear guidance, practical tools and visual benchmarking that strengthen husbandry and young-stock performance. Link sustainability actions, including emissions reduction, to clear productivity and profitability outcomes while actively managing costs and energy use.	2.3 – Adapting to a changing operating environment 3.1 Advancing industry sustainability	• Continue to focus on genetics by increasing use of the Balanced Performance Index and initiating the new Australian Breeding Values Predictive Powers project. • Implement the next phase of DairyUP research, focusing on mastitis and pinkeye. • Develop data-driven case studies that show how reducing emissions intensity can improve profitability. • Provide evidence-based insight into the profit metrics and greenhouse gas outputs of intensive dairy farm systems.

Regional themes

Beyond the national themes, people from each region identified local issues, opportunities and delivery needs. The following section captures region-specific feedback, extension priorities and, where relevant, additional responses that address the regional themes. National investments that also respond to regional feedback are reflected in the national themes table.

Some feedback raised through consultation relates to broader industry settings, market conditions or policy areas. These points have been noted as part of the consultation record and will inform ongoing engagement with farmers, industry and delivery partners.

Gippsland

Regional theme	What we heard	Strategic Priority	Extension priorities
Profitability	Profitability remains the central priority, with strong focus on improving pasture-based systems, managing costs, maintaining competitive returns and focusing on risk-mitigation. Competing land use and prices is another concern and factor impacting overall profitability.	1.1 – Uplifting farm business performance	Strengthen farm business resilience. Increase farm business planning, risk management and recovery from unexpected events.
Feedbase	Feed utilisation and efficiency are critical to margins, particularly given the impact of imported feed costs and seasonal variability.	2.1 – Building feedbase productivity	
Herd performance	Long-term profitability is underpinned by herd performance.	2.2 – Building herd productivity	
People and skills gaps	People and capability are key constraints, including attracting and developing skilled people, developing leadership skills and planning for succession. There is a need for stronger skills in business management, data use and decision-making, particularly to manage risk and variability.	1.1 – Uplifting farm business performance 1.3 – Creating pathways for people	Build capability across dairy people. Deliver extension events, learning opportunities and farmer-led activities that respond to local needs.
Extension	Poor coordination of extension and training limits the impact – extension should be focused on problem-based learning, not providing generic information. The opportunity to use Gippsland focus farms to drive participation, learning, and practical excellence should be maximised. Tailor programs and training to reflect the diversity of farm types, families, business structures.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations	
Changing environment	Climate variability and risk are increasing pressure on farm systems, including the need to adapt to changing conditions and manage volatility.	2.3 – Adapting to a changing operating environment	
Water	Water availability and policy are key concerns, highlighting the need to better understand the value of water security and explore opportunities to redirect water from gas, mining and other industries to agricultural use.	3.1 – Advancing industry sustainability	

Regional theme	What we heard	Strategic Priority	Extension priorities
Industry sustainability	Industry attractiveness and long-term sustainability matter, including maintaining community confidence, demonstrating responsible practices and promoting dairy careers.	3.1 – Advancing industry sustainability 3.3 – Driving community trust and support	Collaborate to amplify impact. Build strategic relationships and support delivery of actions in the Gippsland Dairy Industry Strategic Plan.
Connections to services	Building strong relationships with dairy service providers, including attracting younger professionals, will strengthen the industry.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations	

Key regional responses

- Review international approaches to preventing facial eczema, to inform practical, evidence-based prevention strategies.
- Partner with Gardiner Foundation to deliver one-to-one human resource support for farms with staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Deliver the Cows Create Careers program in the Fulham Correctional setting.
- Work with the Gippsland Dairy Industry Leadership Group, who leverage extensive industry networks to provide strategic guidance and leadership to the dairy industry in Gippsland.

Key national responses

- Embed our national climate adaption extension program.
- Deliver strategic and technical policy research, analysis, insights and solutions.
- Continue to support industry via data-driven technical policy support and frameworks.
- Implement CalfWays and Growing Beef from Dairy project activities.

Additional feedback noted

- Limited processor diversity reduces resilience and market choice.
- Reintroduce high-quality, Gippsland-based training opportunities.

Murray and New South Wales

Representatives from these two regions were consulted as a group, so themes and responses from both regions are captured here.

Regional theme	What we heard	Strategic Priority	Extension priorities
Profitability	Increasing farmer financial literacy will boost profitability. Providing benchmarks and tools tailored to systems will help achieve this.	1.1 – Uplifting farm business performance	Strengthen farm business management. Improve understanding of profit drivers through practical extension, peer learning and business analysis tools.
Feedbase	Understanding feedbase complexity, including the relationship between quality and quantity, is key to profitability and productivity.	2.1 – Building feedbase productivity	Improve profitability through feedbase. Strong focus on feedbase productivity and nutrition, such as Advanced Nutrition in Action workshops.
Herd performance	Year-round calving is complex, increasing the cost of production and feed requirements across differing climates and systems.	2.2 – Building herd productivity	Improve heifer performance. Support improvements in animal nutrition and increased weighing of heifers, including practical strategies to improve heifer fertility and health.
Industry sustainability	Clear readiness, response support, and strong mitigation planning are key to effective disaster management. Building understanding of dairy's social, economic and nutritional value among the community and government is vital for long-term sustainability.	3.1 – Advancing industry sustainability 3.3 – Driving community trust and support	
People, and connections to services	Building partnerships with commercial advisors and strengthening extension practices and provider capability will lead to real changes in farm practice. Defining the role of publicly funded extension alongside commercial advisors will provide clarity for farmers. Access to service providers is often dictated by geography and 'system difference'. Skill development (business, digital and technical) is a top priority, as is attracting skilled labour, developing management and leadership pathways.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations 1.3 – Creating pathways for people	Attract, retain and develop talent. Support farming teams with employment, career and leadership pathways.
Changing environment	Energy costs and reliability remain key concerns. Research and investment should be tailored to projected regional climate change. Emissions-reduction technologies must not compromise productivity and profitability – which is at risk due to climate, water and energy concerns.	2.3 – Adapting to a changing operating environment	
Communications and engagement	Farmer audiences should be clearly defined to allow for tailored program segmentation.	Enabler 1 – Communications & Engagement	
Digital tools	Artificial intelligence and enhanced digital tools will enable improved decision-making and problem-solving.	1 – Unlocking today's potential	

Key regional responses

- Continuation of C4 Milk research to examine the effect of various break crop strategies in the Northern Victorian environment, under dryland and irrigated conditions.
- In partnership with Murray Dairy and Gardiner Foundation, continue to deliver a range of dairy-centred activities and events that support technical capability development, leadership skills, peer-to-peer support, networking, and issues-based conversations through the Young Dairy Network across the Murray region.
- Deliver Discussion Groups through the partnership between Dairy NSW and NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.
- Progress Climate Smart Feedbase through collaboration between Dairy NSW, Subtropical Dairy, Murray Dairy and Queensland Department of Primary Industries.

Additional feedback noted

- Ensure targets reflect regional water systems and climate variability.

South Australia and Western Australia

Representatives from these two regions were consulted as a group, so themes and responses from both regions are captured here.

Regional theme	What we heard	Strategic Priority	Extension priorities
Profitability	Greater whole-of-system data analysis is needed to support decision-making. Use whole-farm data to identify the optimal production system, rather than chasing per-cow production.	1.1 – Uplifting farm business performance	Strengthen farm business performance. Build capability through benchmarking, risk management, financial tools and whole-farm planning
Feedbase	Improving pasture production, utilisation, and surplus management is key to increasing productivity, alongside improving access to and understanding of alternative feedbase options.	2.1 – Building feedbase productivity	Increase homegrown feed productivity. Improve pasture production, utilisation, feed quality, grazing management and forage decision-making.
Herd productivity	Flat milk supply is one factor currently constraining profitability.	2.2 – Building herd productivity	Enhance nutritional management. Build nutrition capability through practical training in feed quality, diet balancing, supplementary feeding and body condition management to support herd performance and profitability.
Extension	Extension delivery requires improvement to ensure it is relevant, engaging and practical. Activities should be timely, hands-on and delivery gaps addressed, particularly in South-east South Australia.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations	Build industry capability and resilience. Support practical learning, discussion groups, peer engagement and workforce capability.
Changing environment	Tools such as the Australian Dairy Carbon Calculator should be promoted to help farmers measure their carbon impact and connect it directly to choices made on farm.	2.3 – Adapting to a changing operating environment	
Communications and engagement	Alternative engagement channels (e.g. tailored podcasts) should be trialled to reach more farmers.	Enabler 1 – Communications & Engagement	

Additional feedback noted

- Risk of over-focusing on limited issues (e.g. pests) at the expense of system performance.

Subtropical

Regional theme	What we heard	Strategic Priority	Extension priorities
Feedbase	Effective management of pasture varieties, including investing in crop and pasture varieties specific to the region alongside new varieties, will help lift feedbase productivity.	2.1 – Building feedbase productivity	Build a resilient feedbase. Support C4 Milk extension, FertSmart, irrigation, Pasture Fundamentals and TopFodder delivery.
Herd management	Herd size, health, genetics and fertility are key concerns in relation to milk quality and overall profitability.	2.2 – Building herd productivity	Improve herd health and productivity. Deliver mastitis, lameness, transition cow and heat stress programs suited to subtropical conditions. Evaluate changing calving patterns. Adapt farm business programs to assess the financial impacts of changing milk flows.
People	Succession planning and assistance with compliance – relating to workplace health and safety and overseas workers – are priorities.	1.1 – Uplifting farm business performance 1.3 – Creating pathways for people	
Communications and engagement	Demographic data and categorisation should be used to engage with farmers more effectively.	Enabler 1 – Communications & Engagement	

Key regional responses

- C4Milk: Queensland Department of Primary Industries collaboration investigating fodder crops, feeding systems and profitability.

Additional feedback noted

- Outside investment for infrastructure and Total Mixed Ration farms.
- Better ability to cope with heat, humidity, ticks, flies.
- Ability to keep farms cool and dry.

Tasmania

Regional theme	What we heard	Strategic Priority	Extension priorities
Profitability	Ensure the economics of farm systems are well understood – particularly in relation to the Tasmanian dairy industry's operating conditions – will help enhance profitability.	1.1 – Uplifting farm business performance 2.3 – Adapting to a changing operating environment 3.2 – Remaining locally and globally competitive	Strengthen farm business management. Improve costs, margins, planning, decision-making, data use and benchmarking.
Feedbase	Building knowledge of feedbase options – particularly those that are home-grown and suited to Tasmanian weather conditions – is critical, supported by the development of new resources and improved access to existing materials.	2.1 – Building feedbase productivity	Increase homegrown feed productivity. Improve grazing, forage planning, soil management and system decisions for Tasmanian conditions.
Herd management	Understanding the right genetic traits for the region and system, informed by benchmarking data, is a priority.	2.2 – Building herd productivity	
People	Skilled labour shortages are a significant concern. Programs to address induction, retention and progression are vital, as is exploring alternative labour models such as contract milking.	1.3 – Creating pathways for people	Build people management capability. Build employee, leadership, safety and wellbeing capability across large and complex farms.
Communication and engagement	Access to existing programs, tools and resources needs to be improved.	Enabler 1 – Communications & engagement	

Key regional responses

- Hire, Develop, Reward, Keep: Investing in People in Agriculture.
- Regional CalfWays project in partnership with TasFarmers.

Key national responses

- Continuation of dairy farm system economic analysis work.
- DairyHigh2 investment in partnership with Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture.

Additional feedback noted

- Generation of wealth given Tasmanian corporate environment.

Western Victoria

Regional theme	What we heard	Strategic Priority	Extension priorities
Profitability	Improving access to representative regional Dairy Farm Monitor data and benchmarking – filtered by farm size, system and region – will help identify key drivers of success and lift profitability.	1.1 – Uplifting farm business performance	Strengthen farm business performance. Build capability in budgeting, benchmarking, business analysis and risk management to support profitability, resilience and long-term success.
Feedbase	Invest in region-specific research aligned to local climate and feedbase challenges.	2.1 – Building feedbase productivity	Increase homegrown feed productivity. Improve pasture production, feeding decisions and nutrient use efficiency to reduce seasonal risk.
Herd management	Increasing the use of genomic data and digital tools are central to productivity, as is strengthening reproductive support services.	2.2 – Building herd productivity	
Connections to services	Increasing access to skilled technicians and independent consultants will help drive improved farm business outcomes.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations	
Extension	Improving extension quality, consistency, and practical relevance through benchmarking and Farm Engagement Lead expertise will support farm practice change.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations	
People	Labour challenges are key issues, including availability, culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) considerations and training and extension needs.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations 1.3 – Creating pathways for people	Manage people and build workforce capability. Strengthen workforce capability, leadership, safety and people management practices.
Industry sustainability	Strong regional alignment and consistent messaging across organisations will help ensure coordinated action. There is a need to learn from dry seasons, failed autumns, and fire recovery to improve rapid decision-making.	1.2 – Enhancing farm operations 3.1 – Advancing industry sustainability	
Water policy	Water security for stock and domestic use is a critical issue.	3.1 – Advancing industry sustainability	

Key regional responses

- Develop resources for culturally and linguistically diverse employees and their employers to support settlement, engagement and retention in the dairy industry.

Key national responses

- Deliver strategic and technical policy research, analysis, insights and solutions.

Additional feedback noted

- Housing for farm workers.



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