

#### By Shanky Sungroya - GippsDairy

Feedbase and nutrition sit at the heart of every dairy system in Gippsland. It determines how efficiently a farm runs, how smoothly cows perform, and how much profit remains at the end of the season.

Many things influence a farm, weather patterns, prices, labour, etc., but feedbase and nutrition consistently stand out as the biggest levers farmers can actually control.

Across the region, farms that make the most of their home-grown feed, graze at the right time, conserve quality silage and balance their diets well tend to be the most stable, resilient and profitable.

They are not doing anything remarkable; it's simply their management discipline. That is what lifts them.

"Home-grown feed is the cheapest feed you'll ever buy, if you manage, harvest, and feed it right."

CONTINUED OVER



**Growing Profit from the Ground Up** 

## Growing Profit from the Ground Up

#### Understanding where value is lost

The biggest losses in dairy feed systems rarely come from major events. They come from moments that seem small at the time. Waiting a little too long to graze. Cutting silage when it "looks ready" instead of when it's at its best. Offering cows feed that doesn't quite match their requirements. These are everyday decisions, but over a season they create some of the largest gaps in profit.

Pasture that is allowed to get ahead quickly loses energy and digestibility. In ryegrass, even a week's delay can mean about one megajoule of energy per kilogram dry matter lost. That doesn't sound dramatic, but it means cows get around ten percent less usable energy from each mouthful. That drop directly affects milk production and the amount of supplement required to fill the gap.

Silage can go the same way. Cut too late or compacted poorly, it loses the very energy we rely on in autumn, winter and early lactation. Then there's the hidden cost of waste at feed-out - heating, mouldy sections, or loose-faced stacks that spoil quickly. All of this reduces the feed available to cows without reducing the cost of making it.

Under-utilisation is another slow leak. Leaving a tonne of dry matter behind here and there quickly becomes many tonnes when spread across the whole grazing area. That feed, which could have been turned into milk, simply goes unused.

The other side of the equation is purchased feed. While necessary at times, delivered energy from purchased feed is almost always more expensive than energy from well-managed pasture. When the feedbase slips, purchased feed fills the gaps and the financial pressure increases.

Most farms do not need to grow significantly more feed.

They need to use more of what they already grow and protect its quality from paddock to cow.

#### Why nutrition matters just as much as growth

Even the best pasture only performs if the cow can digest and convert it efficiently. This is where balanced nutrition becomes crucial. When energy, protein and fibre work in harmony, cows milk well, maintain condition, and stay fertile.

Small imbalances are easy to miss but can be very costly over time.

A ration slightly low in energy gradually pulls down milk production. Too much protein can waste energy and affect fertility. Not enough structural fibre affects rumen function. Inconsistent feeding patterns disrupt rumen microbes, leading to dips in performance.

Good nutrition does not always mean feeding more, it means feeding what the cow actually needs, based on the quality of the feedbase.

# When feedbase and nutrition are aligned, everything becomes more efficient:

- Cows eat more consistently
- Milk production becomes steadier
- Rumen function stabilises
- Fertility generally improves

Steve Fallon 0427 352 231

India Dean 0484 361 177

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 Feed costs drop because supplements are used strategically, not reactively

Rosedale

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This alignment is where the biggest improvements are found.



#### Why timing and planning matter

Improving feedbase and nutrition is not about making dramatic changes. It is about getting the timing right and paying attention earlier. Adjusting a rotation before quality slips, cutting silage at peak energy, testing feed before feeding it, and observing the herd early, these actions all prevent problems rather than chasing them later.

A proactive approach doesn't need to be complicated. It simply creates room to make sound decisions instead of being forced into expensive ones. The farms that operate with the least stress often share one trait; they stay just a little ahead of the season.

#### Where learning gaps usually sit

Across Gippsland, most farmers already have strong practical knowledge. The learning gaps often appear in a few areas:

- Understanding how Metabolisable Energy (ME) protein and fibre interact
- Knowing exactly when to graze to protect quality
- Turning pasture measurements into rotation decisions
- Cutting silage for energy instead of bulk
- Reading feed test results confidently
- Balancing diets without over- or under-feeding supplements
- Understanding how small ration changes affect cow performance
- Linking nutrition decisions to herd health and fertility

These gaps are not due to lack of skill, they come from the complexity of dairy systems and the pace of seasonal change. Even the best operators benefit from refreshing or updating their understanding.

This is where structured learning can be incredibly helpful. Not because farmers need "training", but because even one or two new insights can save many thousands of dollars across a season.

# How GippsDairy can support farmers who want to build or refresh these skills

Throughout the year, GippsDairy provides a range of opportunities for farmers to strengthen their feedbase and nutrition understanding. These sessions are practical, local and designed around real farm situations.

#### **Nutrition Fundamentals**

Ideal for brushing up on the building blocks of cow nutrition - energy, protein, fibre, feed tests, diet structure and interpreting numbers correctly. This is particularly helpful for farmers wanting to understand their ration better or prepare for more advanced learning.

#### Top Fodder (Autumn & Spring)

A hands-on look at making and managing high-quality silage. Farmers often find this extremely valuable, especially in years when conserved feed becomes a major cost centre. The program focuses on harvest timing, moisture, compaction, sealing and feed-out practices.

#### Feeding Pastures for Profit (FPFP)

A deeper, season-long approach to grazing management, pasture growth, budgeting and utilisation. Many farmers describe FPFP as the point where grazing decisions became clearer, easier and more profitable.

#### Advanced Nutrition in Action (ANIA)

An in-depth, applied program that brings feedbase and nutrition together. Farmers work with advisors to build practical ration strategies, use the Rumen8 model, interpret feed tests, and understand how feeding decisions affect the business. Entry requires passing a pre-quiz, and doing Nutrition Fundamentals beforehand makes this easier and more valuable.

#### Programme Outline (3 Core units):

- 1. Milking herd & heifer feeding; digestion, intake, balanced diets.
- Productivity, health & welfare; fertility, rumen stability, heat stress, mycotoxins.
- 3. Strategy & implementation; dollars, people, and making change stick.

#### 2026 details:

- Duration: 8 days across 3–5 months
- Fee: \$1,500 + 10% GST
- Subsidy: First 10 registrations receive 50% Gardiner Foundation support (\$750 + GST)

These opportunities are simply tools to help farmers build confidence, sharpen decision-making, and reduce unnecessary costs.

Farmers can see what's coming up or enrol through the GippsDairy website events calendar, or by contacting us directly:

#### (03) 5624 3900

#### info@gippsdairy.com.au

#### Final thoughts

A strong feedbase and a balanced nutrition system doesn't come from dramatic changes. They come from getting the timing right, understanding how feed works in the cow, protecting quality, and making consistent, informed decisions.

Grow it well - Use it wisely - Balance it properly, and never stop learning, because every year brings new challenges, but also new opportunities to improve.

Every profitable litre of milk begins in the paddock. And the farms that treat feedbase and nutrition as connected parts of the same system tend to be the ones that stay resilient, efficient and profitable through all kinds of seasons.



#### 2026 STEP BY STEP LEARNING PATHWAY

	TIMING (2026)	FOCUS	
Nutrition Fundamentals (NF)	Late January	Core principles (ME, protein, fibre, intake) - ideal brush-up for ANIA's qualifying quiz.	
Feeding Pastures for Profit (FPFP)	Starts February 2 classroom days + 5 field days; measure → plan → graze → review across season		
Top Fodder (Autumn silage)	February Make, store, and feed conserved feed that's worth feeding.		
Advanced Nutrition in Action (ANIA)	Starts March	8-day advanced Nutrition program over 3–5 months	
Top Fodder (Spring silage)	August	Spring cut readiness: harvest timing, compaction, covers, feed-out strategies etc.,	

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#### By Lauren Foster - GippsDairy

With the warmer months well and truly upon us, it's a good time to reflect on how much heat and humidity can affect our cows and what we can do to help reduce this stress, and the subsequent reduction in production and fertility.

Cows feel the heat more than we realise, even at 25°C they can begin to feel uncomfortable; this is made worse if the humidity is also high. High humidity reduces cows' ability to effectively evaporatively cool which is their main mechanism for keeping cool on hot days. The immediate impact of heat stress on cows is a decrease in feed intake resulting in reduced milk production. Long term heat stress results in reduced in-calf rates, low milk production, low protein and fat test results, liveweight loss and other cow health problems that can negatively impact farm income. Heat stress can be effectively managed with a proactive whole-of-year approach including changes to on-farm infrastructure, animal nutrition, and breeding programs. Farms calving in Autumn also need to consider dry cows in their heat stress plan for the farm, with heat stress during pregnancy being linked to reduced milk production in the next lactation and less productive and fertile calves.

#### Infrastructure and water:

When considering cattle heat stress on farm our main area of focus should be on infrastructure and short-term management changes on hot days, as this is where we will see the most benefit. Sprinkler systems used in the yards on hot days can really help cow comfort levels at milking, if there is a system already in place check it is putting out large droplets of water not fine misting sprays (as this will reduce the cow's ability to evaporatively cool even further) and there is enough water to run it throughout the milking.

Ensuring there is shade in paddocks on hot days and where possible on laneways and yards is important and thinking about shade in longer term infrastructure and farm developments. Ample water supply is vital as cows can drink up to 250L each on a hot day.

Trough type and placement should also be considered. Cows will consume 30-40% of their daily water intake at the exit side of the dairy if it is available. Large easily accessible water troughs in all paddocks will also encourage cows to graze for longer in warmer weather helping to reduce production losses.

#### Breeding:

Not all cows are made equal with some being more susceptible to heat and humidity than others. Brown Swiss and Jersey cows are more heat tolerant than Holsteins, younger smaller animals are also better at dealing with high ambient temperatures than larger animals and of those in the milking herd, lower producing cows are less affected by the heat.

Within a breed some cows are more susceptible than others. There is a 'Heat Tolerance' Australian breeding value (ABV) which can be considered when selecting bulls, cows with a Heat Tolerance ABV of more than 100 are better able to tolerate warm and humid conditions resulting in less production loss.

#### Nutrition

Metabolising food produces heat; low fibre high quality fodder produces less heat during the digestion process than high fibre fodder and is therefore a better option on hot days. Increasing concentrate feeding can also reduce the heat load from digestion, while the addition of some fats can help to fill the gap in energy intake when feed intake reduces during periods of heat stress.

However, some additives will increase the heat load, so it is best to discuss this with your nutritionist. In addition to this on hot days the highest quality pasture should be available overnight when it is cooler and cows are more likely to graze.

There are many changes we can make both short and long term to keep our cows cool, comfortable and milking well when the weather is warm. Some actions to consider for your milking herd for the rest of summer include:

- Delay afternoon milking until after 5pm on hot days
- Wet the dairy yard before the cows arrive
- Sprinkler system in the dairy yard
- Install large water trough on the side exit to the dairy
- Dietary modifications increase concentrate and grain feeding and feed high quality forage fibre
- Provide cows with the highest quality pasture to graze overnight when they're cooler.





#### By Belinda Griffin - GippsDairy

Gippsland's Women in Dairy came together in Traralgon on 14 November 2025 for a lively and uplifting celebration of the region's dairy community. Women in Dairy from across Gippsland gathered for this highly anticipated, well-attended event, organised by committee members with support from GippsDairy.

With around 170 women filling the beautiful grounds of All Occasions Weddings and Functions Traralgon, the day offered a rare chance to step away from the farm and enjoy time for themselves—while still feeling connected to their work and industry. Many attendees commented that it's the perfect mix: a purposeful day out that leaves the guilt behind, whether they've reassigned jobs at home or simply let a few tasks wait.

The afternoon featured inspiring guest speakers, generous gifts from local companies, service providers and sponsors, and gave plenty of opportunities to connect and recharge. Now in its fourth year, the event continues to champion the achievements, resilience and leadership of women across the dairy sector.

At the heart of the day was a three-woman panel facilitated by Women in Dairy committee member, Allison Potter.

#### Panellists

- Carley Einseidel A rising talent in agriculture and 2025 ALPA Southern Young Auctioneer finalist, building her career as a livestock agent.
- Anna Thompson Senior Research Scientist at Ellinbank Smart Farm, leading innovative pasture research and exploring new technology to help farmers optimise forage use.
- Becky Dickinson Founder and head veterinarian at Veterinary Support Services in Warragul, dedicated to mentoring and training the next generation of rural veterinary professionals.

The panel was praised for being warm, articulate and incredibly relatable. As one attendee put it, "They walk among us. What they talked about is real, it's attainable—and it's wonderful to celebrate their success!"

Feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive, with participants already sharing ideas for next year's topics and interest in attending smaller discussion group events throughout the year.

Another refreshing, empowering and motivating day for Gippsland's Women in Dairy—celebrating one another, growing together, and continuing to trailblaze across the industry.





# Grazing Technology Roadshow: Bringing Innovation to Farmers

#### By Corrie Goodwin - Specialist Director



Dairy has always been part of my life. I grew up on our family farm at Milawa in north-east Victoria — if you've ever driven past the sign for Goodwins Lane, you're close.

Dad and my grandfather both chaired their local dairy co-ops, and Mum came from a dairy family in Yarram (Green). Milking cows was my apprenticeship – it built my work ethic and set me up for a 20+ career post-farmgate.

I started out as a field officer and have worked across most parts of the supply chain — from milk supply and quality to sustainability and regulation. The common thread has been endeavouring to find practical ways to make things work better across the industry. I've represented dairy nationally through the Australian Dairy Industry Council and as an executive with the Australian Dairy Products Federation. I've always been drawn to work that removes barriers, builds trust and helps the industry adapt and stay competitive.

I currently hold several governance roles — including Deputy Chair of the Game Management Authority and Independent Director of Sheep Producers Australia — and consult with the Brien Holden Foundation, which delivers optical services into remote Indigenous communities across Australia and into Asia. Working in a different sector has broadened my perspective and tested me in new ways. It's challenged how I think and given me new tools to bring back to dairy.

I'm delighted to have joined the GippsDairy Board and to be part of such a committed team. The calibre of the Board and Sarah's leadership sets a strong tone. I've also been struck by the thinking coming through the Young Dairy Network. I was disappointed to miss the Women in Dairy lunch this year, but I'll be there next year. Since joining, I've had the opportunity to visit two farms, and those conversations have reinforced just how important Gippsland is to the strength and future of Australian dairy. I'm looking forward to spending more time on farm and contributing wherever I can. I won't squander the opportunity to make a positive impact for dairy farmers in Gippsland.

This Christmas I'll be on my sister's farm at the base of the King Valley, taking the dogs for a swim in the Ovens River at the back of my brother's farm and "coordinating" the family menu. Wishing everyone a safe and happy festive season.

**GIPPSDAIRY** 

### GippsDairy Board 2025 wrap up

#### By Karen McLennan - GippsDairy

The GippsDairy Board would like to thank farmers, service providers, funders and Dairy Australia for their contributions to our programs and services during 2025.

We are always able to achieve more through strong partnerships and positive relationships. This has been recognised by the board through adding a new strategic priority on collaboration to the GippsDairy Strategic Plan 2025-28, released in October 2025. The five strategic areas in the plan are;

- **1.** Enhance the prosperity and resilience of Gippsland dairy farm businesses to drive growth of the industry.
- **2.** Improve the capacity and capability of our dairy people across Gippsland.
- **3.** Support and promote a culture of leadership across the Gippsland dairy industry.
- **4.** Enhance the reputation and attractiveness of the Gippsland dairy industry.
- 5. Collaborate to amplify the impact of our efforts in Gippsland.

# The GippsDairy Strategic Plan 2025-2028 can be accessed: www.dairyaustralia.com.au/gippsdairy/reports

During 2025, GippsDairy welcomed Corrie Goodwin to the board in the role of Specialist Director. Corrie has a wealth of dairy experience that will be an asset to the board. There is an article in this edition that shares more about Corrie's background. The board has farewelled Tony Platt and acknowledges his valued insights and contributions to Board discussions.

Tony's thoughtful perspective and steady presence consistently elevated the quality of board discussions. Farmer directors, Sarah O'Brien and Mick Hughes have been reappointed for another three year term and at the 2025 AGM in October, Sarah O'Brien was re-elected board Chair and Ken Lawrence as Deputy board Chair. Congratulations to Sarah O'Brien on also being elected as Chair for the Council of Chairs for 2026 at a national level. All Chairs



of dairy Regional Development Program's (RDPs) across Australia and the Chair of the Dairy Australia board meet four times yearly to collaborate and amplify their impacts around dairy research, development, extension and projects.

GippsDairy participated in the recent national RDP forum in Wollongong, spending valuable time with colleagues across the country. These forums occur twice yearly and enable RDP Chairs, Deputy Chairs, Executive Officers the chance to work with Dairy Australia on priorities, initiatives and opportunities. The focus of this recent forum was on creating impact, collaborative opportunities amongst RDPs, peer networks and stakeholder engagement and governing for impact. This forum was the first time all regions have been together face to face with new Dairy Australia CEO Matt Shaffer. Matt has been active in visiting regions, meeting farmers and ensuring that the new Dairy Australia Strategic Plan 2025-2030 is relatable to farmers. Please look out for opportunities when Matt is visiting Gippsland, he thrives on connecting with farmers.

Thank you to GippsDairy's amazing staff for their efforts, commitment and dedication in 2025. The staff were active in supporting farmers during drought, delivering a broad range of extension and continuous improvement during 2025. Learnings from 2025 and farmer engagement will be the basis of relevant and innovative service and program delivery in 2026.



#### By Jackie Aveling - GippsDairy

When a local beef farmer group asked for information on monitoring collars and virtual fencing, we saw an opportunity to go bigger and highlight a range of technologies, some new and some which have been around for several years but were not so well known. Farmers want practical insights—not just on cutting edge tools, but also on low-cost, high-impact grazing technologies that could make a real difference on-farm.

We designed the Grazing Technology Roadshow to deliver exactly that. Over one week, we ran five discussion events across Gippsland from Omeo to West Gippsland which included: Omeo, Orbost, Bairnsdale, MID and Ellinbank. Each event brought together farmers, product owners, and researchers' resulting in practical demonstration and open discussion about smart grazing and herd monitoring solutions.

Farmers were exposed to virtual fencing systems and smart monitoring collars to simple tools under \$1,000 including: automatic timed gate openers and timed electric tape fence lifters. All technologies that can save labour and improve animal health outcomes. The turnout was fantastic—over 30 attendees at each dairy-focused event. Farmers were highly engaged, asking questions and sharing experiences. The discussions reinforced the value of peer-to-peer learning and highlighted how grazing technology can boost farm productivity and profitability.

#### A big thank you to:

- Our speakers for generously sharing their time and expertise.
- Tech companies for providing devices.
- Farmers who hosted the events and shared their experiences
- Industry partners

Our goal is simple: listen to farmers, understand what they want to learn, and connect them with trusted sources of information. We'll keep seeking feedback and exploring new ways to help farmers adopt innovative grazing technologies that make their businesses more efficient and sustainable.



# SITUATION AND OUTLOOK

# Dairy Retail Performance Holds Firm

#### By Madelyn Irvine - Dairy Australia

Dairy products continue to perform well in the domestic retail market. Supermarket sales of milk, cheese, and yoghurt have increased 1.1%, 3.8%, and 8.4% respectively over the past year.

Yoghurt remains the standout performer, with Greek yoghurt's 15.0%<sup>†</sup> increase spurring the category's growth<sup>†</sup>. Dairy spreads were the only category to drop in volume sold, slipping just 0.9%. Despite the mixed volume changes, the total value of sales increased for all these categories, ranging from up 1.9% for cheese to up 10.5% for yoghurt<sup>†</sup>.

Private label continues to gain share across the four major dairy categories, supported by cost-of-living pressures and changing consumer perceptions. In the milk sector, private label now accounts for 63% of volume sold and 46% of value sold†. This trend reflects lingering cost-of-living pressures and a shift in consumer attitudes, as private label is no longer seen as lower quality.

Dairy remains a staple in Australian consumer baskets and found in most households. While retail demand remains strong, rising living expenses and evolving consumer tastes will continue to shape future growth.

†NielsenIQ Homescan based on a continuous panel of 10,000 households; excludes non-private dwellings and businesses, non-permanently occupied households and out-of-home/impulse purchasing. DAIRY AUSTRALIA calculation based in part on data reported by NielsenIQ through its Homescan Service for the dairy category for the 52-week periods ending 13/07/2025 and 05/10/2025, for the total Australia market, according to the NielsenIQ standard product hierarchy. Copyright © 2025, Nielsen Consumer LLC.

# Hoofing around Gippy town

SAVE THE DATE				
DATE	EVENT	LOCATION		
Thursday 23 April	GippsDairy Muster	Toora		
Wednesday 11 – Friday 13 February	Australian Dairy Conference	Melbourne		

GIPPSDAIRY EVENTS - JANUARY TO FEBRUARY 2026				
Thursday 15 January	Cool Cows – South Gippsland	Toora		
Tuesday 27 January	Nutrition Fundamentals – MID	Maffra		
Wednesday 28 January	Nutrition Fundamentals – South Gippsland	Leongatha		
Thursday 29 January	day 29 January Milking and Mastitis Management – South Gippsland			
Thursday 5 February	Young Dairy Network – Bega Factory Tour	Morwell		
Tuesday 10 February	Young Dairy Network – Career Pathways Panel Session	Morwell		
Monday 16 February	Business Governance and Investment Forum	Traralgon		
Wednesday 18 February	Euthanise Livestock – East Gippsland	TBC		
Thursday 19 February	MID Discussion Group	TBC		
Thursday 19 February	Milking and Mastitis Management – West Gippsland	TBC		
February	Feeding Pastures for Profit – MID	TBC		
February	Feeding Pastures for Profit – South Gippsland	TBC		
February   West Gippsland Yarra Valley Discussion Group		TBC		

# **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 code or visit the Industry Statistics page of the Dairy Australia website to view the most recent hay and grain figures.



GIPPSDAIRY BOARD OF DIRECTORS					
Sarah O'Brien	Chair - Dairy Farmer Director	Martin Fuller	Specialist Director		
Ken Lawrence	Deputy Chair - Dairy Farmer Director	Raelene Hanratty	Dairy Farmer Director		
Mick Hughes	Public Officer – Dairy Farmer Director	Corrie Goodwin	Specialist Director		
Lisa Broad	Dairy Farmer Director	Aaron Thomas	Dairy Farmer Director		
Peter Fort	Specialist Director				

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