

# How Now Gippy Cow



A GIPPSDAIRY PUBLICATION – ISSUE 319 – SEPTEMBER 2026



## GippsDairy: 30 years of farmer-led leadership in Gippsland

By GippsDairy

**When GippsDairy was formed in 1996, it began with a big task – to help bring together the needs, ideas and ambitions of one of Australia's most important dairy regions.**

The first office was modest - a room in the back shed at Ellinbank Research Farm. But the ambition was not. GippsDairy was created to give Gippsland dairy farmers a stronger voice in research, development and extension, and to make sure regional priorities were not lost in state or national decision-making.

It was the second Regional Development Program to be formed in Victoria, following WestVic Dairy, and from the beginning it had a clear purpose: to connect the people, knowledge and resources needed

to strengthen the Gippsland dairy industry.

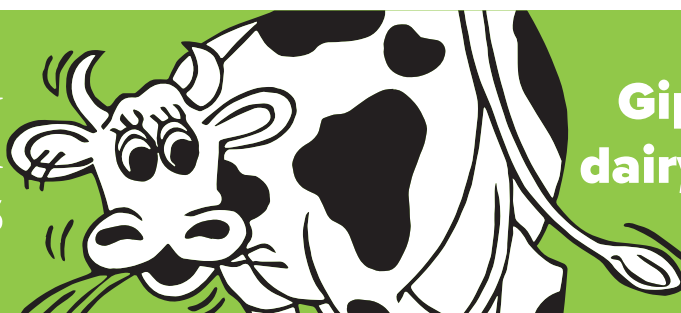
The first GippsDairy Board met with Executive Officer Sandra Jefford in January 1996. An interim committee had already spent time considering the Board's role, mission and membership, with board members sought to represent UDV District Councils in Gippsland, the UDV Gippsland Research Committee, government research and extension, dairy manufacturing companies, education providers and independent industry representatives.

It was a practical structure for a practical industry. Farmers, processors, service providers, researchers and educators all had a stake in the future of Gippsland dairy. GippsDairy's role was to bring those voices together and turn regional needs into action.

CONTINUED OVER

# NOTMAN

PASTURE SEEDS



**Gippsland's  
dairy pasture  
experts**

## GippsDairy: 30 years of farmer-led leadership in Gippsland

## Summer forage starts with a plan



## Built through consultation

One of the first things the new Board did was listen.

In 1996, about 300 people attended consultative meetings across Gippsland, from Traralgon, Warragul, Maffra and Yarram to Poowong, Leongatha, Kongwak, Foster, Denison, Trafalgar, Bunyip and Gruyere. The aim was not simply to tell farmers what GippsDairy would do, but to ask what mattered to them.

Those conversations shaped the first Regional Development Plan. It identified priorities that still feel familiar today: farm business management, labour, access to information, environmental responsibility, animal health, feedbase, farmer confidence, community understanding and industry leadership.

In one sense, it is comforting to see how consistent the themes have been. In another, it is confronting. The pressures have changed, the tools have improved, and the industry has evolved, but the core challenge remains the same: how to help dairy farmers run strong businesses, care for their people and land, and stay confident about the future.

## Learning governance while leading an industry

The early years of GippsDairy were also a learning curve for the people around the Board table. Many of the first farmer directors were stepping out of their own farm businesses and into formal governance roles for the first time. They were not only helping shape programs for dairy farmers across Gippsland; they were learning what it meant to govern an organisation, manage priorities, assess projects and make decisions on behalf of a broader industry.

That experience became part of GippsDairy's wider legacy. The skills developed through the Board - governance, strategy, communication, financial oversight and leadership - did not stay within GippsDairy. Many directors carried those skills into other roles, including sporting clubs, community organisations and other boards.

In that way, GippsDairy helped build more than industry programs. It helped build regional leaders.



## Remembering the first Chair

The first Chair of GippsDairy was Don Campbell, a Yannathan dairy farmer remembered for his passion for investing in young people and the future of the dairy industry. Don made it work, balancing the needs of his farm business, home renovations and leading a new organisation. Don was tragically killed in a car accident in 1998. Don's contribution has remained part of GippsDairy's story, particularly through the Don Campbell Memorial Study Tour, which has continued to inspire young dairy farmers to look beyond their own farm gate and see new possibilities for their future in the industry.

## A roll call of leadership

Across 30 years, GippsDairy has been shaped by many Chairs, Deputy Chairs, Executive Officers, directors, staff, project contractors, service providers and farmer contributors.

Based on incomplete records (corrections welcomed), the Chair role has been held by Don Campbell, Peter Hanrahan, Ron Paynter, Ian Cogle, Tyran Jones, John Verstedden, Matt Gleeson, Graeme Nicoll, Grant Williams, Lauren Finger and Sarah O'Brien.

Deputy Chairs have included Rasa Bennett, Carol Bradshaw, John Hutchison, Tyran Jones, Malcolm Sellen, Neil Walker, John Verstedden, Matt Gleeson, Graeme Nicoll, Grant Williams, Lauren Finger, Shiona Berry, Sarah O'Brien and Ken Lawrence.

Executive leadership has included Sandra Jefford, Dr Danielle Auldish, Maree MacPherson, Allan Cameron and Karen McLennan.

## MORE INFORMATION

Scan the QR code to continue reading about the Leadership of GippsDairy



## Adam Fisher, Notman Pasture Seeds

Spring can produce plenty of pasture, but it's also the time to start thinking about where feed will come from when conditions warm and ryegrass growth begins to slow.

The best results come when the crop has a clear purpose and fits into the overall farm feed plan.

Before choosing what to sow, there are a variety of things to work through. Are we trying to produce quality grazing through early summer or extend it through to autumn, grow bulk feed for a summer silage cut, clean up a weedy paddock before going back to perennial pasture, or simply get something productive back into a paddock that may have been sacrificed over winter?

## From there, we can select the right forage.

Brassicas can provide high-quality feed relatively quickly, while chicory and plantain offer excellent feed quality and flexibility where moisture is available, particularly heading closer to autumn. Millet is a safe grazing option, while forage sorghum is well suited to producing bulk for silage. With both C4 grasses, we need to wait until soil temperatures increase, generally from late October into November.

Kale, fast-feed turnips and fodder beet each have a different place in the summer forage program. Fast-feed turnips are a great option when the priority is getting quality feed in front of stock quickly. Kale under

effluent irrigation provides a longer-growing, higher-yielding option where feed is being targeted for later in summer or autumn. The more niche fodder beet can produce very high dry matter yields, but growing it successfully requires close attention to detail.

Maize remains an important option across many farms where the aim is to produce a high-yielding, high-energy crop, provided the appropriate feed-out equipment is available.

Summer forage blends continue to offer flexibility and reliability under changing summer conditions. Combining grasses, brassicas, herbs and legumes can spread risk across different growing conditions while providing a more diverse feed source. Mixed crops can range from a straightforward 80/20 millet and rape mix through to a highly diverse multi-species blend.

Regardless of what goes in the paddock, establishment is critical. Good weed control beforehand, good seed-to-soil contact, maintaining adequate sowing rates and early monitoring for insects can make a much bigger difference in achieving the result you're after.

Most importantly, start planning early. Identify your likely summer feed gap, work backwards to determine when that feed needs to be available, and then choose the crop and sowing window to match.

A well-planned summer forage crop can produce valuable home-grown feed while also setting the paddock up for the next phase of the pasture rotation.

## AGRIBUSINESS

## Farm Advisory Service – extended until the end of September

## By Agriculture Victoria

Farmers across Victoria can access a second one-on-one consultation with a technical specialist through the Farm Advisory Service.

More than 720 farmers across the state have already taken advantage of the service, using one-on-one sessions with experienced advisors to assess their situation and make informed decisions for the season ahead.

Specialist consultants include agronomists, veterinarians, animal nutritionists, business advisors, and farm planners, with expertise across

dairy, beef, sheep and wool, horticulture, and cropping industries.

The service has been extended until the end of September, providing farmers with additional support to navigate seasonal challenges and plan for their business's future.

## MORE INFORMATION

For more information about drought support, visit [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/drought](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/drought) or call 136 186.

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## Improving heat detection: A key ingredient for unlocking reproductive performance

Dr Stephanie Bullen – National Animal Health & Welfare Lead, Dairy Australia

### Takeaways:

- The largest reproductive performance analysis ever undertaken in the Australian dairy industry found that 40% of seasonal and split-calving herds and 60% of year-round calving herds have significant scope to improve heat detection.
- The highest-performing Australian herds inseminated at least 80% of eligible cows within 21 days of mating start date.
- Utilising twice-daily paddock checks, even for a short, focused period of 2–3 weeks, can considerably improve heat detection accuracy.
- Heat detection training for staff is available through Dairy Australia's regional teams.
- Synchrony programs and wearables may not necessarily increase reproductive performance but can be valuable tools for improving labour efficiency.

Accurate heat detection is critical for achieving strong reproductive performance. It goes without saying that a cow that is not detected on heat is not inseminated and won't get in calf.

### Largest analysis of reproductive performance ever undertaken

Earlier this year, Dairy Australia commissioned the architect of the original InCalf program, Dr John Morton, to analyse data from Australian dairy farms and identify key opportunities to improve herd reproductive performance. This was the largest analysis of reproductive performance ever undertaken in the Australian dairy industry and included data from 663 seasonal, split-calving and year-round calving herds, representing almost one million lactations.

The findings identified substantial opportunities to improve heat detection performance. Up to 40% of seasonal and split-calving herds and up to 60% of year-round calving herds had significant scope for improvement. The highest-performing herds were consistently inseminating more than 80% of eligible cows within the first 21 days of mating.

### Practical tips for this joining season

#### 1. Get the fundamentals right

The best heat detection results are achieved by combining paddock observations with heat detection aids such as tail paint and heat mount detectors. Paddock checks two hours after the morning milking and before the afternoon milking are ideal. Consider an additional check two hours after afternoon milking.

While this may seem onerous, improving heat detection accuracy and subsequent pregnancy rates can enable farmers to reduce the overall AI period length and obtain replacements in a shorter timeframe, saving labour at other crucial times of the year.

Even if twice-daily checks are not feasible for the entire mating period, consider a targeted focus period of two or three weeks after mating start date where "all hands are on deck" for heat detection.

#### 2. Simple pre-mating heat detection program

**STEP 1:** Tail paint all pregnant cows with one colour (e.g. green).

**STEP 2:** Tail paint all non-pregnant cows 30 days prior to mating start date with another colour (e.g. red).

**STEP 3:** Top up red and green paint that has not been rubbed twice weekly.

**STEP 4:** Submit all red cows to a progesterone-based non-cycling cow program 10 days before mating start date.

The period before mating is an ideal opportunity to train staff and practise heat detection skills. Dairy Australia offers Heat Detective training programs that provide an excellent starting point for new staff and a valuable refresher for experienced managers. Contact your regional Dairy Australia team or check the events calendar to find a course near you.

### 3. Wearables and synchrony programs improve labour efficiency but not necessarily performance

Many farmers are now investing in wearable technologies such as collars and ear tags to support heat detection. Well-performing technologies can achieve a level of precision similar to that of an experienced farm manager, but they do not guarantee improved reproductive performance.

A recent study conducted by DairyNZ found that herds using wearables experienced no significant change in in-calf rates during the first two years after adoption compared with herds not using wearables.

This suggests that wearables can support good management and reduce labour inputs, but improved reproductive performance is not guaranteed. It is also important to remember that technologies can fail (for example, if the entire herd becomes spooked), so backup heat detection methods are still recommended. Skilled herd managers and stock handlers must still make the final decision on which cows are selected for artificial insemination.

Synchrony and timed-AI programs can also provide benefits through improved labour efficiency and increased submission rates, particularly in larger herds where staff may have less time available for heat detection or where heat detection accuracy is difficult to maintain.

The most commonly used programs include single or double prostaglandin injections to synchronise observed heats, as well as GnRH-based programs with or without progesterone devices that enable fixed-time insemination without the need for heat detection.

It is critical to work with your veterinarian to determine the most appropriate option for you and your herd.

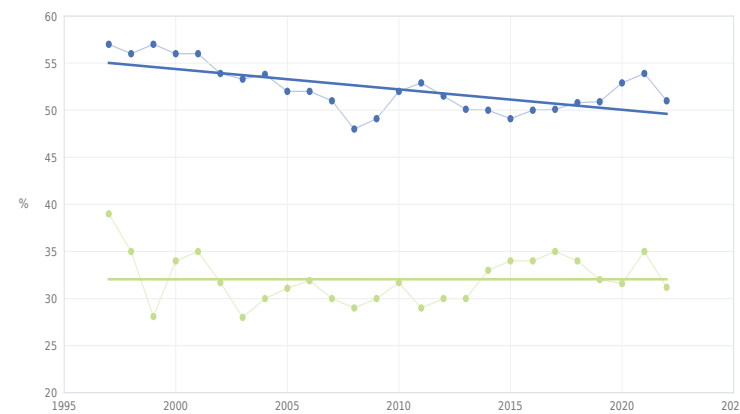


Figure 1. Australian dairy herd reproductive performance 1997-2022

—●— 6-week in-calf rate  
—●— 100-day in-calf rate  
— Linear (6-week in-calf rate)  
— Linear (100-day in-calf rate)

## See what's happening over the fence at the Tracy's farm at Waratah Bay

By Cassie Wright – South Gippsland Landcare Network

If you've driven past the Tracy dairy farm at Waratah Bay lately, you might have noticed something different growing in the paddocks - pasture mixes of chicory, clover, plantain, buckwheat, sunflowers and more, instead of the usual ryegrass. There's a reason for that, and it's worth hearing.

The Tracy family has farmed at Waratah Bay since 1980, with Stuart at the helm since 1991. Like a lot of Gippsland dairy farmers, they'd been dealing with pastures that needed constant resowing, ongoing animal health issues, and the squeeze of rising input costs. A few years ago, they started looking for a different pathway, trialling multispecies pastures, longer grazing rotations, and biological fertilisers.

A two-year demonstration trial on the property, run with South Gippsland Landcare Network, allowed the Tracy's to measure the changes in management with this new system. The multispecies pasture produced significantly more feed, at a lower cost, with higher quality than the ryegrass pasture. Soil health improved too, with the trial plots showing roughly double the earthworm numbers of the conventional plots. "Our goal is to have a profitable, lower cost productive system that is more resilient to outside influences such as higher fertiliser prices, lower commodity prices or adverse environmental conditions" says Stuart.

Now the Tracy farm is one of just five demonstration sites nationally in the new Dairy Resilience Project which is being delivered locally by South Gippsland Landcare Network, working directly with dairy farmers to figure out what's realistic and worthwhile for their own systems.

**First field day: 7 October 2026, at the Tracy farm, Waratah Bay – run in collaboration with GippsDairy.**

This is your chance to walk the paddocks, see the trial results, and hear directly from Stuart about what's worked, what hasn't, and what's next. Multispecies specialist Jade Killoran will also be there to unpack the science behind the numbers, along with an introduction to growing multispecies pastures. It's the first of two field days to be held over the life of the project. Scan the first QR code to register.

There are also places available for dairy farmers in the upcoming five session program - which will include expert speakers, farm walks and learning from other dairy farmers. Participants will also have access to financial support for soil and plant testing and expert advice along the way. For more information or to express your interest see here.

The Dairy Resilience Program is supported by Soils for Life and the Australian Government's Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust.



Join South Gippsland Landcare Network and GippsDairy on Wednesday 7 October for a field day to kick off the Soils for Life Dairy Resilience Project in South Gippsland, scan this QR code to register.



Dairy farmers are also invited to join the upcoming 5 session group learning program to support farmers to improve soil health and productivity, and reduce input costs. It includes funds for soil and plant testing and agronomist support – Scan this QR code to learn more and express your interest.



### MORE INFORMATION

For further information contact Cassie Wright, Projects and Education Coordinator, South Gippsland Landcare Network, [cassie@sgln.net.au](mailto:cassie@sgln.net.au) or call 0448 739 559



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## Meet the LC – Luke Johnson

By Luke Johnson – Young Dairy Network

**Growing up on a family dairy farm, I developed a lifelong passion for the dairy industry and have worked within the sector throughout my career.**

My practical farming background, combined with a Bachelor of Agribusiness, has provided me with a strong understanding of both on-farm production and the broader agricultural industry.

I have been fortunate to participate in a number of professional development opportunities, including the Don Campbell Memorial Tour and a Gardiner Foundation study tour to New Zealand. These experiences broadened my perspective on dairy farming, innovation, leadership, and the opportunities available to producers both in Australia and internationally.

One of the aspects of the dairy industry I value most is it's people. I am passionate about supporting and encouraging the next generation

of farmers as they enter the industry. I enjoy connecting with young farmers, helping them build networks, and ensuring they feel welcomed and included within the dairy community.

I am honoured to have recently been appointed Deputy Chair of the YDN Leadership Committee, a role that provides an opportunity to further support and advocate for young people in the dairy industry. Through this position, I look forward to contributing to leadership development, industry engagement, and creating opportunities for emerging dairy professionals.

I believe the future of the dairy industry depends on fostering strong relationships, sharing knowledge, and creating opportunities for young people to succeed. By supporting emerging leaders and promoting a positive industry culture, I hope to contribute to a vibrant and sustainable future for dairy farming.



## GIPPSDAIRY

## GippsDairy Team Update

**Over the past six months, we've seen some changes across the team, and we're pleased to share an update on our current structure and focus areas.**

Our Farmer Engagement team continues to strengthen, with Jackie Aveling working across the East Gippsland, MID, central and parts of south Gippsland, and Jay Singh working across south Gippsland, Baw Baw and Bass Coast regions. Both are supporting farmer engagement and building strong connections on the ground.

Veronica McLeod continues to provide leadership across MID Discussion Groups (DG) and Women in Dairy, maintaining strong direction and support for these programs, as well as providing support to the extension team. Megan Grumley is now in a full-time position, leading our work in animal performance while also coordinating and facilitating our discussion groups, ensuring they continue to deliver value to participants.

Jess Blackstock is currently supporting both extension and communications, with plans to return to extension full-time once a Communications Coordinator is appointed. Moving forward, Jess will focus on YDN and Farm Business extension, helping drive outcomes in these priority areas.

Shanky Sungroya continues to lead across nutrition, feedbase, climate environmental stewardship and regenerative agriculture discussion groups, supporting farmers with expertise in these key areas.

Tania Ketteringham is supporting people experience and continues to write great adverts for farm positions and support a diverse range of people related enquiries. Tania's role is spread across Dairy NSW and Gippsland.

Rohanna Crouch is leading externally funding projects including Q Fever, Cows Create Careers at Fulham Correctional Centre and others and continues to source funding to deliver projects that meet farmer needs.

Sue Mead provides project support, finance and office administration. Sue is the point of contact for Q Fever testing and vaccination appointments, facial eczema spore count testing and is supporting the women in dairy committee.

Katherine Vaughan expertly supports board operations, including subcommittees and helps Karen in her management role.

Trish Hammond's role in supporting farmers experiencing drought is coming to an end, she will continue to facilitate the Cows Create Careers Program at Fulham Correctional Centre and will be coordinating a project during 2026-27 providing support to farmers employing culturally and linguistically diverse workers.

Andy Thomas and Cindy Lucas continue to fill gaps in extension delivery and supporting projects.

We're also fortunate to have Lauren Foster continuing with us as a contractor delivering some performance extension and possibly continuing to support the Facial Eczema project. Her ongoing involvement provides valuable continuity around animal health and performance.

Our staff play an essential and encouraging role in supporting dairy farmers. We have a range of skills across the team and value the additional perspective that our farmer staff contribute. Please reach out to them with your needs and suggestions.

## SERVICES

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## Don't skim over your fringe benefits tax obligations

By Australian Taxation Office

**If you employ staff, understanding FBT isn't just good practice – it's essential to avoid unexpected costs and compliance risks.**

For many dairy farmers, offering 'perks' like housing is often a practical part of farm operations. However, these benefits and the tax obligations that come with them can easily be overlooked. Fringe benefits tax (FBT) is paid by employers when they provide benefits to employees (or their family or associates) in addition to wages and salaries. While perks can help attract and retain workers, especially in regional areas – they can also attract FBT.

**As a dairy farmer, are you:**

- allowing employees to use work vehicles for private purposes?
- reimbursing an employee's personal expenses, such as rent or utility costs?
- providing on-site accommodation?
- providing meals or board?

Providing benefits may help keep your farm moo-ving or even be necessary for your workers, so it's important to understand how FBT applies to stay compliant and make informed decisions for your business.

**How FBT works**

The FBT year runs from 1 April to 31 March. If you provide fringe benefits during this time, you need to self-assess your FBT liability, lodge an FBT return and pay any tax owed.

**Following these 4 key steps helps you stay on top of your FBT obligations.**

**1. Identify the type of fringe benefits you provide**

Start by reviewing all the benefits you provide employees beyond wages and salaries. This may include the fringe benefits already mentioned or other non-cash benefits.

Fringe benefits can take many forms, so carefully identify what you provide, who receives it and how it's used. This will help you determine whether FBT applies. If FBT applies, check if there are any exemptions or concessions available.

See [ato.gov.au/FBTtypes](https://ato.gov.au/FBTtypes) to learn more.

**2. Work out your FBT liability**

To work out your FBT liability for the year, you'll need to calculate the taxable value of each benefit provided. Different benefits use different calculation methods, so it's important you apply the relevant method to ensure your FBT is accurate. Your registered tax agent can also help you through this step.

Visit [ato.gov.au/calculateFBT](https://ato.gov.au/calculateFBT) to find out more.

**3. Keep accurate records**

The records you need to keep will depend on the benefits provided and the method you used to calculate the taxable value. Your records should show how the benefits were valued, how you worked out your FBT and support any exemptions or concessions you claim.

Check [ato.gov.au/FBTrecordkeeping](https://ato.gov.au/FBTrecordkeeping) for more.

**4. Lodge, pay and report**

You'll need to lodge your FBT return and pay any amount owing. If you're preparing your own return, lodgment and payment is due by 21 May each year. If you're using a registered tax agent, you may have until 25 June to lodge and pay, but you need to be listed on your agent's FBT client list by 21 May to be eligible.

You may also need to report the reportable fringe benefits amount on your employees' income statements by 14 July.

Find more about lodging and paying at [ato.gov.au/FBTlodgment](https://ato.gov.au/FBTlodgment).

If you provide fringe benefits, it's important to understand the tax implications. A little preparation can go a long way, so review your arrangements and seek advice from a tax professional to help ensure your FBT obligations are managed correctly.

## MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about fringe benefits tax and your obligations at:  
[ato.gov.au/FBT](https://ato.gov.au/FBT)

## The good and bad of input prices

By Tom Youl – Dairy Australia

**Farm input price movements were mixed in July. Collectively, input prices have been falling since March, but several products recorded showed signs of reversal.**

Diesel prices increased by 10% nationally while urea prices also rose. The deterioration of the situation in the Middle East during July highlighted that the conflict still has a part to play in determining input prices. Notably, imports of urea are up calendar year to date than in 2025, despite concerns of widespread shortages earlier in the year.

In Gippsland, hay prices fell by 1.6% in July and finished 46% lower than a year earlier. Grain prices were relatively steady during the month

but have increased by 13% since the start of 2026. Conditions were similarly mixed from a rainfall and water availability perspective. Rainfall was above average across West and South Gippsland but below average in East Gippsland, consistent with root-zone soil moisture conditions across the region.

Overall, Gippsland's input price environment is more favourable than it was 12 months ago, largely due to significantly lower hay prices. However, risks remain on the horizon. The Bureau of Meteorology's climate outlook is forecasting a hot and dry spring, potentially threatening both the production and pricing of purchased feed. Milk production has been strong across Gippsland so far in 2026, but that momentum could stall if seasonal conditions become less favourable.



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**■ BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL**

# Hoofing around Gippy town



## SAVE THE DATE

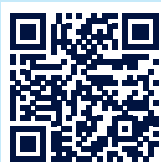
| DATE             | EVENT                                         | LOCATION |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------|
| 8 October 2026   | GippsDairy AGM and Farmer and Industry Dinner | Moe      |
| 20 November 2026 | Women in Dairy – Ladies Lunch                 | Morwell  |
| 6 December 2026  | YDN End of Year event                         | TBC      |

## GIPPSDAIRY EVENTS – SEPTEMBER TO OCTOBER 2026

|                                      |                                                          |             |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Thursday 3 September                 | Women in Dairy: Social Dinner – South Gippsland          | Loch        |
| Tuesday 8 & 15 September             | Top Fodder or Successful Silage                          | Ellinbank   |
| Wednesday 9 & 16 September           | Milking & Mastitis Management – West Gippsland           | Trafalgar   |
| Wednesday 9 September                | Women in Dairy: Paint, Socialise & Sip – South Gippsland | Toora       |
| Wednesday 16 & Thursday 17 September | Business Governance and Investment Forum                 | Southbank   |
| Wednesday 16 September               | Women in Dairy: Paint, Socialise & Sip – MID             | Heyfield    |
| Thursday 17 & 24 September           | Rearing Healthy Calves – MID                             | Tinamba     |
| Tuesday 29 September                 | Herd Systems Technology Day                              | Morwell     |
| Thursday 1 October                   | The Heat Detective                                       | MID         |
| Friday 9 October                     | Young Dairy Network West Gippsland: Heifer Management    | Labortouche |
| Thursday 8 October                   | GippsDairy AGM & Farmer and Industry Dinner              | Central     |
| Friday 16 October                    | Young Dairy Network MID: Heifer Management               | TBC         |
| Thursday 22 & 29 October             | Milking & Mastitis Management – MID                      | Tinamba     |
| Thursday 22 October                  | Profitable Farm Emissions Plan Workshop – West Gippsland | Warragul    |
| Friday 23 October                    | Young Dairy Network South Gippsland: Heifer Management   | TBC         |

## Upcoming events

Scan the QR code or visit:  
[dairyaustralia.com.au/gippsdairy](http://dairyaustralia.com.au/gippsdairy)  
 for our full calendar of upcoming events.



## 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.



## YOUR GIPPSDAIRY TEAM

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