The Milk Flow

Summer edition - 2025

Dairy NSW board update to NSW dairy farmers

As we approach the end of 2025, I would like to acknowledge the significant amount of work undertaken by dairy farmers across New South Wales during what has been a variable and at times challenging year. Seasonal shifts, cost pressures, and business complexity have continued to influence farm decision-making, and it has been encouraging to see how producers have adapted and planned through these conditions.

Following the recent Dairy NSW AGM, I am pleased to move into the role of Chairperson of the Dairy NSW Board, and congratulate Carissa Wolfe on her appointment as Deputy Chair. We also welcome new Board Directors Justin Walsh and Stephen Collins, and confirm that Phil Ryan has been returned for another term. I extend thanks to outgoing Chairperson, Andrew Smith, and outgoing Board member, Dimity Smith, for their contribution to the organisation.

Dairy NSW continues to evolve its ways of working with Dairy Australia to strengthen service delivery and maintain a clear focus on farmer needs. To support this transition, the Board has established a working group of directors to guide the process, and in October several structural adjustments were implemented. Natalie Campbell has taken on additional responsibility in supporting the Dairy NSW Board and now reports directly to the Board. Dairy NSW Regional Manager, Paul van Wel, has transitioned out of Executive Officer duties, allocating 40% of his role to Regional Manager responsibilities, including staff management for Jane Woolacott and Ali Briggs and oversight of service delivery across the region. The remaining 60% of Paul's role has shifted to a new National Farm Engagement Coach position, piloted for 12 months and focused on coaching, capability development, strategic input and national farm engagement support. Additionally, in November, Ali Briggs stepped into an expanded Farm Engagement Lead role, now supporting farmers across both the Mid Coast and Hunter regions, continuing to provide timely, regionally relevant and practical support during seasonal and business challenges.

Looking ahead to 2026, dairy businesses across NSW will continue to operate in a dynamic environment. Feedbase management, labour availability, input costs, water access, and increasing regulatory expectations will remain key areas of focus. Continued improvement in business performance, adoption of technology, and strategic planning will be important for maintaining strong and efficient farm systems.

Dairy NSW will concentrate on providing practical, regionally relevant support across these areas. Our priority remains ensuring farmers have access to high-quality extension services, locally tailored technical guidance, and clear pathways to Dairy Australia programs and resources. This includes support for feedbase and irrigation planning, animal health and welfare, business management, environmental compliance, and workforce capability.

Work to strengthen farm engagement and streamline service delivery will continue, ensuring the organisation remains responsive and aligned with the needs of NSW dairy farmers. Our aim is to make it easier for farmers to access the right advice at the right time, and to support informed, evidence-based decision-making on farm.

As we move into the Christmas period, I wish you and your families a safe and productive start to the new year. Should you require any support or information over the coming months, please contact the Dairy NSW team - we are here to assist. .

Donna Salway
Chairperson, Dairy NSW Board

Delivering *for* Dairy

Dairy NSW spotlight

Meet Justin Walsh

Dairy NSW board director

Dairy NSW is pleased to welcome South Coast dairy farmer, Justin Walsh, to the Board. Justin brings a strong mix of practical farming experience, strategic thinking, and industry leadership to the role.

After completing a Bachelor of Agricultural Science at the University of Sydney in 2006, Justin returned home to the family dairy at Jaspers Brush, where he began share-farming with his parents. In 2016, he took on full management of the business and has since overseen its expansion to a 400-cow operation. His focus has been on building efficient, pasture-based production systems, investing in infrastructure that improves labour efficiency, and strengthening herd performance to support long-term business resilience.

Justin is also deeply committed to industry development. He regularly hosts students, service providers and visiting groups to demonstrate practical innovations in pasture management and sustainable dairy production. In 2024, he completed the Australian Institute of Company Directors Observership Program, further enhancing his governance capability and strengthening his contribution at a board level.

Justin joins the Dairy NSW Board with a clear commitment to supporting farmers, driving continuous improvement, and contributing to a strong and sustainable future for the NSW dairy industry.

Meet Stephen Collins

Dairy NSW board director

Dairy NSW is pleased to welcome Stephen Collins to the Board, bringing with him a unique blend of agricultural insight, strategic design expertise, and a strong commitment to the sustainability of regional communities.

Stephen is the grandson of a Tasmanian dairy farmer and orchardist, and although he grew up in cities including Hobart, Darwin, Sydney, and Canberra, farming has always been part of his story. Since moving to the Bega Valley with his family in 2021, he has become deeply embedded in the local agricultural community. Stephen manages Rock Lily - a 100-acre forested property and bed and breakfast in Brogo - and works on a large commercial dairy farm in Angledale. He has strong interests in conservation, regenerative agriculture, and innovative approaches that help ensure farming remains a viable, fulfilling livelihood for smallholders and their families.

Before settling in Brogo, Stephen spent 16 years running a Canberra-based organisational design and innovation studio, consulting widely across federal and state government, banking, telecommunications, IT, and not-for-profit sectors. He brings specialist expertise in policy and program development, regulatory design, service implementation, and human-centred approaches that support practical, farmer-focused outcomes.

Dairy NSW looks forward to Stephen's contributions to the Board and the broader NSW dairy community.

Meet Matthew Shaffer

CEO, Dairy Australia

It's been a busy few months as I settle in at Dairy Australia. Whilst I'm certainly no stranger to dairy given my background with DataGene and Holstein Australia, there has still been plenty to learn. I'm looking forward to guiding Dairy Australia as we focus our efforts on enhancing the profitability of dairy farm businesses and improving herd and feed productivity, whilst ensuring the sustainability of the industry.

In my first few months in the role, I've visited farmers and dairy manufacturers across Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, New South Wales and Northern Queensland, with visits to other dairy regions still to come. In New South Wales specifically I visited farmers on the south coast from Bega to Sydney and am keen to visit the other dairying regions in NSW in the year ahead.

Meeting directly with farmers and industry in the regions in which they operate is helping inform our priorities, ensuring that we're directing our investment into the services and initiatives that will deliver the greatest benefits to farmers.

The conversations I've had with farmers have covered the breadth of topics that keep them awake at night – issues such as improving the productivity of pastures and herds to support farmers in doing more with less, the need for viable markets for non-herd replacement calves, addressing the challenges in accessing labour and supporting new entrants to dairy farming, and improving consumer perceptions of dairy farming to protect our licence to operate.

These discussions have been incredibly valuable in affirming the areas where we're on the right track – these are some of the issues that keep the Dairy Australia team awake at night too – and in reminding us of where we need to improve our focus – feedback that has been crucial as we begin transitioning to our new strategic plan.

The Dairy Australia Strategic Plan 2030 sets out our priorities, outcomes and targets for the next five years. It is informed by farmers, who have provided insights on what's most important to them. Specifically, they want to:

- Be **more profitable** and help them unlock the potential of their farm businesses,
- Be **more productive** through research and innovation that delivers long-term gains on farm, particularly in herd and pasture management, and
- Be **sustainable and competitive** on a local and global scale, by focusing on sustainable practices that farmers do every day.

These insights form the foundation of the plan, providing a framework to guide our investment focus and shaping our approach to service delivery for all farmers, across every farming system or business profile – small or large, grazed or TMR, family-owned or corporate. We want to meet farmers where they are and help every farmer make the right decisions for their farm, their family, and their future.

In support of these priorities, we're also setting objectives that support ambitious industry goals to measure our performance, including: a profitability target for every farmer, improving the yield of dry matter homegrown feed, increasing the genetic gain of the national herd, and increasing the longevity of herds.

Importantly, these insights and goals also reflect a whole-of-industry approach, which is vital if we want to reach our common goal of achieving sustainable profitability through productivity.

When we work collaboratively, we achieve great things – I saw this first-hand during my time at DataGene. However, when we work against each other rather than with each other, we split our focus and our efforts. We are paddling a rowboat using only one oar, and we wind up going in circles.

It is clear from my conversations with farmers, industry leaders, research partners, service providers, and government agencies that we are united in our aspirations for Australia's dairy industry. We want a united, strong, profitable, sustainable industry that gives opportunities to the next generation and helps feed the world. What connects us is stronger than what sets us apart.

Dairy remains an incredibly rewarding industry. We haven't often focused on the success stories, but there are many in our industry. I see them in my travels. By working together to focus on our shared priorities and face up to our challenges, I see great opportunities ahead for Australian dairy.

Scan the QR code for an overview of the Dairy Australia Strategic Plan 2030.

Strategies for managing heat stress in NSW dairy systems

As temperatures climb across New South Wales, the implications for dairy herds extend well beyond day-to-day cow comfort.

The science behind heat load

Dairy cows begin to accumulate heat load once the Temperature-Humidity Index (THI) exceeds 68 - a threshold now commonly surpassed in regions such as the Mid North Coast, Hunter, South Coast, Riverina, and Murray. NSW's combination of high humidity, warm nights and extended hot spells means cows often remain in a sustained heat-stressed state, unable to effectively dissipate accumulated heat.

Physiological responses occur quickly:

- **Reduced dry matter intake (DMI)** as cows attempt to limit internal heat production.
- **Compromised rumen function**, resulting in lower fibre digestion and altered fermentation patterns.
- **Reproductive disruptions**, including reduced oestrus expression, poorer conception rates, and higher early embryonic loss.
- **Immune suppression**, leading to elevated mastitis risk and higher somatic cell counts.

These compounding factors can extend well beyond the heat event itself, influencing herd performance into autumn.

Infrastructure and cooling design for NSW conditions

In many NSW systems - ranging from pasture-based coastal farms to mixed feeding operations inland - cooling infrastructure provides one of the highest returns on investment.

Shade and structural cooling should follow three core principles:

1 Maximise radiant heat reduction

Light-coloured, reflective roofing materials significantly reduce heat load. Artificial shade structures can achieve a >30% reduction in radiant heat compared with unshaded areas.

2 Prioritise locations of forced congregation

Holding yards, dairy entrances and feedpads generate the greatest benefits from targeted cooling, as cows reliably spend time at these points regardless of grazing rotation.

3 Adopt a combined cooling approach

High-volume, low-speed fans paired with low-pressure, targeted soakers offer the most effective evaporative cooling. Cooling should begin before cows reach heat stress, typically mid-morning during severe conditions.

Nutrition: precision adjustments for summer conditions

Heat stress fundamentally alters nutrient requirements and rumen dynamics. Precision feeding strategies can help stabilise intake, energy balance, and cow health.

Key considerations include :

- **Energy density** – Supplementary fats offer a low-heat-increment energy source.
- **Fibre management** – Strategically reducing NDF during heat events can improve intake.
- **Water access** – Cows may consume up to 200 litres/day in extreme heat; ensure trough flow rates exceed peak demand.
- **Osmolyte supplementation** – Betaine improves cellular hydration and supports rumen stability under heat load.
- **Forage quality preservation** – In irrigated Murray and coastal systems, maintaining leaf quality and minimising heat damage in summer crops is critical.

Genetics, management, and longer-term adaptation

Genetic selection for heat tolerance—such as slick-coated variants and improved feed conversion - will play an increasing role in resilience. While long-term in nature, these traits align with future climate modelling for NSW.

Operational management also remains central:

- Shift heavy tasks to cooler periods
- Adjust milking times to early morning or evening
- Ensure unrestricted water and shade during all grazing periods
- Closely monitor high-risk groups, including transition cows and heifers

Rapid-action checklist for NSW heat events

- Initiate cooling systems **before** THI peaks
- Provide at least **one trough per 20–30 cows** with high flow capacity
- Review and temporarily adjust feed rations to stabilise energy intake
- Increase shade access in high-use laneways and yards
- Observe behaviour changes - panting, drooling, bunching - early in the day
- Monitor milk yield and rumen indicators for signs of cumulative heat load

Access support and regionally relevant expertise

Dairy Australia's **Cool Cows** program offers evidence-based, practical tools to help NSW farmers strengthen resilience to summer conditions. For tailored support, connect with the Dairy NSW team.

Tips for keeping cows cool during hot weather

1 Wet the dairy yard for an hour before cows arrive.

2 Set up a sprinkler system at the dairy yard.

3 Install a large water trough on the exit side of the dairy.

4 Sprinkle cows for 30–60 minutes while standing in the dairy yard waiting for afternoon milking.

Dairy Farm Monitor Project 2024-25 NSW Results

In 2024-25 the average NSW Dairy Farm Monitor profitability increased slightly on the previous year, whilst being the second highest in the 14 years of the project (accounting for inflation). Profitability remained above the long-term average ($1.55/kgMS) for the fifth year in a row with an average Earnings Before Interest and Tax (EBIT) of $2.14/kgMS.

Gross farm income was relatively stable ($12.56/kgMS), influenced by a lower average milk price ($11.55/kgMS) which was buffered by higher average livestock trading profits.

Seasonal conditions varied across the year and regions, impacting management and performance. Drier conditions were experienced in southern inland regions and flooding and prolonged wet conditions experienced along the northern coastal strip and some southern coastal regions.

When accounting for inflation, variable costs decreased on a dollars per kilogram milk solids basis largely driven by lower purchased feed and agistment costs ($/kgMS). Overhead costs also decreased on average across the state when accounting for inflation.

Feed reserves were drawn down on in the North, with good inventory on hand in the South by the end of the year.

Profitability (dollars per kg milk solids) in 2024-25 was above the long-term average for both the North and South regions.

Strong profit results per farm (average EBIT $697,468) across the state, were above the 14-year long term average of $366,394.

Milk price

Milk price decreased three per cent (nominal) on average from 2023-24. Milk income declined from 94% to approximately 92% of gross farm income with livestock trading and other farm income increasing in proportion.

New South Wales ↓ 3%
to $11.55/kgMS

The North → 0%
stable at $12.38/kgMS

The South ↓ 5%
to $10.82/kgMS

Expectations for profit in 2025-26

Return expectations for the 2025-26 period have been influenced by geographical region. Thirty-six per cent of North farms are expecting declining returns compared to only six per cent in the South. Fifty per cent of participants in the North and South are anticipating returns to improve with the outlook in the South very positive overall as 94% anticipate improving or stable returns. Given the drier conditions in the south and flooding/prolonged wet in the north, the issue of most concern to farmers in the short and medium term is that of climate/seasonal conditions.

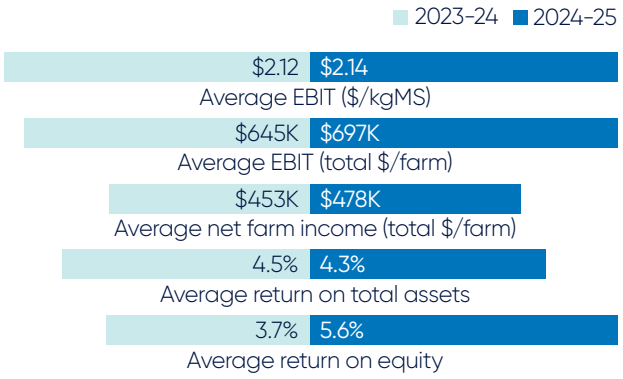
Greenhouse gas emissions

The average net greenhouse gas emissions for NSW dairy farm monitor participants were 4,649 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents per farm in 2024-25. This was an increase on the previous year, likely due to an increase in emission sources associated with higher average milk solids production. Emissions intensity increased slightly on the previous year but has remained relatively stable at 0.92 t CO_2-e/t FPCM.

Historical Profitability

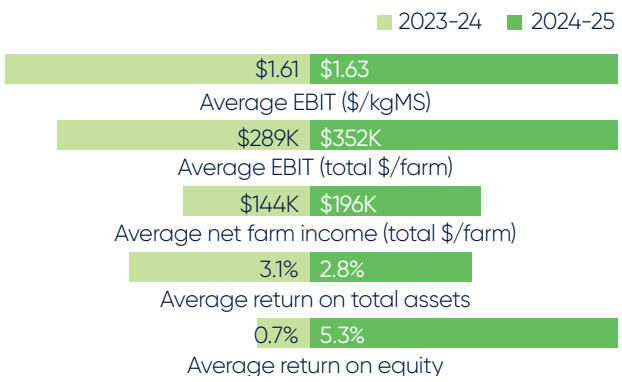
*Long term average value

New South Wales



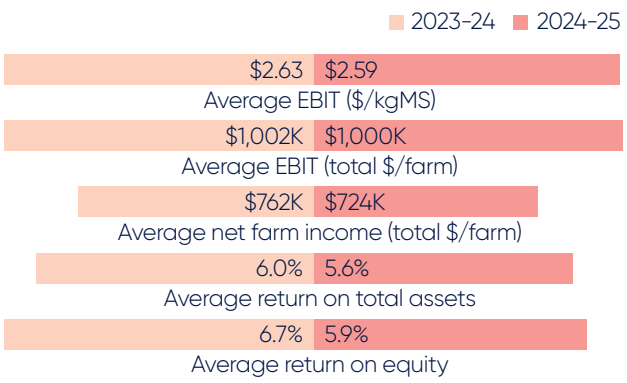
Seasonal conditions proved challenging this year with dry conditions dominating in southern inland regions and extreme flooding and prolonged wet conditions occurring in the north in the second half of the year due to ex Tropical Cyclone Alfred and then the East Coast Severe Weather event. Access to irrigation water assisted farms in the south in managing the drier conditions. The flooding and wet conditions had significant impacts on affected farms with loss of pasture/crops and animal health and production impacts. While gross farm income was the third highest in 14 years of NSW DFMP it was slightly lower than the previous year for the state ($/kgMS), however there are regional nuances related to milk price and livestock trading profits as discussed below. Interest and lease costs have stabilised relative to the large increases seen in previous years on a $/kgMS basis.

The North



The North farm participants received a similar average milk price to the previous year (the third highest average milk price in 14 years in real terms), and livestock trading profits remained strong, resulting in the second highest gross farm income. Overhead costs increased driven by higher cash costs (paid labour, repairs and maintenance and 'other' overheads) and while the non-cash cost of imputed labour decreased, depreciation increased. Variable costs declined slightly with stable herd costs, higher shed costs and lower total feed costs. Lower total feed costs were influenced by higher homegrown feed costs and a draw down on feed inventory which were outweighed by lower purchased feed and agistment costs. The resulting impact being a one per cent increase in profitability remaining above the long-term average and being the fourth highest seen in the last 14 years (accounting for inflation).

The South



Gross farm income declined three per cent this year as a result of a lower average milk price (down five per cent) and lower other farm income, with the overall impact softened by a four per cent higher livestock trading profit. Efficient use of resources and cost control saw a decrease in operating costs (variable and overhead) and on average, farmers were able to increase the value of feed and water inventory across the year. Lower operating costs and higher livestock trading were insufficient to counter the lower milk price, resulting in a two per cent decline in farm profitability (average EBIT per kilogram of milk solids). This was the fourth highest profit in the 14 years of the project (accounting for inflation) and remains above the long-term average.

Managing pinkeye in dairy herds: What NSW dairy farmers need to know for effective treatment

The ocular disease commonly referred to as 'pinkeye' in cattle (formally Infectious Bovine Keratoconjunctivitis or IBK) is more than just a nuisance – it carries real animal-welfare and productivity implications for dairy herds.

A recent episode of Dairy Australia's podcast, DairyPod, features veterinary surgeon Dr Mac Kneipp speaking with Dr Stephanie Bullen from Dairy Australia about the latest insights. The key takeaway? While bacteria play a part, pinkeye is a multifactorial challenge – and managing it effectively means addressing environment, animal, and pathogen factors.

Understanding the risk and cause

Traditional teaching focuses on the bacterium Moraxella bovis as the primary culprit. Indeed, older fact sheets from the NSW Department of Primary Industries point to Moraxella infection as classic IBK. However, recent thinking – as explained by Dr Kneipp – emphasises that initial eye damage (ultraviolet radiation, dust, tall or stalky pasture, mechanical trauma) creates the opportunity for bacterial invasion.

Risk factors commonly seen on NSW dairy farms include young animals (less immune experienced), high fly burdens, dusty or low cover paddocks, bright UV exposure, and animal movements/yarding that bring contact. Understanding this helps shift the focus from reactive treatment only, to proactive management of the environment and animal – helping prevent outbreaks rather than just treating them.

Practical management strategies for your dairy herd

1 **Early detection and treatment** – Prompt identification of affected animals pays dividends. Signs to look for include excessive tearing or squinting, cloudy or ulcerated cornea, redness or swelling of the eyelid/eye region. Early intervention reduces welfare impact, lowers the chance of permanent corneal damage, and reduces spread within the herd.

2 **Environmental and vector control** - Address the root triggers: minimise dust (e.g. by managing paddock cover, avoiding heavy stock in very dry dusty paddocks), provide shade to reduce UV damage, keep fly populations down (through fly control programs, ear tags, pour-ons, traps) and limit mechanical eye irritation (e.g. long stalky grass or seedheads near feeding areas).

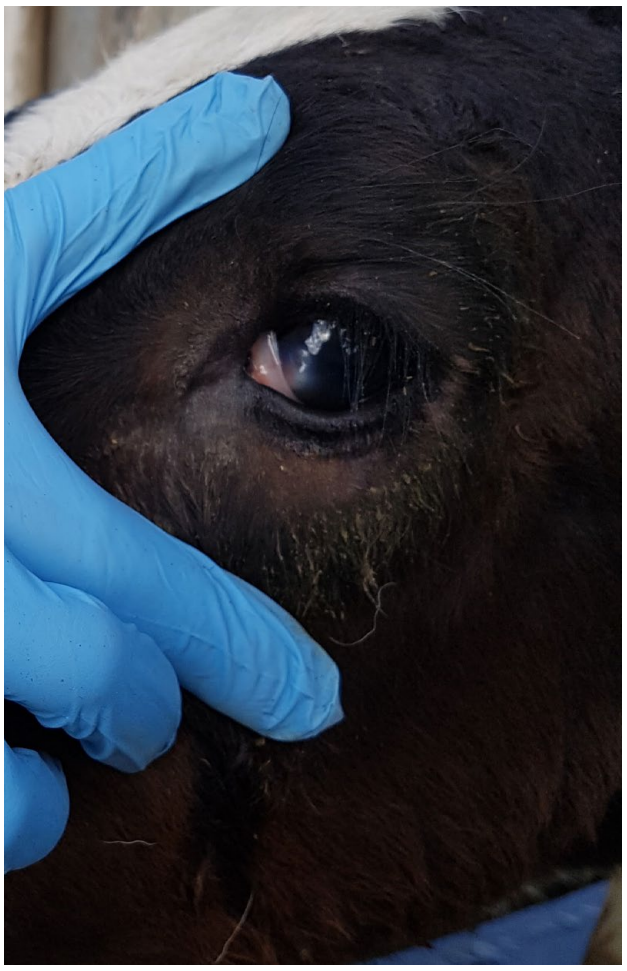
3 **Herd segregation and monitoring** – If cases appear, consider segregating affected mobs or individuals to reduce spread. Also track which groups are more vulnerable (younger animals, newly introduced stock) and monitor closely during higher-risk times (hot dry conditions, fly season).

4 **Record-keeping and review** - Track cases, treatments, outcomes, and paddock/environmental conditions at the time of outbreak. This gives you data to identify trends (for example, particular paddocks, mob types, or seasons) and refine your prevention plan next season. The DairyPod discussion emphasises the value of understanding those underlying herd and environmental factors.

Why this matters for NSW dairies

Beyond the welfare of your cows, pinkeye has tangible productivity effects – reduced feed intake, slowed growth (in youngstock), possible reduction in production if animals are uncomfortable, and increased labour/time costs. Australian factsheets estimate that IBK remains one of the most economically important ocular diseases in cattle. For dairy operations in NSW, where seasonal conditions (dry spells, high UV, fly pressure) and intensification or close grazing may be present, staying ahead of pinkeye risk should be part of your herd-health toolkit.

Pinkeye isn't only about treating the bacteria. It's about managing the whole system – animal health, environment, vector control, and active monitoring. By taking a proactive, herd-wide approach, NSW dairy farmers can reduce incidence, improve animal welfare, and protect productivity. If you suspect pinkeye in your herd, work with your veterinarian to tailor a prevention and treatment strategy that fits your farm's conditions.



Scan the QR code to listen to the full DairyPod recording.

Fall armyworm: what NSW dairy farmers need to know heading into the 2025-26 growing season

The recent DairyPod episode Fall Armyworm: Understanding and Detection provides a timely reminder for dairy farmers across New South Wales to strengthen surveillance of this increasingly prevalent pest.

Fall Armyworm (Spodoptera frugiperda) is now established across northern and coastal NSW and is periodically detected further south, posing a material risk to dairy feedbase planning.

A growing threat to NSW feed systems

Dairy regions such as the Mid North Coast, Hunter, Manning, New England, and Northern Rivers rely heavily on home-grown forage - including maize silage, sorghum, ryegrass, and mixed cereal forages. These crops sit squarely within FAW's preferred host range. Even minor early-season pressure can compromise plant density, reduce biomass accumulation, and alter silage quality parameters such as starch, NDF and DM yield.

Warmer seasonal trends, coupled with irrigation in parts of the state, provide ideal conditions for FAW life-cycle acceleration. Larvae develop rapidly, often outpacing detection if crops are not scouted intensively.

Technical indicators of FAW presence

FAW is most effectively identified during early larval stages. Key indicators include:

- **Windowing and pin-hole lesions** on emerging leaves - often the earliest visible sign.
- **Larvae concealed in whorls or leaf sheaths**, with frass accumulation at the plant base.
- **Egg masses** covered in a pale, felt-like layer, typically on the undersides of leaves.
- **Rapid defoliation across patches**, especially in maize and sorghum blocks.

Chemical control options are limited for pastures and winter cereals, placing greater importance on early detection and agronomic decision-making. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies - including crop rotations, strategic grazing, and use of less susceptible varieties - should be considered.

Quick, practical actions for NSW dairy farms

1 **Implement structured crop scouting** within 5–7 days of emergence and continue weekly during warm months.

2 **Map and classify high-risk paddocks**, prioritising maize, sorghum, and early sown cereals.

3 **Establish an early-warning protocol** with your agronomist to support rapid response thresholds.

4 **Prepare feedbase contingencies** - including alternative forage options - if FAW pressure increases.

5 **Document crop observations** to support future risk modelling and farm planning.

FAW will remain an evolving challenge in NSW. Proactive monitoring and informed agronomy remain the best defence for protecting your feedbase heading into the next production season.

Scan this QR code to listen to the recent DairyPod interview.

Smart irrigation decisions to maximise productivity

As NSW dairy farmers move through the hot, dry conditions typical of January, February and early March, irrigation decisions are carrying even more weight.

Many regions – from the Mid Coast through to the Hunter, North Coast, and southern inland valleys – are experiencing high evapotranspiration rates, declining soil moisture, and increased pressure on both pasture performance and water resources. With summer storms remaining unpredictable and storages under strain after a tough finish to 2024/25, every megalitre needs to count.

This period is also a crucial set-up window for autumn. Decisions made now – around timing, prioritisation, and system readiness – will strongly influence pasture recovery, silage planning and overall farm resilience heading into the cooler months.

In a recent Dairy Australia podcast interview, Cath Lescun, National Soils & Water Lead at Dairy Australia, chats with Dr James Hills, Livestock Production Centre Leader at the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, to discuss the essentials of irrigation planning and management.

They cover the key steps and checks before irrigating — from preparation and pressure testing to understanding soil types – along with practical tools and methods for assessing soil moisture, calculating how much water to apply, understanding readily available water (RAW), and getting irrigation scheduling right.

The below key areas are a timely update for dairy farmers, whether already irrigating or holding off due to seasonal conditions.

Get systems irrigation-ready

While we recognise irrigation is well underway, we have kept this point in as it is a major cause of delayed start to irrigation, impacting productivity. Did this happen to you this year? We recognise many systems in the mid coast and Hunter regions were damaged earlier in the year, with competing priorities for rebuild.

Before the first irrigation event, system readiness is one of the most cost-effective steps farmers can take. Pumps, sprinklers, irrigators, hoses, filtration units, and control systems must be checked, cleaned and pressure tested. Even minor issues – such as worn nozzles or incorrect pressure – can cause uneven application, reduce water-use efficiency and limit pasture response.

Dairy Australia's Smarter Irrigation for Profit 2 project provides pre-season checklists for centre pivots, travelling irrigators and surface irrigation, helping farmers identify faults early and ensure systems are calibrated to deliver uniform application across varying soil types commonly found in NSW dairy regions.

Irrigate on time: avoid costly delays

As Victoria-based Irrigation Extension Officer Nick O'Halloran highlighted, spring is the most productive season for pasture growth, and irrigation timing directly influences yield. Delaying irrigation by even a few days when soils are already dry can result in dry matter losses of up to 60 kg/ha per day. For NSW farms running tight feed budgets, these losses compound quickly.

Monitoring evapotranspiration (ET) is essential. ET rates indicate daily pasture water use and can be accessed through tools such as Agriculture Victoria's Eto Map and NSW DPI weather data feeds. When ET exceeds effective rainfall and RAW (Readily Available Water) is depleted, it is time to irrigate – before stress sets plants back weeks.

Know your soil and RAW

NSW dairy regions have a wide range of soil profiles – from sandy coastal soils to heavier alluvial clays inland—so understanding soil water-holding capacity is critical. RAW (Readily Available Water) reflects how much moisture plants can access between a full profile, and the point irrigation is required. Loamy soils typically have higher RAW than sands or clays, but rooting depth is equally important: shallow-rooted pastures may draw water only from the top 30–50 cm.

Tools such as IrriPasture combine local weather, ET, and soil characteristics to automate water-balance calculations and provide crop-specific irrigation recommendations.

Prioritise water where it matters

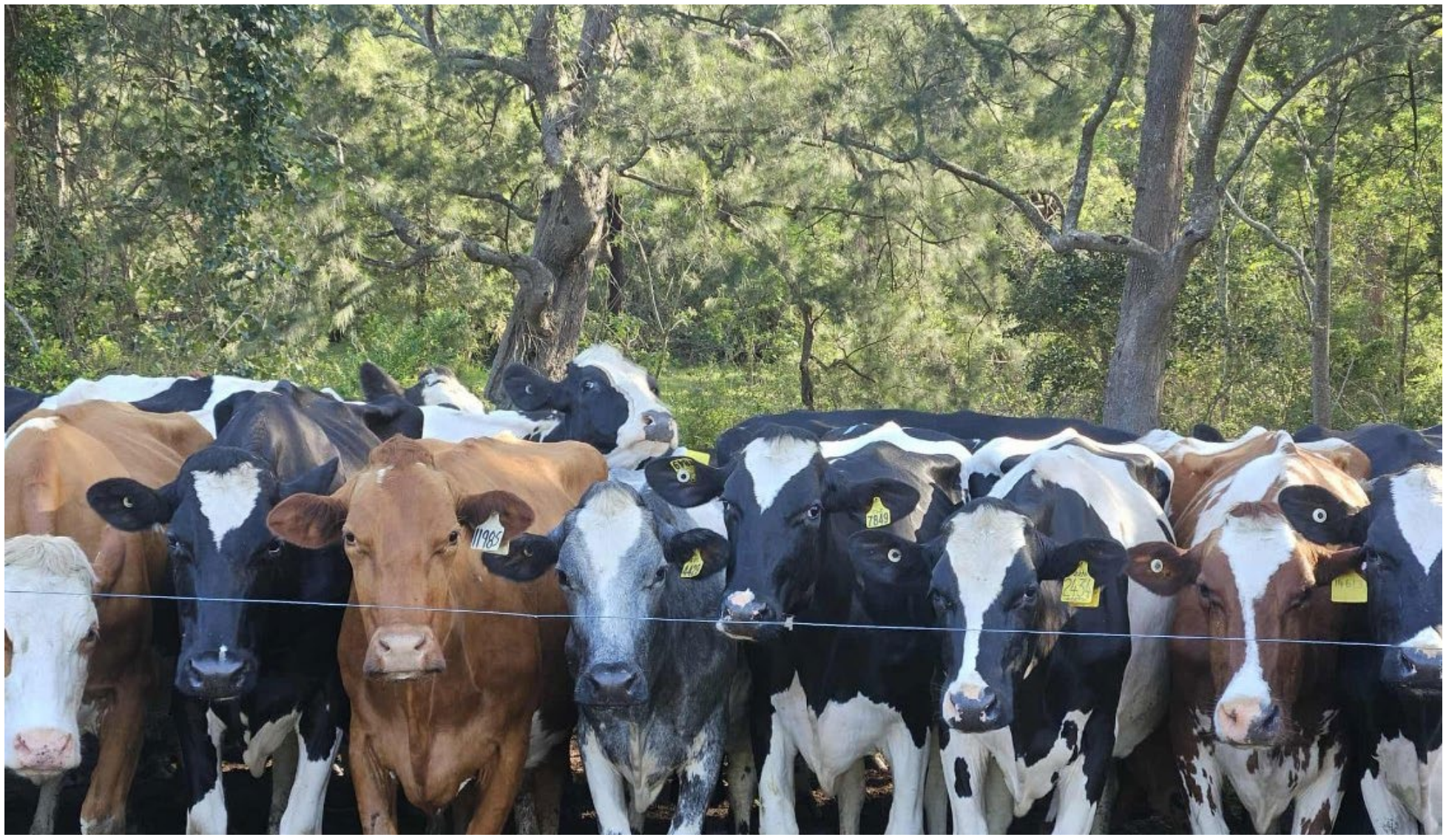
When allocation or on-farm storage is tight, NSW farmers should prioritise irrigating paddocks with strong plant density, good fertility, and low weed burden.

Avoid the 'green drought'

Cath Lescun's Tasmanian case study is a timely warning: pastures can look green yet be severely under-irrigated. Poor distribution uniformity and delayed irrigation resulted in a five-tonne/ha loss over five months – equivalent to $125,000 in missed fodder across 100 ha. Ensuring systems deliver required flow rates and timing irrigation correctly is essential to avoiding such silent losses.

As climate variability intensifies and NSW farms juggle rising water costs, smart irrigation is central to resilience. By combining accurate scheduling, soil knowledge, and system maintenance, dairy farmers can maximise spring growth, improve water-use efficiency, and strengthen their feed position for the seasons ahead.

For more information, resources and support on soils and irrigation contact your local Dairy NSW team member or scan the QR code here.



How Picasso Cows program inspired a farmer's path

As a fifth-generation dairy farmer, Tom Wilson has "always had a love for cows." But it was a primary school art project two decades ago that sparked his passion in a creative way. His school, Jamberoo Public School, was the first in Australia to paint a life-sized cow as part of Dairy Australia's *Picasso Cows* program.

As a fifth-generation dairy farmer, Tom Wilson has "always had a love for cows." But it was a primary school art project two decades ago that sparked his passion in a creative way. His school, Jamberoo Public School, was the first in Australia to paint a life-sized cow as part of Dairy Australia's Picasso Cows program.

The program began in Kiama, NSW, where Jamberoo local and long-time dairy supporter, Lynne Strong, recognised an opportunity to connect and engage the wider community with the dairy industry. The program was later taken on by Dairy Australia and expanded to a nationwide initiative, teaching students about dairy farming, nutrition, and sustainability through a creative, collaborative art project.

Jamberoo Public's painted cow even made it to the Easter Show, sparking curiosity from other schools and showing how a simple, hands-on project can connect children to the story of milk and build an appreciation for dairy farming.

"No one had ever done anything like that before," Tom explained. "Painting a cow really got me thinking about what we do on the farm and why it matters."

He describes the experience as a stepping stone.

"It might just flick a switch for some kids," he says. "You start by painting a cow, then you want to know more—how farms work, how to look after animals, how milk is made."

Today, Tom and his brother Luke lease a farm at Jamberoo on the NSW South Coast where they milk 150 mainly Holstein cows, with a few Jersey crosses, twice a day. The herd produces about 4,600 litres daily - roughly 30 litres per cow - on a pasture-based system with a grain mix feed in the dairy.

Running cows in Jamberoo is as rewarding as it is demanding.

"Seeing the cows happy and the farm looking good - it gives you pride in what you do," he says. But the coastal climate can be unpredictable.

"When it's wet, we feed hay to keep fibre up. When it's hot, you've got to keep them cool and comfortable." Small, constant decisions, he says, make all the difference.

Leasing has been the brothers' pathway into the industry - an opportunity Tom knows not everyone gets.

"It's not easy for young people to get started, but there are still chances if you work hard and the right doors open," he says. "Programs like Picasso Cows are important because they get kids interested early and show them what's possible."

Over the past two years, the Gardiner Foundation's sponsorship of Picasso Cows has enabled more schools to take part, helping students connect classroom learning to real-world dairy. The program now reaches approximately 12,000 young Australians each year, educating them on where their food comes from, the important role dairy plays in Australia and potentially inspiring the next generation of dairy professionals.

For Tom, that connection runs deep.

"If kids don't get that early exposure, they might never know how rewarding this life can be," he says. "You're outdoors, working with animals, learning something new every day. It's a great way to live."

For more information on how Dairy Australia works to promote Australian dairy and the Picasso Cows program scan the QR code.

How dairy is reducing waste

With the Australian Government having committed to halving food waste by 2030, the dairy sector is stepping up to play a key role in achieving this target.

Food waste is one of the biggest challenges across Australia's food system. Around one-third of all food produced each year never gets eaten, which is about 7.6 million tonnes of food, much of it still edible. It costs the Australian economy more than $36 billion a year and generates around 17.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gases.

Dairy is one of the largest sources of food waste across the supply chain, particularly in manufacturing, food service, retail, and households. That also means our industry has one of the biggest opportunities to make a difference.

To support this national goal, Dairy Australia worked with industry partners to develop the Dairy Food Waste Action Plan. The plan set out to understand where food waste occurs, why it happens, and how to reduce it across the supply chain. It focused on practical actions to improve efficiency and reduce losses.

The results show encouraging progress. In 2022–23, the dairy supply chain produced around 612,000 tonnes of food waste, a 16% reduction from 2020–21. More waste was avoided, with a 38% increase in higher value uses such as upcycling into new products or diverting to animal feed. Despite these gains, the total value of lost finished product was still estimated at $844 million a year, showing there is still more to do.

Most dairy food waste occurs after milk has left the farm. On farms, losses are minimal and usually only happen because of specific events like power outages or milk contamination. In manufacturing, waste often comes from by-products such as whey or from equipment inefficiencies linked to aging assets. In households, food was wasted due to over-purchasing, confusion about use-by dates, and perishable products not being used before expiry. By understanding these causes, the industry can target efforts where they have the greatest impact.

Reducing losses in manufacturing helps protect the value of every litre of milk produced on farm. Helping households waste less ensures the products farmers work hard to produce are enjoyed as intended.

Not all waste can be prevented, however. Some by-products and organic residues are part of normal production, and the focus should be on turning these materials into value. To explore this, Dairy Australia led a bioenergy feasibility study to assess how organic waste from dairy and other animal industries could be converted into renewable energy through anaerobic digestion. This process produces biogas for heat and power, along with nutrient-rich digestate that can improve soils.

The study found strong potential for regional bioenergy hubs, particularly in Warrnambool, where waste supply and energy demand align. A facility processing about 30,000 tonnes of organic waste each year could produce around 26,500 GJ of renewable energy. The concept is technically sound, but current economic conditions make it challenging to implement. Greater policy support and recognition of the environmental benefits would help unlock these opportunities.

Better waste management is about more than disposal. It means preventing losses where possible, finding value in by-products, and recovering energy and nutrients from what remains. Through data, collaboration, and innovation, the dairy industry is taking practical steps to make this happen. By continuing to build on this work, we can reduce emissions, protect value, and make sure every litre of milk delivers its full potential, supporting a more efficient and sustainable dairy industry for the future.

In NSW, the DairyUP project is researching this priority area to support farmers to implement better waste management practices on farm.

Scan here to view the latest research and information from the DairyUP program.

Connect with Dairy NSW in 2026

In 2026, staying connected with Dairy NSW means staying ahead.

Our regional team is here to support your business with practical, research-based services that reflect local conditions and farmer priorities. From animal health and nutrition to business management, effluent planning and succession, our events and advisory services are designed to build skills, confidence, and long-term sustainability. Connecting with us ensures you have access to the latest tools, trusted expertise, and the right support at the right time.

Explore upcoming events and speak with our team to find the services that best support your farm business in 2026.

Scan here to view the Dairy NSW Events Calendar for upcoming events in your local region.

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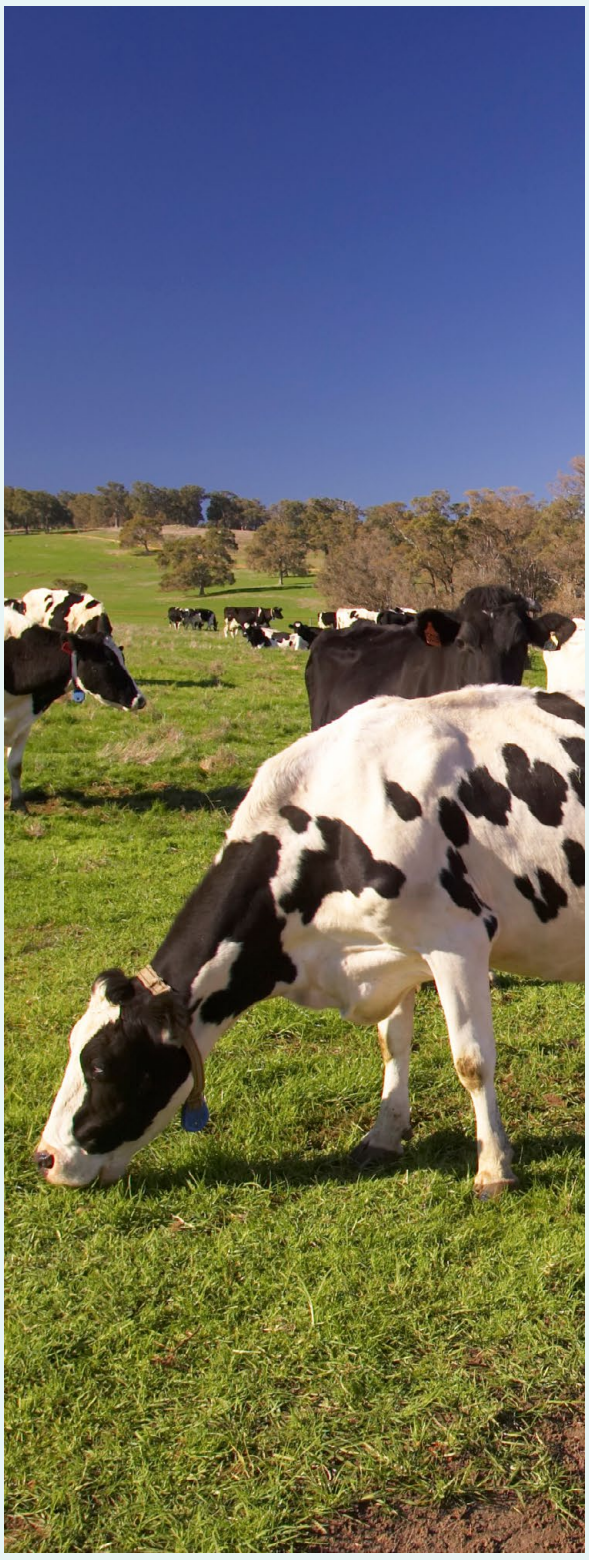

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Acknowledgement: Dairy Australia acknowledges the funding from levy payers and contribution by Commonwealth Government.

MC-593 | Dec 2025