

WestVic Dairy News

March 2026

Fuel and fertiliser disruption

Dairy Australia is working closely with the broader dairy industry to respond to fuel and fertiliser supply and pricing challenges, supporting farmers during a period of ongoing uncertainty.

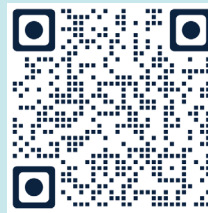
Continuing tensions in the Middle East are impacting global supply chains, with flow-on effects being felt across Australian dairy farms. Fuel supply constraints and rising fertiliser prices continue to be reported across Australia, as global market disruption and increased demand place pressure on availability. These impacts are expected to continue for some time.

In response, Dairy Australia has activated its Issues Management Framework to ensure a coordinated and consistent industry response across the dairy supply chain. We are working closely with Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF), the Australian Dairy Products Federation (ADPF) and governments to identify on-farm impacts of supply chain disruptions and ensure farmer needs are clearly understood and supported.

Broader industry engagement is underway through national coordination and advocacy efforts. This includes participation by ADF, ADPF and Dairy Australia in discussions through the Federal Government's National Coordination Mechanism, as well as industry representation at the Minister's Agriculture Fuel Supply Roundtable. In parallel, whole-of-agriculture advocacy is being led through peak farming bodies, calling for government recognition of the potential impacts on food production and regional communities.

Resources and updates

Scan the QR code for practical, fertiliser, pasture and feed, budgeting and people management resources:

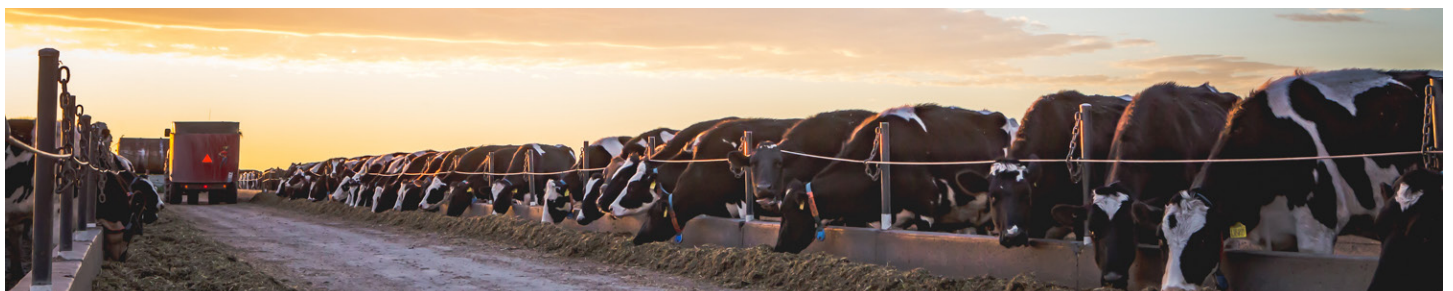


As more information becomes available in response to this fast-evolving situation, updates will be available at dairyaustralia.com.au

Contact the Western Victoria team for further information and support by calling **5557 1000** or emailing info@westvicdairy.com.au.

Support during challenging times

Farmers experiencing stress or financial pressure due to the current uncertainty are encouraged to seek support. Assistance is available through the National Centre for Farmer Health, including financial and wellbeing resources, at farmerhealth.org.au/support-hub



Farming from the grass up

Rachel and Dale McLean have turned to Dairy Australia's Forage Value Index (FVI) tables to inform their seed purchasing decisions and they're seeing the positive results.



Rachel and Dale McLean

Like most farmers, Rachel considers herself a "cow person" but her real passion is the grass.

"I like cows, but I really love growing grass and seeing high quality pastures," she says.

Rachel's phone is full of photos of lush grass growing on her South-west Victorian farm – and she wants to make sure that she and her cows are getting the most out of it.

Rachel and Dale have leased their 130-hectare farm in Gorae West for the past seven years, initially in partnership with Dale's family but on their own for the past two years. They also lease a nearby 40-hectare property for young stock.

They currently milk about 190 cows in a mixed herd, down from a peak of 250 as they strive to reduce reliance on bought-in feed.

Traditionally, they relied on agronomists, seed brochures, and local word-of-mouth for their pasture variety choices but it didn't always work out.

"Every catalogue comes out saying they're the biggest and the best but I don't know if it's true or not," Rachel said.

"With the Dairy Australia FVI, you can look at the tables and see exactly how the varieties perform against each other. It takes out the guess work," says Rachel.

Rachel and Dale aim to become self-sufficient home-grown feeders and need the right grasses in the right paddocks.

"Because we're seasonal calving starting in May and make all of our milk and money up until the end of spring, we need grass that's going to keep them fully fed for the months that we need," Rachel said.

"For us, summer production is less important because we're winding them down to be dried off. Mid-winter is when we need the most feed, to match the peak feed demand from our herd. If we can get the right varieties that support what we're trying to do with our farming system, it means less reliance on silage and bought-in feed."

When they took over, the farm was planted in annual ryegrass, but Rachel and Dale have since dabbled in Italian ryegrasses and perennials. They introduced a trial of Cocksfoot to overcome a barley grass problem – adding clovers and ryegrass to make it more palatable for the cows – and trialled multispecies mixes that have been particularly successful in winter.

Varieties on the FVI are ranked according to the return they deliver at the farmgate, including information about seasonal dry matter yield, trials, metabolisable energy (ME), heading date, endophyte, and much more. The rankings provide an independent and reliable assessment on the potential economic value of perennial, Italian and Annual ryegrass cultivars.

Based on the FVI, last year they selected their perennial and Italian cultivars from the rankings.

"Both varieties were on top of the charts last year and they both just kept going and going for us really late into spring," Rachel said. "The paddocks that we didn't sow last year went to head far earlier than the new varieties. They're still near the top of the list this year and I'd be happy to stick with them."

They also consulted the FVI to help select an annual ryegrass variety in the calf paddock with great success, allowing a quick rotation of paddocks.

"The only thing we've bought this year is cereal hay for the springers and we've cut 1,000 bales of silage compared to 600 a few years ago and managed to do a pit for the first time. Previously we bought-in vetch and clover hay to keep them fed in winter. We're mid-February now and we've still got six paddocks that are green and growing."

Rachel and Dale are aiming to reduce fertiliser use and "step back and let the grass do its thing" to feed their mid-sized herd.

"We produce as much as we can over spring, and having high quality pasture during this period helps sustain milk production that is profitable and has a high margin well into mid to late lactation," Rachel said.

They say they will continue to consult the FVI, including the new energy component to make sure their grasses not only yield well, but that their cows want to eat them.

"We want to be self-sufficient and keep turning the grain dial back as much as possible so they can be fully fed on grass that we've grown," Rachel said. "You don't want to waste a good season, and we want to get as many milk solids from directly grazed pasture as possible."

Find out more

To access the 2026 Forage Value Index (FVI) tables, **scan the QR code.**



The FVI was developed in collaboration with DataGene, Meat & Livestock Australia and the Pasture Trials Network.

Dairy Farmers' Ball names 2026 Netherlands study tour winner

By Aylish Tobin-Salzman - Communication Co-Ordinator

Dairy farmers came together for the third Dairy Farmers' Ball on Saturday 21 February, where the highly anticipated winner of the all-expenses paid trip to the Netherlands was announced. This year's recipient is Breanna Stewart.

Breanna describes her journey into the dairy industry as something that happened by chance.

In 2024, with a renovated caravan and plans to travel and work, she left her hometown of Stawell. Breanna travelled as far as Tarrone, where she found work on a dairy farm. She has been there ever since.

"I renovated a caravan to work and go travelling and I ended up getting a calf rearing job. That turned into a full-time position, and somewhere along the way I just fell in love with dairy farming," says Breanna.

"I love the cows and I love who I work for."

Breanna was thrilled to hear her name announced as the winner.

"I'm absolutely stoked, I just can't believe it. I'm so excited to get over there and see how it all goes. It's a massive opportunity."

Courtesy of exclusive sponsor Lely, Breanna will enjoy return airfares to Amsterdam, a week's accommodation, farm visits, and a behind the scenes tour of Lely Headquarters.

"It's a huge opportunity to go over there to learn and see how things can be done differently for better outcomes on farm," says Breanna.

Breanna believes technology will continue to be a key part of the dairy industry's future.

"I'm excited to see the Lely technology. We don't have any smart tech on the farm where I work, everything is hands on. I'd love to see what options are out there that we might consider implementing."

"My manager is really supportive of me with me learning more about dairy farming and exploring new ideas."

Recently, Breanna has travelled to Gippsland and Tasmania to tour dairy farms thanks to sponsorship from the DemoDAIRY Foundation.

"I'm really enjoying the opportunities to see how everything works and how farmers do things differently in different places."

"I love that all the dairy farmers I've met are so passionate about the industry. They're always willing to share their knowledge and chat."

Breanna shared her appreciation for the event.

"I just want to say a big thank you to Dairy Australia and WestVic Dairy for putting on such a great night, and to Lely for this incredible opportunity. It's so much fun meeting others in this awesome industry."



Breanna Stewart

Initiated by the WestVic Dairy Young Dairy Network Leadership Team, the Dairy Farmers' Ball celebrates the dairy industry and the strong community that drives it. This year marks the third time the event has been held.



WestVic Dairy - Young Dairy Network Leadership Team with Project Coordinator Liza Fahey

Maintaining milk production amid declining summer pasture

By Debbie Twiss, Extension Advisor – Animal Health and Performance

Maintaining milk production curves as pasture quality and availability diminish in late summer is a perennial challenge for South-west Victorian dairy farmers. While pasture silage remains the primary solution, the timing of harvest is critical. Farms relying on silage contractors can face difficulty timing silage cut before emerging seed heads mature and the stalkiness of the plant increases. With ryegrass, quantity often comes at the expense of quality; later harvests may boost bulk, but they result in lower protein and poorer digestibility. To counteract this, a Mepunga dairy farm strategically planted a mixed crop of peas (60%) and oats (40%) in early August 2025 to blend with ryegrass for pit silage. The goal was to bolster the nutritive profile of their pit silage, ensuring a higher-quality feed source during the summer fodder deficit.

For successful spring establishment, pea and oat crops require a minimum of 600mm of moisture through either rainfall or irrigation. Low-till sowing to a depth of 15-30mm, and a light roll to secure the seedbed without over-compacting the soil are best to promote uniform germination. Sowing rates can range from 120 to 200kg/ha with lower rates sown early in planting season (July-September). This crop was sown at 135kg/ha. DAP was applied at 50kg per hectare.



Figure 1: Pea and oat crop at 107 days after sowing (sown 2 August 2025)

Just as with ryegrass, the nutritional value of a pea-oat crop is a moving target. Peas increase protein content of the mix, with the greatest metabolisable energy and crude protein values when the pods have formed on the plant but are still flat. Ideal time for harvest is when the oats are between ear emergence and soft dough with the peas in full flower. On average harvest 100-120 days after sowing.



Figure 2: Pea and oat crop cut for pit silage at 111 days after sowing.

This crop yield reached a solid 9t DM/ha. The total pit yield was 457 tonnes with 154 tonnes of dry matter contributed from the pea and oat crop.

Table 1: Feed test result of pit rye grass silage blended with pea and oat crop

Pit silage assessed 19 Jan 2026	
Dry Matter (DM)	29.5%
Metabolisable energy (ME)	8.51 MJ/kg DM
Crude protein (CP)	15.1%
Neutral Detergent Fibre from organic matter (NDFom)	56.3%

The lower ME per kg dry matter reflects the fibre content of the ryegrass mixed with the pea and oat crop.

Table 2: Typical silage values (as % DM) – from DLF seeds

Silage	ME	CP	NDF
Oat	8.5-9.5	8.5-10	60-65
Oat/Pea blend	9-10	11-14	55-60

Starting in mid-January 2025, pit silage supplementation commenced on the feed pad for the 310-head milking herd. The herd consumed two-thirds of the silage ration after morning milking and ate the rest of the silage after pm milking. On a diet of silage and grain, the herd held milk production at 1.9kg milk solids per cow per day, with an average milk volume of 25L per cow per day.

Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group Celebrates 60 Years of Innovation and Leadership

By Sheeraz Ahmad, Extension Coordinator – Farm Business Management



Figure 3: Milking herd with silage ration after morning milking, 17 February 2026.

Recovering from a drought feed deficit requires a calculated trade-off between yield and quality. By strategically utilising high-value crops and targeted grain supplementation, this herd has successfully maintained summer milk production despite declining pasture availability.

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to Paul and Taylor Wallace of Wallace Pastoral Co for opening their gates and allowing me to document their spring silage crop. Special thanks go to share farmers Kaylee and Phil Beard, whose assistance while managing a busy harvest window was greatly appreciated.

Find out more

For resources that offer practical strategies for balancing cow diets, improving feed efficiency and enhance overall herd performance **scan the qr code.**



The Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group recently celebrated its 60th Anniversary, marking six decades of farmer-led innovation, collaboration and industry leadership in South-west Victoria. The milestone event brought together farmers, industry representatives and community members to reflect on the group's proud history and its ongoing contribution to dairy development in the region.

A feature of the evening was a presentation by Peter Younis, who explored the history of Artificial Insemination (AI) and its strong connection to the Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group. His presentation highlighted how advances in reproductive science have shaped modern dairy farming and reinforced the region's role as an early adopter of innovation.



Sheeraz Ahmad, Rachael Campbell, Linda Whiting, Ashley Gristede and James OBrein.

Peter traced the story of AI from early scientific discoveries in the 17th and 18th centuries through to the development of commercial breeding programs in the early 1900s. Research undertaken in the 1940s at the State Research Farm in Werribee led to the establishment of Australia's first commercial AI unit, the Timboon and District Cooperative Artificial Breeding Association. The Association officially opened in October 1948.

The evening was expertly guided by Master of Ceremony Chris Hibbert, who brought energy and humour to the program, reflecting the strong community spirit that has long underpinned the discussion group's success.

Guests also enjoyed an engaging talk from AFL Hall of Fame legend Doug Hawkins, whose stories and reflections added a memorable and entertaining dimension to the celebration. Adding to the spirit of the evening, a

raffle was drawn for a signed Western Bulldogs "team of the century" jumper. Funds raised from the raffle were donated to charities supporting communities impacted by recent bushfires, demonstrating the group's ongoing commitment not only to industry leadership but also to broader community support.

Group Leader Ashley Gristede closed the evening by thanking attendees, sponsors and supporters, and presented gifts to the guest speakers in appreciation of their contribution. The success of the event was a testament to Ashley's leadership, supported by the dedicated leadership team of James OBrein, Linda Whiting, Rachael Campbell, Max Bond and myself. The Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group also acknowledged the generous support of its event sponsors - WestVic Dairy, Dairy Australia, Nutrien Ag Solutions, Notman Pasture, Ridley, Reids and Barenbrug.

Reaching 60 years is a significant achievement. It reflects not only the strength of dairy farming in the Port Campbell district but also the enduring value of farmer networks that encourage shared learning, critical thinking and continuous improvement.

As the dairy industry continues to navigate change – from evolving markets and technology to sustainability and workforce challenges – groups like Port Campbell remain vital. Their history demonstrates that innovation thrives where farmers come together to share ideas and challenge thinking.

WestVic Dairy and Dairy Australia congratulates the Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group on this remarkable milestone and looks forward to supporting its continued contribution to the region's dairy future.

Find out more

If you'd like to find more about Port Campbell Dairy Discussion Group or Dairy Australia's Farm Business Management services and resources, contact Sheeraz Ahmad on **0414 684 065** or email **sheeraz@westvicdairy.com.au**.

WestVic Dairy Focus Farm report

Bostocks Creek

Date	6/3/2026
Milking area	212 ha
Production	
Cow numbers	166
Milk solids/cow/day	1.67kg
Litres/cow/day	19.3L
Fat	5.00%
Protein	3.66%
Grazing and supplement feeding (cow/day)	
Barley costing 37c/kg DM (\$337/t)	5.5kg
Profeed costing 72c/kg DM (\$650/t)	2.0kg
Almonds 19c/kg DM (\$175/t)	4.0kg
Silage 26c/kg DM	7.0kg
Rape (kg DM)	0kg
Pasture (kg DM)	1-2kg
Area in rotation	170ha
Rotation Length	100 days
Grazing area (ha per 24 hours)	1.3ha
Daily income over supplementary feed costs (IOSFC)	
Mar Milk Price (\$/kgMS)	\$9.91
Income/cow	\$16.55
Supplementary feed cost/cow	\$5.73
IOSFC/cow	\$10.82
IOSFC/ha	\$8.47

Notes

- The first grazing of the summer crop finished last week, we will start grazing regrowth soon.
- 11mm of rain last week has created a green tinge across the farm. We are offering the milking herd around 1 ha of pasture per day and a sacrifice paddock at night.
- We have soil tested and applied lime on some areas and come up with a fertilizer plan for the farm to be applied over autumn.
- The dairy has had a minor upgrade completed while the milking herd is reduced.
- New season almonds have arrived, and we have started feeding them. We will continue to dry off small batches of cows.



Contact us if you would like know more about our services and resources

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