

WestVic Dairy News

November 2025

Defying the Drift – Inspiring the Next Generation of Agricultural Leaders

Emma Collins, Workforce Attraction Coordinator



WestVic Dairy Young Dairy Network Leader Zoe Greenslade and I were thrilled to attend as guest speakers at the 'Defying the Drift' program, held at Longerenong College near Horsham in September.

Zoe engaged students with her personal journey in the dairy industry, sharing how passion, resilience, and community support helped shape her career. Her story highlighted the real-world challenges and rewards of working in the dairy industry.

I followed with a presentation on the wide range of career opportunities available in the industry. From hands-on farm roles to AgTech and agribusiness, I answered the students' questions on the dairy industry and discussed why it's an exciting space for young people to build meaningful careers.

Defying the Drift is Rotary District 9780's flagship youth program, designed for Year 10 and 11 students interested in agriculture, land and livestock management, and related industries.

Since 2010, Defying the Drift has been inspiring students to explore leadership and career pathways in agriculture through immersive learning experiences and mentorship.

With the average age of farmers nearing 60, programs like Defying the Drift are vital for attracting young people to agriculture and dairy. More information can be found at the Rotary District 9780 website or on the Defying the Drift Facebook page.

Thank you, Zoe, for helping to inspire our future leaders!

Kids on farms

Matt Wood, Extension Advisor



Those of us that grew up on farms will no doubt have great memories of all the fun we had and the things we learned – and most likely, some of the precarious things we got up to! And therein lies the problem, as there are many fantastic aspects of growing up on a farm, but there are also many risks. The farming sector in Australia sadly represents the highest proportion of accidents causing death in any workplace, with children making up one quarter of this statistic.

With the school summer holidays around the corner, kids will be spending more time on farms. When you throw in the appeal of playing in dams and creeks during hot weather, the odds of accidents happening significantly increase.

How do we manage these risks? Firstly, let's see what your legal requirements are. According to WorkSafe:

"If you are an employer you must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons other than employees are not exposed to risks to their health or safety arising from the conduct of your business."

In reality, it comes down to common sense and personal approach to risk. Across the region, there is a wide range of practices, from farms where children are not permitted on-site at all, to those that have designated areas for employees' children to play while work is underway.

Where a business chooses to position itself on this scale is up to the farm owners or managers. A commonly observed scenario is that employees' children are not permitted on the farm, while the owner's children are – one of those 'do as I say not as I do' situations based on roles and responsibilities. Ultimately, it's about balancing safety, practicality and risk management in the context of your business.

Children can attend our farms for many reasons, including those that aren't invited. If there is a chance of a child attending your workplace, for any reason, you need to consider this when complying with your obligation to identify hazards and control risks.

Possible risk controls may include:

- Developing a policy on children in the workplace. A policy template can be found on the *People in Dairy* website. The policy should cover:

- when it is appropriate for children to be in the workplace
 - supervision requirements
 - which areas of the workplace children can be.
- Ensuring children are appropriately supervised in the workplace.
 - Ensuring hazardous areas are secure so children cannot access them.
 - Creating a safe play area if children regularly attend the workplace.
 - Supervised operation of equipment and restricting children from riding in the back of utes or on tractor attachments.
 - Remove keys from vehicles when not in use.
 - Fence off effluent ponds and dams.
 - Teach children how to behave around animals and supervise interactions when children are younger.

Of course, there comes a time when children become quite useful to have around. It's a long-term investment though, with a gate opener taking 8-10 years to develop!

On a more serious note, about half of child deaths were kids that were performing tasks on-farm. Following a recommendation from the Victorian coroner, several organisations combined to create the *Child Safety on Farms* handbook. Whilst designed to ensure the safety of all children, it focuses on those within the ages of ten to 15, when they are more likely to be helping on the farm.

At the end of the day, we want all kids to be safe. That can be achieved on farms without compromising on the fantastic experience our children can have growing up on the land.

If you would like a free high viz vest for your child/children, we do have a limited supply at the WestVic Dairy office in Camperdown. Please get in touch if you are interested.

The resources mentioned, along with additional information, can be found on the *Visitors, Children and Traffic* page of the *People in Dairy* website.

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Reflection of dry season and challenges in return to pasture feeding

Debbie Twiss, Extension Advisor



After two years of dry conditions, dairy farmers across Southwest Victoria have emerged with hard-won insights, innovative practices, and a renewed sense of community. At a winter farm day hosted by the Young Dairy Network, farmers and service providers shared their wins, challenges, and experiences from the last two years.

One of the key themes of the discussion was the value of budgeting. Many farmers found that using financial, feed, and fertiliser budgets helped them stay on track and maintain milk production, even when conditions were tough. This approach supported day-to-day decisions, building confidence and resilience for managing future dry periods.

Another common theme was the benefit of purchasing fodder early. When cashflow allowed, buying ahead of predicted shortages helped farms avoid inflated feed costs later in the drought. This proactive strategy gave farmers more control and reduced stress during critical times.

To manage the feed demand during the dry period, farmers used a range of strategies including destocking, adjusting reproductive management including shifting calving dates, and growing fodder when conditions allowed.

These approaches helped reduce pressure on pasture and maintain herd condition through challenging months.

In some situations the strategies to manage feed had a positive effect on milk production and feed efficiency, with some farms reporting a production per cow improvement as a result of feeding purchased feeds with higher energy density. Feed conversion efficiency improved with the use of sacrifice paddocks and feedpads reducing the energy cows would usually expend walking to paddock and grazing pasture. These changes not only supported production but also contributed to better animal health.

Many farmers noted with the increased time required to undertake feed planning, fodder sourcing/purchasing and feeding out, that they just did not have time to get off the farm. Across the industry, there was a clear observation on the value of checking in with people regularly. "We now appreciate the importance of connection and looking out for everyone in our team."

Despite reduced pugging damage, often seen in wet winters, the combination of set stocking across sacrifice paddocks and prolonged dry conditions saw the increased need for pasture renewal, to rebuild the feed base. Once rain did fall and renovated pastures were ready to graze, moving cows back into the rotational grazing system presented its own challenges. Strategies to optimise pasture feeding have been explored as part of the Dairy Australia Feedbase project at the Ellinbank Smart Farm. A topic for a future newsletter.

The dry season has pushed many farmers to rethink feed strategies, invest in monitoring technologies, and adapt herd management. These experiences are more than survival stories – they're seeds of innovation that can help build a more resilient dairy future. As dry conditions become more frequent, these lessons offer a practical roadmap. Whether it's smarter feeding, better budgeting, or staying connected with others – every insight counts.

By sharing what worked and what didn't, we can build a collective knowledge base that informs future drought support, infrastructure investment, and extension services. The team at WestVic Dairy are collating key learnings from discussion with farmer groups. The questions being asked to start the conversation are:

- What practices from dry times will you carry forward into your future planning?
- What didn't work well and where was the greatest struggle?
- What would you do differently or change next time?

Do you have an experience to share of around the challenges you faced? If you would like to be part of the conversation, please contact WestVic Dairy so we can organise a visit to hear your experiences. Your story could shape the next generation of preparedness.

Accurate cashflow starts here

By Sheeraz Ahmad – Extension Coordinator, Farm Business Management



Running a successful dairy farm today requires more than just good pastures, healthy cows, and reliable milk production. Strong financial planning and accurate cashflow management are just as important as feeding strategies and herd health. Knowing how money flows in and out of your farm business helps you make timely decisions, prepare for challenges, and build long-term sustainability.

One of the most practical ways to stay on top of your finance is by using a cash budget. It gives you a clear picture of expected income, when it's likely to arrive, and how expenses will unfold over the months ahead. With milk prices fluctuating seasonally, input costs shifting, and seasonal variations affecting both income and expenditure, a reliable cashflow forecast can be the difference between smooth operations and unexpected stress.

To support dairy farmers in this area, Dairy Australia has developed a simple, easy to navigate Dairy Cash Budgeting Tool. This spreadsheet-based tool helps farmers to accurately track and plan their cashflow, without needing specialist accounting software or complex financial training.

Why cashflow matters

Cashflow is often described as the lifeblood of a business. Even if your farm is profitable on paper, a lack of available cash when bills are due can quickly lead to financial stress. For example, feed bills often arrive in big chunks during dry months, while milk income can vary due to seasonal adjustments or payment schedules.

By mapping these inflows and outflows in a structured way, farmers can:

- Identify tight spots in advance and make arrangements with suppliers or financiers.

- Take advantage of opportunities (such as input discounts) by knowing when cash will be available.
- Build greater confidence when making business decisions.
- Reduce stress by avoiding last minute surprises.

The Dairy Cash Budgeting Tool is designed to make this process straightforward and tailored for the realities of dairy farming.

What the tool offers

The spreadsheet has been built with farmers in mind. It is not overloaded with unnecessary features but instead focuses on what is practical and useful for day-to-day and seasonal planning.

Key features include:

- **Clear monthly breakdown** – Enter expected income and expenses across each month to build a detailed cashflow forecast.
- **Dairy-specific categories** – Includes relevant income and costs including milk income, feed, fertiliser, repairs and maintenance, wages, and loan repayments.
- **Automatic calculations** – Totals and balances are calculated for you, saving time and reducing errors.
- **Easy navigation** – Simple layout makes it accessible, even for those with limited spreadsheet experience.

For many farmers, the biggest benefit is seeing the year mapped out visually. It becomes easier to spot months where cashflow dips below comfortable levels and to plan ahead for how to manage those periods.

Practical tips for using the tool

Use accurate figures (not estimates), keep the budget updated regularly, test 'what if' scenarios to explore different decisions, and share it with your advisor for stronger financial planning.

Important notes

Because of its structure, the Dairy Cash Budgeting Tool is best accessed on a desktop or laptop computer. While many farmers now use tablets and smartphones in the paddock, these devices may not be fully compatible with all features of the spreadsheet. To ensure smooth operation, download the tool directly onto a computer before entering data.

How to access the tool

The Dairy Cash Budgeting Tool is free to download from Dairy Australia. Once downloaded, it can be saved, customised, and reused year after year. Each season may bring new challenges, but by having a well prepared cashflow plan puts you in a stronger position to manage change with confidence.

Farmers who have taken the time to set up and use a cash budget often report feeling more in control and better prepared for both good and tough times. With so many external factors influencing dairy businesses, from weather to global markets, knowing your cashflow provides peace of mind and greater flexibility.

The Dairy Cash Budgeting Tool is not about complicating farm life, it's about making financial management easier, clearer and reliable. By investing a little time upfront, you can avoid unnecessary stress later on and focus your energy on what you do best: running a productive and resilient dairy farm.

Download the Dairy Cash Budgeting Tool today and take the next step in strengthening your farm business. If you'd like to find more about WestVic Dairy's Farm Business Management services and resources, feel free to contact Sheeraz Ahmad on **0414 684 065** or email sheeraz@westvicdairy.com.au

Renee's Dutch dairy experience

Aylish Tobin-Salzman,
Communications Coordinator



In August, Renee Mugavin returned from an all expenses paid trip to the Netherlands where she toured dairy farms and visited the Lely headquarters.

Renee won the week-long tour, courtesy of Lely, at last year's Dairy Farmers Charity Ball, hosted by the WestVic Dairy – Young Dairy Network.

The Warrnambool local has worked on a Purnim dairy farm for almost seven years. Renee took her friend and work colleague Niesha Hunter along for the experience.

"We finished calving and off we went. We knew it was an opportunity we'd never get again," says Renee.

Apart from getting separated when Renee missed getting on a tram, the trip went smoothly. It was the first time overseas for both. The highlight was seeing how different dairy farming is in the Netherlands.

"The whole experience was amazing. Everything over there is so different to Australia, seeing the different systems and the Lely robots in action was very, very cool," Renee reflected.

"Opportunities like this are such an eye opener. I've only worked on one farm, so to go overseas and see how they are doing things was great."

The Lely Headquarters in Massluis impressed Renee.

"It was huge. They took us to the Lely Museum and we got to see from where it all started up to where their robots are now."

The itinerary included four farm visits and seeing other technologies. The housing, robots, and the cut and carry approaches Renee saw was a big contrast to the 44-bale rotary and pasture-based system she's used to.

"It was a crazy difference to farming here. One farm that stood out was one that housed everything; their calves, heifers, and bull calves were all barned.

"At another farm they went out and cut fresh grass and fed it to the barned cows straight away, along with other supplements in a total mixed ration."

The tour highlighted that some challenges farmers face are universal.

"I don't think the general public realises how much hard work farmers put in to produce the food that goes on to their tables."

"When people hear stories about what farmers go through, the more they understand. I think the more we can showcase the great work farmers do and how much they care for the land and their animals, the better."

The trip reaffirmed Renee's love of agriculture. What does the future hold? More of what she enjoys – dairy farming.

"I love what I do now, calf rearing, milking, caring for them through

WestVic Dairy YDN Explores Innovation and Opportunity in South Australia

Liza Fahey and the YDN Leadership team



In mid-September, members of the WestVic Dairy Young Dairy Network (YDN) embarked on a dynamic study tour across the Dairy SA region, gaining valuable insights into diverse farming systems, business structures, and future-focused innovations.

The four-day journey offered participants a unique opportunity to connect with South Australian farmers, explore cutting-edge technologies, and reflect on their own career paths and aspirations.

Day one: Foundations of innovation

The tour began with a visit to Jake Altman's sixth-generation family farm, an operation showcasing long-term investment in infrastructure and innovation. Milking 500 cows three times daily, the farm features a compost barn and feed alley built 21 years ago, a fully automated calf shed, and a dry feedlot for beef cattle. Notably, the farm runs a full Total Mixed Ration (TMR) system, uncommon in South Australia's low-rainfall environment (310mm annually), and produces 70% of its feed on-farm in a typical year.

Jake's off-farm experience as an electrician has contributed to the farm's financial stability and strategic planning. Future developments include robotic milking, a second compost barn, a calving barn, and a methane digester. However, expansion is capped at 600 cows due to EPA regulations.

While succession planning remains uncertain, Jake's clear business focus and optimism about the industry were inspiring.

Day two: Robotic systems and agritourism

Day two featured two visits to robotic dairy systems, one using Lely robots in an extended yard, and the other retrofitted with GEA robots, integrating existing herringbone infrastructure and recycling pipework.

Both farms operated grazing systems with feed pads, offering a valuable comparison of robotic integration styles. Robotic calf feeding added to the innovation on show.

Discussions centred around succession planning and risk management. One farm showcased a collaborative business structure between two owners, while another encouraged youth involvement in the industry.

The day concluded with social go-karting followed by a dinner hosted by YDN SA, featuring Narelle and Joel from Dairy Adventure. Their passion for agritourism and bridging the gap between farming and non-farming communities highlighted the importance of storytelling in promoting the dairy industry.

A key take-away from that day was the importance of strategic planning when considering infrastructure development and future-proofing.

Day three: Business structures and leadership

Day three focused on business models and leadership. The first farm, Emu Springs, is a partnership-driven farm who had relocated from northern Victoria milking 950 cows. The participants saw how irrigation and generator-powered milking could thrive on sandy soils. Lucerne and ryegrass were sown to optimize feed production.

The second farm was the Cavill family share-farming operation, milking 650 cows on irrigated land owned by a third party. Challenges at the farm include saline irrigation water, that equates to applying two tonnes of salt annual. The farm boasts a stable, all-female workforce with low turnover. Leadership discussions with Andrew (Dairy SA Chair) and Josh (YDN Chair) emphasized the importance of stepping up and supporting people in the industry.

The day wrapped up with mini golf and a combined dinner with Mt Gambier's YDN group, fostering cross-border connections and knowledge sharing among over 40 attendees.

Day four: Scaling up and diversification

The final day began at Chris Procter's farms, where Chris and share farmer Ben shared their journey. Chris owns nine dairy farms milking 6,000 cows and producing 3.1 million kgs/MS annually. His philosophy, "cash is king", drives a simple, pasture-based system designed for staff efficiency.

Chris has also diversified into poultry, operating five farms with 38 sheds and processing 160,000 chickens weekly.

The farm that Ben operates is milking 800 cows on 400 hectares, growing 22 tonnes of perennial ryegrass per hectare, supplemented with grain. Their partnership exemplifies how aligned values and systems can lead to successful share farming.

The tour concluded at Grange Garlic, a family-run business producing 100% Australian garlic. Their state-of-the-art facility supplies wholesalers, independent supermarkets, and small businesses.

The team is exploring biochar production, expanding their impact beyond horticulture.

Participant reflections: Growth, insight, and connection

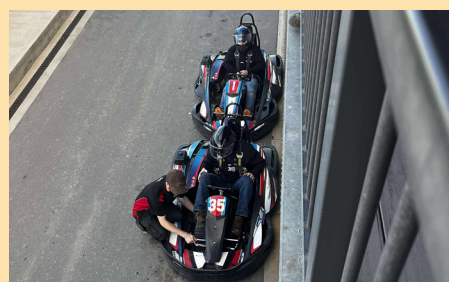
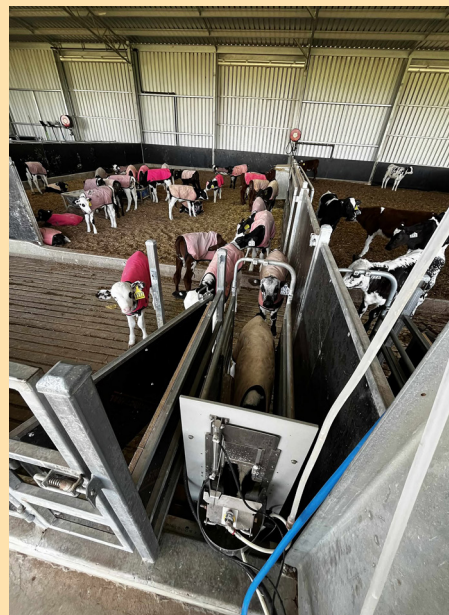
Feedback from attendees highlighted the tour's impact on personal and professional development:

- Exposure to diverse systems helped participants reassess their own farming goals and methods.
- Networking with like-minded individuals fostered new friendships and professional connections.
- Succession planning emerged as a key topic, with some gaining the confidence to initiate conversations at home.
- Technology insights, especially around robotics and automation, shifted perspectives on lifestyle and business choices.
- Business structures like share farming opened minds to alternative pathways in dairy.
- Leadership discussions encouraged participants to consider their role in shaping the industry's future.

One participant summed it up:
"There's no right or wrong way to farm - just opportunities to learn, adapt, and grow."

Conclusion

The WestVic Dairy YDN tour of South Australia was more than farm visits, it was a journey of learning, connection, and inspiration. From robotic dairies to garlic farms, participants saw firsthand the diversity and resilience of Australian agriculture. The experience will undoubtedly shape careers and contributions to the dairy industry for years to come.



WestVic Dairy Focus Farm report

Bostocks Creek

Date	06/10/2025
Milking area	212 ha

Production

Cow numbers	277
Milk solids/cow/day	2.35kg
Litres/cow/day	32.6L
Fat	3.97%
Protein	3.25%

Grazing and supplement feeding (cow/day)

Barley costing 40c/kg DM (\$360/t)	5.5kg
Profeed costing 81c/kg DM (\$725/t)	1.0kg
Pasture (kg DM)	14.6 kg
Area in rotation	94ha
Rotation Length	24 days
Grazing area (ha per 24 hours)	3.9ha

Daily income over supplementary feed costs (IOSFC)

October Milk Price (\$/kgMS)	\$8.77
Income/cow	\$20.61
Supplementary feed cost/cow	\$2.49
IOSFC/cow	\$18.12
IOSFC/ha	\$23.68

Notes

- Just finished feeding palm kernel to the herd.
- Finished AI early October and have been using collars, no bulls will be used over the herd. Pregnancy test is due in mid-November.
- 25ha of silage is baled and followed with a urea application. Urea has been applied after grazing at 80kg/ha.
- Had 105ha shut for silage which should yield 300 to 400 tonne of dry matter.
- Planning to sow 12 ha of summer crop soon, plus another 12ha to be sown in three to four weeks.



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

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