Your levy in action

PASTURE IN PRIME POSITION
Staying on track for a summer pay off

Preparing for an El Niño
Setting up summer feed

Don’t be caught short

Summer Management Plan included
over the fence...

It’s hard to believe it’s December already. While we have faced some challenging times this year, looking back, it’s not the ups and downs of the milk price that have stayed with me, it’s the people who have chipped in to help others within the industry that stand out for me.

At DairyNZ we’ve been struck by some of the touching stories we’ve heard of how farmers are helping each other.

We’ve heard of farmers secretly leaving baking at cowsheds of people doing it tough, of people offering up spare rooms and home cooking in their houses for farmers who need a break.

One farmer volunteered to host three school groups each week on his farm to help us clear a waiting list of children wanting to visit a dairy farm as part of our Rosie education programme.

Fifty people turned up in Taranaki to help clean up flood-hit farms. Farmers took in extra cows that needed to be milked when paddocks were under water in Manawatu.

Many farmers have helped us with our Tactics campaign – hosting events and sharing knowledge, experience and tips on how to get through a low milk price. Your knowledge and support has been invaluable.

We’ve got good reason to be proud of the industry we work in.

Family, friends, looking after your health, enjoying your farm and the cows, paying it forward, doing something every day for someone else – just as someone else does something for you, that’s what really matters, and I think it’s what our industry has always been good at.

Christmas is the time to celebrate all that kindness and generosity in this past year. It is what counts – and we can count on that getting us through the next year. The summer is almost here – check out the great tips in this issue, especially the farmer stories.

I welcome your feedback. Feel free to email me at tim.mackle@ceo.dairynz.co.nz.

Tim Mackle
Chief executive DairyNZ

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Inside Dairy is the official magazine of DairyNZ Ltd. It is circulated among all New Zealand dairy farmers and industry organisations and professionals.

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New chair elected
Waikato farmer Michael Spaans was elected in November by the DairyNZ board as its new chair. Michael has been a member of DairyNZ’s board of directors since 2008.

Farm roster – now quick and easy!
Can you put together your employee roster in just three minutes from start to finish? DairyNZ’s new online Roster Builder can help you do it. Exploring different options, making changes and sharing the roster with employees is now quick and easy. Tested and refined by dairy farmers, you can create a custom roster for your business with as much or as little detail as you want to include. Get started now and take the stress out of workforce planning – visit dairynz.co.nz/rosterbuilder for more details.

Feds launch grazing agreement
Federated Farmers have released a new grazing agreement that offers three agreements in one. They have improved their existing grazing agreement and expanded it to cover both heifer and winter or seasonal grazing. It costs $80.50 for members and includes 15 minutes of free legal support from the Federated Farmers support line. Visit fedfarm.org.nz/grazing or call Federated Farmers on 0800 327 646.

We appreciate your feedback
Email insidedairy@dairynz.co.nz or call us on 0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969). Alternatively, post to: Inside Dairy, Private Bag 3221, Hamilton 3240. For information on DairyNZ visit dairynz.co.nz.
PASTURE IN PRIME POSITION

Staying on track for a summer pay off
The farm team has gained an average cover of 300kg dry matter (DM)/ha and is on track to achieving their goal of capturing an extra half tonne of DM before Christmas.

While the review visit in August ensured their pasture was in a prime position going into spring, it has also set them up for summer. “We have learnt lessons we will apply every season,” they say.

Learning how to use the Spring Rotation Planner (SRP) properly was one of the best things to come out of the feed visit say Jens and Leslie.

“I’ve always done grazing management and paddock allocation by the seat of my pants,” says Jens. “It does make it hard to teach and to know if I’m exactly on point.

“I understood the concepts of the SRP but I’d never been talked through the detail in relation to our situation.

“Learning how to use it properly and applying it on our farm meant Leslie and I could really nail it.

“Having a set plan to follow immediately gave us confidence.

“Once I knew how to use it, I realised it’s not hard to do. It’s about following a plan to ensure pasture management stays on track. It’s definitely paid off going into summer.”
Leslie says the SRP is now their ‘go-to’ tool. “I wouldn’t consider doing grazing management without it,” says Leslie. “It removes the guesswork – as soon as we started using it I felt like we were in the right position. If you’ve got a good plan in place it’s easier to deal with tough situations when they come your way.”

In turn, Jens says he was really happy knowing Leslie had a robust plan to work from. “I would recommend all farmers sit down with their consultant and learn how to use the SRP to its full potential. It makes achieving grazing management targets a whole lot easier, especially if there’s more than one person involved in managing pasture. “It’s removed a lot of stress from an already tough season and alleviated or removed a lot of the problems we would have been facing now.

“Knowing you can get through a feed supply shortage takes a big weight off your mind.”

Spring Rotation Planner in practice

For the farm team, the practical application of the SRP meant allocating smaller breaks. “Allocating the correct feed every day meant we were able to increase pasture cover through winter and end up in a good position come spring,” says Jens.

“It also meant we were allowing pasture to get to target pre-grazing yields, ensuring we had enough pasture for the next round,” says Leslie.

In October, the team was happy with their cover of 2200kg DM/ha, an average gain of about 300kg DM/ha.

Balance date for the farm was October 10. At the start of October the farm was on a 26 day round and since balance date they have been shortening the round.

“With AB (artificial breeding) starting on October 19, having adequate feed on-hand is as important as ever,” says Jens. “It’s one of the flow-on effects of good levels of quality pasture – we’re aiming for a good submission and conception rate.”
We’ll start to increase feed coming into AB – and we’ve now got plenty of pasture on-hand to do this.

Key changes yield big results

“Our main takeaway message from the feed assessment was that we could feed slightly less per cow,” says Leslie.

“It was good getting that reassurance that the cows would be fine on 14kg DM.”

“We’ll start to increase feed coming into AB – and we’ve now got plenty of pasture on-hand to do this.”

Top tips for improving pasture management

1. Learn how to use the Spring Rotation Planner and use it as your shared go-to planner – it will pay dividends.

2. Have a plan to follow.

3. Assess residuals and cover properly – no ‘guesstimating’.

4. Use it or lose it – meet target residuals (1500-1600kg DM) for quality pasture.

5. Use DairyNZ’s pocket guide to grazing management in spring with clear pictures and explanations to help meet targets.

6. Work as a team with a shared resource such as the Spring Rotation Planner.

“It was good getting that reassurance that the cows would be fine on 14kg DM.”

“Key changes yield big results

“Our main takeaway message from the feed assessment was that we could feed slightly less per cow,” says Leslie.

“It was good getting that reassurance that the cows would be fine on 14kg DM – it’s gaining that confidence that you don’t have to ‘feed them heaps’. “

Pasture allocated to the milker and colostrum herds was reduced to 14kg DM/cow (they had been allocated 16kg DM/cow and not eating it at all) and the dry cow herd was reduced to 9kg DM/cow.

Allocating less feed in spring meant slowing the rotation. “We concentrated on fully utilising pasture – grazing a little bit lower and harder,” says Leslie.
Ensuring target grazing residuals were met meant we had enough pasture for the next round of grazing."

Jens says if they hadn’t made the changes they might have matched production up to start of October but they would have been left with no pasture heading into mating and the worry of ‘where to’ next.

“We wouldn’t have been able to maintain production and it would have cost us more in supplements,” says Jens.

“Instead, cows remained in good condition and we have peace of mind knowing there is adequate feed going in to summer.

“We’re concentrating on a pasture-first mentality and getting grazing right; we know that’s what gives the best returns in the long run.

“We weren’t way off track, but some key changes meant we were able to maintain adequate pasture cover going into spring and be well set up for summer.”

Dry summer preparation

In preparation for a dry summer, a crop of turnips will be fed from January 20 onwards for about six weeks, followed by maize silage.

“We’re doing turnips instead of PKE this year as it’s a cheaper feed, plus we’ll get the new grass from that,” says Jens.

“We usually manage to stay on a 21 day round all year quite comfortably and stay milking twice a day for the majority of the season,” says Jens.

Heifers are on once-a-day (OAD) until the end of AB and we winter the cows off-farm from June 1 in three mobs on separate properties.

Feed review visit

Jens says the opportunity to have the on-farm pasture assessment couldn’t have come at a better time.

“We usually try to go into winter with an average cover of 2000kg DM/ha. Instead, we were sitting at about 1800kg DM/ha. We knew we were going to be in trouble if we kept going the way we were.

“It was very beneficial having a consultant on-farm to see the real situation. We received guidance to point us in the right direction and reassurance where we were on the right track.”

The team’s farm visit was held on August 3 with their local consulting officer Kevin McKinley.

“It’s removed a lot of stress from an already tough season and alleviated or removed a lot of the problems we would have been facing now.”
Don’t be caught short

Managing feed supply this summer

Informed feed supply decisions made in early December can help ensure the herd’s production remains profitable for the remainder of the season. DairyNZ developer Sean McCarthy provides insights and points to new resources that will help you make the best decisions over the next few months to ensure feed supply is managed in an effective way.

Ensuring feed supply matches demand, for many, will mean continuing to meet pre-grazing leaf stage and post-grazing residual targets to encourage as much pasture growth as possible. It may also include the use of summer crops, nitrogen (N) fertiliser and supplements where it makes economic sense.

Assuming sensible culling and dry off decisions are made to manage feed demand, the focus shifts to supplying high quality, low cost feed.

Before culling and dry off decisions can be made, it is important to have the right information. Knowing the average pasture cover and feed on-hand will enable you to determine if a lift in farm cover is required and whether December is a good time to apply N fertiliser to encourage greater growth rates in early summer. N boosted pasture is a valuable feed source, and even if ensiling is required, it will cost less than many supplements (for an evaluation framework, see the article Supplements, surpluses and savings, pg 12, Inside Dairy October 2015).

Slowing grazing round

A dry summer will slow pasture growth, so slowing down the round in early December by increasing the number of days in the rotation will help achieve maximum growth during summer and help ensure there is adequate feed ahead of your herd for grazing. It will also allow for grazing of pastures closer to the target three-leaf stage, therefore capturing the 40-50 percent of the high quality leaf growth from the second to third leaf (see Perennial ryegrass grazing management booklet at dairynz.co.nz/grazing-management).

Target residuals for high quality pasture

The way to increase feed is by a slower rotation, not higher residuals. There is a misconception that leaving higher residuals in December will increase feed availability in summer and help capture moisture. Leaves have a limited lifespan so higher residuals will in fact reduce pasture growth and any remaining high quality feed will decay and not be available later in the summer.
Therefore, leaving high residuals in December won’t help fill a feed deficit later on; it will simply result in wasted pasture now and reduced pasture growth and quality in the months ahead.

Residuals of 1500-1600kg DM/ha will ensure the plant maintains its energy reserves and will provide some shading of the soil surface.

**Feeding summer crops**

While the area in crop has by now been determined, it is important to measure and monitor yields so this feed is allocated accurately. Information on managing and feeding individual crops can be found at dairynz.co.nz/crops.

**Ask why before you buy**

Decision rules around feeding supplements need to be made alongside knowledge of overall expected feed supply and demand (see article on reviewing herd numbers on pg 10).

DairyNZ’s new “Summer Feeding Check” worksheet will take you through the steps to work out when you will get a good financial return from using supplements.

The “Weekly feed management check” template included will help you monitor grazing indicators (pre-grazing yield, rotation length, average farm cover, post-grazing residuals) alongside supplement use to determine whether or not money will be made from feeding supplement.

It also provides a checklist of questions that need to be considered before supplement is purchased.

The worksheet can be downloaded from dairynz.co.nz/publications/feed.

**Supplement use after culling decisions**

DairyNZ’s online Supplement Price Calculator will help you determine how much you can pay for supplementary feed during a shortage. It provides a more detailed output with regards to different feed types, amounts and time of the year.

It must be noted that the milk response in these resources is determined based on energy being the limiting factor to milk production. While this is typically the case when cows are eating high quality pasture, in summer/early autumn the availability and quality of the pasture declines and the use of low protein supplements (e.g. maize silage, fodder beet) increases. Therefore in some instances protein may be limiting milk production. However, protein supplements are usually expensive and even with a milk response, the extra milk revenue does not typically outweigh the cost of feeding a protein supplement (See article Should I supplement with protein in summer? pg 26 in Inside Dairy February 2015).

Another factor to consider if using large amounts of supplements in summer is to ensure cows have adequate effective fibre. For example, although PKE is high in neutral detergent fibre (NDF), it contains no effective fibre. From a rumen health perspective, a forage source (pasture, straw, hay) may need to be included in the diet if PKE is being fed. For more information see DairyNZ’s FeedRight booklet at dairynz.co.nz/publications/feed.
Reviewing herd numbers for the best returns

Managing through a drought or very dry summer requires two key outcomes to be kept in mind; keeping some cows in milk for when it rains and protecting next season.

DairyNZ feed and farm systems specialist Kim Mashlan says with a predicted El Niño summer in some parts of the country, and low milk prices, now is the time to review the expected feed situation and herd numbers.

Planned decision rules around early culling, early dry off and selective dry off, as ways to reduce feed demand, ensure clarity for the business and lower the stress of having to make quick decisions in a difficult environment.

When faced with a shortage of feed there are two options; reduce the feed demand or increase the feed supply. Here we consider reducing feed demand options.

Early culling

The first decision to make about culling is “What could be culled early?” e.g. obvious culls, empties and voluntary culls. To calculate the number of voluntary culls, take current cow numbers on hand and add the number of in-calf heifers to enter the herd on June 1. From that figure, subtract the number of empties, the number of known culls (e.g. persistent mastitis,
lameness etc) and deaths. The difference between that figure and the minimum number required to winter is the number of voluntary cull cows.

The second question is “What feed would these animals require if they remained milking?”

When an animal is culled, extra feed is available for the remaining cows, meaning less supplements are required to cover the feed deficit. Therefore the marginal benefit is the saving on supplement not purchased, minus the lost revenue from the culled cow’s milk production.

Thirdly, the value that selling culls early will have on cashflow could be considered, and is obviously impacted by the beef schedule with early culls typically worth more than late culls. Though not a large amount, this equates to a further $23/animal reduction in interest in the example below.

The example in Table 1 indicates where culls are producing less than the herd average (in this case 20 percent less) and supplements cost $350/t, it was more profitable to cull the animal than buying in feed to keep it milking.

The breakeven price for supplement, where it could be worthwhile buying in supplements to keep milking the cull would be $290/t eaten in the above example. Remember this is after you have allowed for wastage. If wastage was assumed to be 10 percent more, then the amount you can afford to pay, including delivery, is $261/t. At 20 percent more wastage then the amount you can afford to pay is only $232/t before it is better to cull animals, based on the example above.

**Early dry off of whole herd**

Modelling (using Farmax) was used to look at the impact of very early and early dry off of the whole herd for a typical farm in both Canterbury and Waikato under pasture growth rates for a typical El Niño year. The results indicated very early dry off (milked for 182 days and dried off end of February) was not profitable, even at a $4/kg MS milk price. This is not recommended.

The early dry off option milked for 237 days and was marginally better than milking to the normal dry off time (267 days) if some of the cow related variable costs (dairy shed costs, electricity, labour, machinery and fuel) could be reduced. Decisions like this need to be done for your own farm with input from advisors.

**Evaluating the worth of selective dry off**

Selective dry off is when some of the cows are progressively dried off through the later part of the season to match feed demand and supply and to ensure body condition score and pasture targets are met.

DairyNZ’s new milk on versus dry off calculator (available now through your DairyNZ consulting officer and on the DairyNZ

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gains - decreased costs if animal is culled</th>
<th>Losses - decreased revenue if animal is culled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feed saved</td>
<td>Milk (kg MS/cow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days</td>
<td>Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total kg DM feed saved</strong></td>
<td><strong>1648</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average price of supplement ($/t eaten)</td>
<td>$350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of supplement saved assuming all feed at same MJME/DM (total feed per cow x $/t)</td>
<td>$577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overdraft interest saved from cull cow revenue (10% interest over 4 months*)</td>
<td>$23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total gains</strong></td>
<td><strong>$599</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net gain from early culling</strong></td>
<td><strong>$96</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible savings from milking and feeding less cows (dairy shed, electricity, vehicle R&M and fuel, labour costs.

*Interest calculated on cull value of $675/cow (@225kg cull weight and $3/kg net of charges).
Selective dry off Keep milking & buy feed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>MS/cow/day</th>
<th>Avg. milkers</th>
<th>Avg. drys</th>
<th>Avg. milkers</th>
<th>Avg. drys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>420</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
The effect of feed type and price on the profitability of keeping cows milking when feed has to be purchased

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feed (tonnes)</th>
<th>Selective dry off</th>
<th>Keep milking &amp; buy feed</th>
<th>Selective dry off</th>
<th>Keep milking &amp; buy feed</th>
<th>Selective dry off</th>
<th>Keep milking &amp; buy feed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avg. milkers</td>
<td>Avg. drys</td>
<td>Avg. milkers</td>
<td>Avg. drys</td>
<td>Avg. milkers</td>
<td>Avg. drys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKE ($275/t)</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>360</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize silage ($270/t)</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>265</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baleage ($450/t)</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>310</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize grain ($430/t)</td>
<td>15,927</td>
<td>$26,606</td>
<td></td>
<td>$6,466</td>
<td>$11,853</td>
<td>$16,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>$10,679</td>
<td>$5,387</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In all feed options, target pasture covers and body condition score targets are achieved, and pasture growth rates and milk produced/cow are kept constant.

However, a change in feed type and price, shown in Feed Option 3, means although both milking on and selective dry off provide a positive return it would be better to selectively dry off. If low producers are selectively dried off, then this feed, if used by the remaining herd, would increase milk solids production.

Due to the many factors that need to be considered when making these decisions it is important to use tools like this calculator to estimate the returns for your own farm.

Key points
Feed price and utilisation will determine if milking on decisions are economical.
Ensure next season’s performance is protected by reaching target pasture covers and BCS targets.
At this point in the season farmers have put a lot of effort into managing pastures to ensure they are in a good state for summer. DairyNZ scientist Cáthal Wims explains the need to continue the focus on grazing management through summer, with particular emphasis on tightly controlling post-grazing residuals.

As pasture supply reduces over the summer months it’s important to think about how to avoid overgrazing, which occurs when pastures are grazed below 7-8 clicks (as measured on the rising plate meter).

This summer’s weather prediction for an El Niño will bring drier conditions in the north and east and below average pasture growth rates to some areas (see mpi.govt.nz).

The temptation during dry summer months is to harvest more pasture by grazing cows to residuals of less than 7-8 clicks, but this practice is detrimental to pasture recovery following the autumn rain and the longer term persistence of the pasture.

The summer and early autumn period is generally the most stressful on non-irrigated pastures. As well as the drier conditions and higher temperatures typically experienced during the summer months, perennial ryegrass pastures can be subject to additional pressure from insect pests.

Avoid overgrazing

Pastures will be subject to further stress if overgrazed. Perennial ryegrass maintains energy reserves which are stored in the 4-5cm of plant above ground level (the stubble). The plant uses these energy reserves during the initial stages of regrowth to regain leaf area.

Summer overgrazing depletes these energy reserves resulting in reduced pasture recovery following the autumn rain, and severe or repeated overgrazing can result in plant death which will have negative consequences for the longer term persistence of the pasture.

Early December is a good time to think about managing pasture residuals over the summer, which unlike the weather and insect pests, are under farmers’ direct control. Think about the level of supplement you have on hand, consider options to reduce demand (e.g. culling, see pg 10) and develop a plan to manage residuals to 7-8 clicks and don’t let them get below this during the summer – it will pay dividends in the autumn.

Nitrogen application

Nitrogen application is a relatively cheap way to gain additional feed and applying 25-35kg N/ha in late spring/early summer (moisture permitting) will help boost pasture supply over the coming months. In addition, nitrogen application in early summer will boost the growth of new perennial ryegrass tillers, or ‘daughter tillers’, which will help thicken up the pasture going into summer.
Once-a-day milking post Christmas

Latest research by DairyNZ senior scientists Jane Kay and Claire Phyn provides valuable insights on what to expect for farmers considering once-a-day (OAD) milking post-Christmas.

Christmas often marks a waypoint in the dairying calendar for deciding how best to approach the remaining four to five months of the season.

Reduced milk returns and the strong likelihood of an El Niño weather pattern delivering dry weather for farmers from Northland down to the east coast, have seen many farmers approaching DairyNZ about the economics and practicalities of going to OAD milking post-Christmas.

Results from OAD milking trial

From January 2013 until the end of lactation, 52 crossbreed cows were split into two herds, one milked twice a day (TAD) and the other OAD. Cows’ feed intake was analysed, along with milk production, somatic cell count (SCC) and body condition score (BCS) gain.

The trial discovered production per cow dropped 10 percent while cows were being milked OAD.

In this particular trial, the 10 percent loss in milksolids production occurred when production was past its peak and cows had already delivered about two thirds of their season’s total yield. This meant the overall impact on the season’s production was approximately four percent.

Small decline in feed intake

The trial found the decline in feed intake by the OAD herd was not as great as expected. Cows milked OAD ate about three percent less than cows milked TAD, says Jane.

This small decrease in intake needs to be considered if milking OAD during a dry summer. With similar intake levels, but with less energy being put into milk production, the OAD herd was in a better energetic state. This resulted in OAD cows being on average a quarter of a BCS unit more at dry off than the TAD cows.

“This meant cows being milked OAD in late lactation had...
slightly less BCS to gain through the dry period in order to achieve BCS targets at calving” says Jane.

“The BCS improvement does take time though; it wasn’t until after six weeks of OAD milking that there were detectable differences in BCS.”

Although SCC was not greatly affected in this trial, it did increase in OAD cows as lactation progressed and milk volume decreased. The impact on SCC of switching cows to OAD milking in mid/late lactation needs to be considered, especially in the first few days.

“The bulk tank SCC needs to be able to double without grading when cows are switched to OAD. Cows with mastitis or high SCC are not good candidates for OAD milking and should be either dried off or continued to be milked TAD” recommends Claire.

Alternatively, the switch to OAD can be staggered over several days to prevent a large spike in SCC.

DairyNZ researchers have also dispelled the “mammary memory” myth that implies putting a cow on OAD will negatively impact on future lactations.

“We followed the cows that had been milked OAD into the next season and there was no reduction in milk solids yield when they commenced TAD milking again after calving” says Jane.

“If anything, these cows will have a higher BCS at dry off, are more likely to reach the BCS targets at calving and reap the production and reproduction benefits of this,” says Claire.

Milking the cows OAD also did not extend the cows’ days in milk.

“When we used drying off decisions based on milk production and BCS, the OAD cows were dried off in slightly better condition, but did not milk longer."

If contemplating milking OAD post Christmas, these performance factors need to be considered alongside other farm specific variables such as lifestyle and milking associated costs.
DairyNZ’s Sarah Tully is involved in developing DairyNZ’s Farmer Wellness and Wellbeing programme. Sarah, along with husband Ciarán, is a dairy farmer in Thames. Here she talks about what farmers can do to stay healthy and strong.

“Those who do not make time for wellness will eventually be forced to take time for illness,” is a quote worth bearing in mind. As farmers, there is always something going on so it is unlikely that we ‘find the time’ – it has to be made a priority.

There are five key components of wellness as shown in the diagram below. Spending time on these will help you meet the demands of work, be sharp in the face of challenges and change and get more enjoyment from life.

**Connect and give** – simply spend time with people you enjoy being around, or attend functions or discussion groups. You could volunteer your time to groups that your kids or grandkids are involved in.

**Keep learning** – how about using some television time to instead read things which stimulate your mind – we receive plenty through the mail! Try surprising yourself by learning new skills; many schools run evening classes for adults. Maybe finish a project that’s been sitting in the garage for ages?

**Be safe** – have a culture of safety around your business, staff and family. Are your insurances up to date? Do you have back-up plans and contingencies in place for volatile times?

**Rest and take notice** – do you pay attention to the simple things or just be ‘in the moment”? Often we are too busy thinking ahead on our ‘to do’ list. Holidays and breaks don’t need to cost the earth, but getting off-farm is a must. Try not to underestimate the restorative power of sleep either.

**Be active and eat well** – try not to always choose the motorbike, could you walk to get the cows? Good nutrition really helps our bodies regenerate – think lean protein and three veg. If you do feel a ‘downer’ coming on, be proactive about moving your mood. It’s ok to talk to someone about how you’re feeling – chances are you’re not alone.

Now, coming up to Christmas and New Year is a great time to sit down and think about how you will focus on your wellness. Focus on one thing at a time if you have to. Remember wellness takes time.

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*The five elements that help us stay healthy and happy*

-DairyNZ’s Farmer Wellness and Wellbeing project is jointly funded with the Ministry for Primary Industries through the Primary Growth Partnership.*
Keeping the big picture in focus

LEO PEKAR

Keeping an eye on the big picture has helped Leo Pekar and his partner Maricel overcome a case of bad timing. This year they moved from a lower order sharemilking role into 50:50. This coincided with a record low milk price and a very wet June, when Invercargill recorded 120 percent more rain than normal.

The couple have learnt to keep things in perspective and ride the ups and downs of dairying to maintain balance. “Don’t forget the big picture, do things that are inspirational to you and give you a break from farming. Remain positive and support others,” says Leo.

Leo and Maricel, who farm in Waikaka Valley near Gore, have an eight year plan which helps guide their decisions in their new 50:50 role.

“It’s important for us to focus on our eight year plan. I thought to myself, it would be ridiculous to think that all those eight years would be rosy – there is going to be a tough one.”

Leo emphasises the importance of taking time out from the farm. For him, listening to music and going mountain biking with friends is a great release.

With two children; Ailin (11) and Iara (8), the couple know to leave work at the door. “We are ambitious but we aren’t going to do it at a cost to the family,” says Leo.

Taking time out

ROBERT ERVINE

Robert Ervine is taking two floods, a low milk price and the threat of an El Niño effected summer in his stride this season.

Over the years the Rangiotu farm owner has developed strategies to cope with events beyond his control, so even when facing a tough year, he has the tools to respond.

“Having had some fairly high stress periods in life you hopefully learn some skills to negate them so that if things are getting tough you have ways of dealing with it,” says Robert.

About 10 years ago, after suffering a marriage break-up, Robert had to take a step back from farming.

“During that period of life, I finished up with ‘brown out’. It wasn’t burn out, but it was close.”

“Taking some time off and just smelling the roses allowed me to pull my life back together. I recognise the signs of burn out more now. If I am making poor decisions, or not making any decisions at all, that is usually the time to take a break .”

For more on Leo and Robert’s stories visit dairynz.co.nz/tactics.
Grazing heifers off-farm: how does it stack up?

Heifer grazing is a major expense and the quality of heifers entering the milking herd will have a significant impact on future milk production and farm income. For these reasons, the farm policy of grazing heifers off-farm warrants regular review. DairyNZ productivity team leader Rob Brazendale provides steps for comparing costs with the value received.

When reviewing a heifer grazing policy, two key questions should be addressed:
- Should my replacement heifers be grazed off-farm or grazed on the milking platform?
- Am I getting value for money from my grazier?

Grazing off versus on the milking platform

If heifers are grazed on the milking platform, the number of cows milked will need to be reduced by around 0.7 cows for every heifer to match the extra feed needed. i.e. if 100 heifers are run on the milking platform, cow numbers should be reduced by 70 cows.

The value of running heifers on the milking platform depends on the milk price, production/cow and the cost of grazing.

A partial budget template has been developed to help farmers evaluate grazing on the milking platform and is available at dairynz.co.nz/heifer-partial-budget.

As a guideline, the breakeven price for heifer grazing on the milking platform is shown in Table 1, using different milk prices and production/cow levels.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Milk price</th>
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<td>$4.00kg MS</td>
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<td>$6.00 MS</td>
<td>$15.40</td>
<td>$16.50</td>
<td>$17.60</td>
<td>$19.10</td>
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</table>

Heifers aged 9 months to 21 months

Added value from graziers

Factors other than economics, such as your own workload and focus, also need to be considered when working out the value of grazing on the milking platform compared to off-farm.

The milking herd is the primary focus for dairy farm managers and heifers can become the forgotten stock class, whereas quality heifer graziers are highly focused on this stock class.

If you have a grazier who is doing a quality job and returning heifers at or above target liveweights, breaking this relationship during low milk price times may be difficult if not impossible to restore when better milk prices return.

Am I getting value for money from my grazier?

When reviewing heifer grazing options, the value of grazing needs to be compared with its costs. Low cost grazing is not necessarily good value, just as paying ‘top dollar’ for grazing does not guarantee top results. Two examples on the following page demonstrate cost versus value.
Example 1

Lower cost of grazing with heifers coming back under target weight

Crossbred heifers are grazed off the milking platform from December for 78 weeks (to the following May).

Average start weight: 100kg
Grazing cost: $7.50/week for R1 (rising one year olds) (first 26 weeks); $9/week for R2 (52 weeks)

Heifers return to the milking platform at an average weight of 350kg, which is 50kg below target for their age.

Working out cost of grazing
26 weeks x $7.50/week = $195
52 weeks x $9.00/week = $468
Total cost of grazing = $663/animal

Weight gain
350kg on return – 100kg at start of grazing = 250kg Lwt gain/animal

Value of grazing per animal
Cost of grazing / weight gain = value of grazing/kg Lwt gain
$663 / 250kg weight gain = $2.65/kg Lwt gain

Example 2

Higher cost of grazing with heifers coming back above target weight

Crossbred heifers are grazed off the milking platform from December for 78 weeks (to the following May).

Average start weight: 100kg
Grazing cost: $10.50/week for R1 (26 weeks); $12.50/week for R2 (52 weeks)

Heifers return to the milking platform at an average weight of 450kg, which is 50kg above weight target for their age.

Working out cost of grazing
26 weeks x $10.50/week = $273
52 weeks x $12.50/week = $650
Total cost of grazing = $923/animal

Weight gain
450kg on return – 100kg at start of grazing = 350kg Lwt gain/animal

Value of grazing per animal
Cost of grazing / weight gain = value of grazing/kg Lwt gain
$923 / 350kg weight gain = $2.64/kg Lwt gain

Although the second example is 30 percent more expensive up front, the immediate value for money is similar and the long term benefits also make the value greater over time.

For many dairy farm businesses, the policy of grazing heifers off-farm remains a profitable strategy, even at relatively low milk price levels.

DairyNZ heifer grazing project

DairyNZ is leading a heifer grazing project that aims to improve the growth of young stock, in-calf rates and the dairy farmer-grazier relationship.

The project is being led in partnership with dairy farmers, graziers, Beef + Lamb, LIC and other industry partners, with five focus farms established around the country.

For more information and resources from the project visit dairynz.co.nz/heifergrazing.

The heifer grazing project is jointly funded with the Ministry for Primary Industries through the Primary Growth Partnership.
Building this season’s lessons into long term profits

2015 will go down in memory as one of the toughest seasons in the last 25 years. DairyNZ business specialist Lynaire Ryan considers it will be a pivotal year for setting the platform for how businesses are run in the future.

Average Farm Working Expenses (FWE) have increased from $2.50/kg MS in 2000 to $4.35/kg MS in 2014 (as shown in Figure 1). From 2000 to 2006, FWE averaged around $2.50/kg MS.

In 2007/08 the milk price reached a record high, above $7/kg MS. A fundamental change in expenditure occurred with FWE increasing by more than $1/kg MS. Feed costs were the largest contributor to the increase in FWE.

The last two seasons have seen reduced expenditure, with many farmers targeting costs between $3 and $3.50. Understandably some cost reductions are one-off and not sustainable over the long term.

This is an opportunity for the industry to make a fundamental adjustment and focus on retaining FWE around $3.50 going into the future. The focus would move to maintaining a low cost structure and increasing the profit margin as the milk price lifts.

Detailed budgets shared

Many dairy farmers already operate their business like this. Several top performing dairy farms achieving FWE below $3.50/kg MS have shared their detailed 2015/16 budgets on the DairyNZ website for farmers to compare costs.

These businesses have learnt lessons from the past and built resilient systems to survive at a low milk price, with little change in costs at a high milk price, except to bank bigger profits. The key points these farmers demonstrate include:

- clearly defined business and farming principles that deliver a profitable business
- a strong focus on maximising pasture growth and utilisation, regardless of system operated
- an emphasis on budgeting and regular monitoring of budgets
- simple and repeatable systems which are clearly understood by the farm team.

The case study of a Canterbury system 3 top farmer, aims to keep FWE around $3.40/kg MS consistently. Very little change is required between a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ year. In the high milk price year of 2013/14, their FWE were $3.67/kg MS. This season they have budgeted on FWE of $3.10/kg MS. When the milk price dropped they only needed to make minor adjustments, so the drop was not a major stressor. The most significant reduction was in fertiliser, with minor savings in animal health, breeding and herd testing.

Take advantage of the changes you have made during this challenging season and build a sustainable business which is profitable at a $5 milk price, not $6.00, as many farmers previously budgeted on.

If the medium term milk price forecaster are correct, then great – bank or invest the extra $1.50. If forecasters are wrong, then the business will be in a more stable position to weather the storms.

To view the case study budgets online, visit dairynz.co.nz/budget-case-studies.
WEB WATCH

New waterways web section helping farmers future proof

A new waterways section on DairyNZ’s website has been designed to help farmers improve water quality and get the best value for money when investing in the environment.

It provides step-by-step actions for fencing and planting waterways, controlling erosion, protecting wetlands, constructing crossings and managing drains to reduce the amount of sediment, nitrogen and effluent entering waterways.

A supporting planting guide for each region will help farmers nail down the best planting options for their area, with a table of top plants and planting calendar.

Make your investment count – check out dairynz.co.nz/waterways.

NEWS SCOOP

New Zealand’s dairy story

Fancy a virtual flight around the globe so you can discover where in the world your milk goes? Try out the DairyNZ online interactive model which visualises data about dairying in New Zealand in a three dimensional model using gaming technology.

DairyNZ’s brand marketing manager Andrew Fraser says the new tool tells the New Zealand dairy story in a way that makes it easy to understand and interesting to view.

“We will use this with teachers as we are developing new educational resources for schools that use the 3D Dairy model as a source of information,” says Andrew.

“When regional production and dairy herd statistics are updated each year, we will be sending journalists to the model to view the latest information. We will also use this with key stakeholders who are not familiar with the scale and scope of the industry. The general public and all our industry partners can view it too.

“We think it is world leading. We have not seen online models anywhere else that present this amount of data in such a simple and interactive manner. It takes tables of data and turns them into interactive information that has more context – giving it much wider appeal than just looking at statistics on a page.”

View and interact with the model at 3ddairy.co.nz.

BY THE NUMBERS

14 percent improvement in water clarity since 1989. (Environment Aotearoa 2015 report)

24,000 kilometres of waterways (94%) from which all stock are excluded. (Reported by dairy companies)
**the seasonal diary**

**MID LACTATION – DECEMBER**

**Feed**
- Consider applying 25-35kg N/ha in late November/December to ensure new tillers are vigorous going into summer.
- With the prospect of a dry summer, think about the level of supplement you have on hand, consider options to reduce demand (e.g. culling, see pg 10).
- Monitor pasture cover and maintain quality by keeping pre-grazing and post-grazing pasture levels at recommended levels. Keep post-grazing residuals at 3.5-4.0cm (7-8 clicks on the rising plate meter). Any lower risks over-grazing.

**Stock**

**Reproduction**
- Enter foetal-aged pregnancy test records to get a detailed InCalf Fertility Focus Report. Review past performance and prioritise (with advisor input) the areas to improve e.g. heifer rearing.

For more information visit dairynz.co.nz/ncalf.

**Facial eczema**
- Start monitoring spore counts and begin zinc treatments as risk conditions increase. Refer to DairyNZ Farmfacts: Facial eczema – zinc treatment, recipes and dose rates (3-7) and Facial eczema – treatment and prevention (3-6).

**Heat stress**
- Look for signs of heat stress such as panting, crowding at the water trough, reduced time spent grazing during the day, a drop in milk production and shade seeking.
- Provide shade and water sprinklers at the dairy where possible.

**People & business**
- Review and update your cashflow budget.
- With your team, plan holidays, the roster and extra cover (if needed) over the Christmas period.
- Complete performance appraisals; provide feedback, identify areas for development and consider options for on and off-farm training. Appraisal templates are available in DairyNZ’s People Productivity Kit and dairynz.co.nz/performance.

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**dairynz directory...**

**EFFICIENT MILKING ANIMATIONS**

With milking occupying over half of the annual work hours on the average dairy farm, a lot of research has gone into finding the most efficient milking methods in both herringbones and rotaries. Applying these time-saving milking techniques is now easier than ever, with online animations showing exactly how the concepts work in practice. Check them out at dairynz.co.nz/milking.

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**NEW HOUSED COW CLEANLINESS SCORE CARD**

Keeping housed cows clean is important for good health and hygiene. This new scorecard uses pictures to show standards for cow cleanliness so you can rate your cows and determine if improvements need to be made or if you’re spot on. Keeping cows clean will reduce the risk of lameness, skin parasites, infections and udder health problems. Download your score card from dairynz.co.nz/cleanncows.

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**DAIRYNZ ON FACEBOOK & TWITTER**

Join our Facebook and Twitter pages to stay up to date with the latest events and industry news. You can also read farmer success stories, join in the AgChats, share photos and provide feedback. Join us at facebook.com/dairynz and twitter.com/dairynz.

For more seasonal information or to order your copy of the Seasonal Diary poster, visit dairynz.co.nz/seasonaldiary.

Order your publications online at dairynz.co.nz or call 0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969).
Saving time and money when milking

Milksmart is coming to Masterton in March as part of DairyNZ’s national series of Milksmart events for 2016 focusing on milking efficiency.

Milksmart is an ideal opportunity to take home specific answers to milking efficiency issues according to Wairarapa dairy farmer and part time farming consultant Aidan Bichan.

“You can choose the topics you’re interested in – you don’t have to go to everything. With access to the experts you have the chance to drill into your own farm issues and very often come away with an immediate fix,” says Aidan.

Aidan is a part owner of a 900-cow dairy farm and has participated in Milksmart events over several years. In his dairy farming consultancy business he has seen many examples of farmers attending Milksmart, putting in place relatively small changes and achieving significant results.

“From what I’ve seen, it’s not uncommon for farmers to find ways to knock two to three minutes off per row or rotation. Add that up and you’re talking 20, 30 or even 40 minutes saved per milking. That’s a lot!

“Different people make use of that extra time in different ways. There are of course also cost savings from running your plant for less time by using less power, but for the people working on the farm, finishing earlier at the end of the day is a massive benefit. On our farm we have a target that most people finish by 5pm, and we usually achieve that because of milking efficiency.

Some of the solutions Aidan has seen making an impact on time saved include optimising platform speed, refining milking technique, improving cow flow along the race or from yard to bail through solving lighting issues, changing the angle of gates, changing breast rail height and changing right angle corners to gentle sweeping bends.

“Milksmart allows you to identify areas where you can capture savings and gives you some options and potential solutions. Many of the changes you can make yourself without a lot of cost and apply straight away for immediate benefit.”

“...it’s not uncommon for farmers to find ways to knock two to three minutes off per row.”
Regional Update

DairyNZ runs a wide variety of farm system discussion groups, field days and specialist events.
For the full list of what’s on near you, visit dairynz.co.nz/events.

DECEMBER EVENTS

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<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
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<td>Farm Supervisors Group.</td>
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NORTHLAND
Northland’s Dairy Connect service received a new coordinator recently. Sue Rynd, a dairy farmer at Tangiteroria hopes to help boost Dairy Connect’s presence in Northland.

Dairy Connect creates a link for farmers who are looking to find support and information, putting them in touch with another farmer who has experience in working through similar issues. Sue sees a lot of value in sharing ideas amongst farmers, particularly those who have been through a similar situation or change.

To find out more about Dairy Connect visit dairynz.co.nz/dairyconnect.

SOUTH WAIKATO
Farmers will get to see award winning pastures at Pasture Renewal Persistence Competition field days in December.

The field days provide farmers with an opportunity to see some of the best pasture growing practices in the region and gain tips from the winners.

There are two categories: pasture sown this year (from January 2015) and pasture renewal from more than three winters ago (prior to May 2012).

These events will be held between December 11-17. For more details visit dairynz.co.nz/events.

NORTH WAIKATO
Farmers in the Matamata Piako District Council area are invited to sign up to a farmer-led initiative called Matamata Piako Three Rivers Trust. The initiative aims to build farm profitability, improve environmental sustainability and lift team performance. All farmers are welcome, from contract milkers through to farm owners. The programme will provide individual mentoring and consultancy for business owners along with specialist group days over three years.

While farmers are asked to make a monetary contribution, the greatest cost of the programme is covered by DairyNZ and other key supporting organisations. For more information email dairypush.mp3@gmail.com.

BAY OF PLENTY
A field day in Whakatane on December 3 will cover tactics for the summer season.

DairyNZ senior economist Matt Newman will lead a discussion about the break even milk price and how this has been affected by the past season. The field day will also cover ‘plan B alternatives for summer’ and focus on how two different farmers have responded to the challenges this season has posed. The Tactics field day kicks off at 10.30am. For more information contact DairyNZ consulting officer Wilma Foster on 021 225 8345.
TARANAKI
This month Taranaki farmers are getting into the Christmas spirit during the next round of discussion groups. The groups will focus on setting up for summer and offer a great networking opportunity for farmers to connect with like-minded individuals.

A BBQ meal will be provided so come along and bring a friend.

To find a discussion group near you visit dairynz.co.nz/events.

WEST COAST/TOP OF SOUTH
With a high chance of El Niño this summer, farmers are encouraged to seize the opportunity to learn from and offer support to their peers through local discussion groups.

Farmers are invited to attend one of the many discussion groups which will cover topics such as summer decision making. These groups are a great way to connect with other farmers and gain constructive ideas for on-farm improvements.

Check out dairynz.co.nz/events to find a group near you and enjoy a Christmas BBQ to celebrate the end of another year.

CANTERBURY/NORTH OTAGO
Operations managers and farm supervisors in the Canterbury and North Otago area are encouraged to join a specialist discussion group where they can share ideas related to their role.

The groups provide a platform for connecting with other farmers in the same position, while exposing them to a range of different farm businesses with different structures. If you would like to find out more about this group please contact DairyNZ regional leader Virginia Serra at virginia.serra@dairynz.co.nz or phone 021 932 515.

SOUTHLAND/ SOUTH OTAGO
The Southland region has 350 sharemilkers, 592 farm owner/operators and milk production contributes $1,896,533,912 to the region.

Dairy farmers can find these figures and more in a new interactive website which visualises data about dairying in New Zealand in a three dimensional model using gaming technology.

This new tool tells the New Zealand dairy story in a way that makes it easy to understand and interesting to view.
Go to 3ddairy.co.nz.

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Regional Leader  Phil Irvine  027 483 9820
South Auckland  Jamie Haultain  027 486 4344
Hamilton North  Jaimee Morgan  021 245 8055
Matamata/Kereone  Brigitte Ravera  027 807 9685
 Morrinsville/Paeroa  Aaron Traynor  027 293 4401
Hauraki Plain/Coromandel  Willy Burnell  021 242 2127

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Regional Leader  Wade Bell  027 285 9273
Te Awamutu  Steve Canton  027 475 0918
Otorohanga  Sarah Dirks  021 770 859
South Waikato  James Burrows  027 483 2205

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Western Bay of Plenty  Kim Reid  021 225 8345
Central Bay of Plenty  Kevin McKinley  027 288 8238
Central Plateau  Wilma Foster  021 246 2147
Whakatane  Julian Reti-Kaukau  027 593 4123

Taranaki
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South Taranaki  Erin Hutchinson  021 246 5663
Central Taranaki  Shirley Kissick  027 704 5562
Coastal Taranaki  Michelle Taylor  021 276 5832
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Tararuawast/South Manawatu  James Muwunganirwa  027 499 9020
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Nelson/Marlborough  Wade Bell  027 285 9273
West Coast  Ross Bishop  021 277 2894

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North Canterbury  Jo Back  021 246 2775
Mid Canterbury  Erin Christian  021 243 7377
Central Canterbury  Natalia Benquet  021 287 7059
South Canterbury  Caleb Strowger  027 593 4124
North Otago  Trevor Gee  021 227 6476

Southland/South Otago
Regional Leader  Richard Kyte  021 246 3166
Central Southland  Richard Kyte  021 246 3166
South Otago  Guy Michaels  021 615 051
Northern Southland/West Otago  Lucy Hall  027 593 4121
Western Southland  Monique O’Connell  027 702 2219
Eastern Southland  Nathan Nelson  021 225 6931

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Use the Summer Management Plan included to help you reduce the impact of El Niño this season while still ensuring your cows and pastures are in good shape for next season.

To find out how to best use this plan, go to a DairyNZ farm discussion group where the focus is on helping farmers create a plan for an El Niño summer.

To find these discussion groups go to dairynz.co.nz/events.