HOW TO PROFIT FROM GENETIC GAIN

Grass choices made easier

Northland farmers join forces
For dairying, genetic improvement is quite simply invaluable. Genetic gain delivers better animals and better pastures year-on-year.

Genetic improvement in animals alone is forecasted to contribute an additional $3 billion in profits across the sector over the next decade.

In this issue of Inside Dairy, we look at what is being done to further build on the value we can get out of genetic improvement.

We show the tangible benefits of building a high Breeding Worth herd and selecting genetically superior grasses that are best suited to your region.

This leads me to put forward the recommendation that we have talked about previously, and that is not to turn away from AI and the associated costs.

While budgets are still tight after the period of lower milk prices, the breeding decisions that you make this year will have a long-lasting impact on the profitability of your herd, and cutting back on AI will prove a false economy.

Finally, you may have seen media interest in the Greenpeace campaign against dairy.

We were deeply disappointed in the decision by the Advertising Standards Authority to reject our complaint about the Greenpeace television advert and have decided to appeal this decision, which is likely to be underway as you read this issue of Inside Dairy.

DairyNZ felt strongly that we have a duty to our farmers and to the public to provide more balance, to acknowledge the great work farmers have done, as well as accepting that there is more to do.

Unfortunately, we can expect more attacks like this given it’s election year, but actions speak louder than words, so we must keep up the progress we’ve made and then give credit where credit is due.

As always, I value your feedback, so please don’t hesitate to get in touch with me at tim.mackle@ceo.dairynz.co.nz

Tim Mackle
Chief executive
DairyNZ

Contents

FEATURES...

2 An invisible hand in profit gains
What’s the real value of genetic improvements?

6 Forage index guiding choices
Making it easier for farmers to choose the best grasses.

23 Northland farmers join forces
A five-year plan to lift the region’s agricultural economy.
IN THIS ISSUE...

1. Take five
2. What do seed companies think of the FVI?
3. The value of high Breeding Worth animals
4. Foraging for new traits
5. Keeping accurate records pays dividends
6. Records keep herds on target
7. Making the most of pasture
8. Attracting the best people
9. Pasture first
10. Just quickly
11. Regional update

TAKE 5...

Tips for farmers

1. Get Milksmart
DairyNZ is hitting the road in 2017 with practical solutions to save you time and money through more efficient milking. New Zealand’s leading experts will share their knowledge and answer your questions. Events are being held at 26 locations in February and March. To register visit dairynz.co.nz/milksmart.

2. Tips for employees
Learn how to find the right job, prepare for interviews and brush up your CV with help from DairyNZ’s new online section for employees. Learn more at dairynz.co.nz/employee.

3. Quick and easy farm rosters
Want some help with your rostering? DairyNZ’s online roster builder helps you set up a simple roster in under five minutes. You’ll soon be spending less time on staff schedules and more time on your business. Get started at dairynz.co.nz/rosters.

4. Five steps to a better partnership
To improve your chances of creating a successful sharemilking relationship, check out DairyNZ’s ‘Do your homework’ checklist. It’s designed to help sharemilkers, farm owners and contract milkers find out everything they can about a business before committing time and money to a new partnership. Prepare well by using the checklists at dairynz.co.nz/homework.

5. Responsible waste management
The safe disposal, recycling and collection of farm waste is a responsible way to reduce negative environmental effects and health risks to people and animals. There are various recycling, disposal and collection options available. Check them out at dairynz.co.nz/waste-management.
Farm manager Jennifer Saunders believes it’s vital to get reliable information about which grass cultivars are best suited to the six farms she oversees.

AN INVISIBLE HAND IN PROFIT GAINS
Genetic gain is a steady process which delivers improvements year upon year. Although these gains can go unnoticed, the value is very real and quickly adds up.

Here, we look at what’s being done to improve the genetics of New Zealand’s dairy cattle and pastures. We also explore how genetic gain is providing tangible economic results for farmers and the wider industry.

Driving efficiencies and farm profit

The national focus for genetic gain across both pasture and animals is to drive efficiency and profit on-farm.

New Zealand Animal Evaluation Limited (NZAEL) manager Dr Jeremy Bryant says profit can be driven through a range of traits, from a cow’s capacity to produce high levels of milksolids compared to her feed requirements, to her ability to get in calf every year.

Likewise, the genetic merit of pasture will impact farm profit, predetermining maximum pasture yields.

Breeding Worth brings benchmark

For New Zealand dairy farmers, the measure of genetic improvement from one generation of cattle to the next is made through the industry’s Breeding Worth (BW) index. BW incorporates a wide range of the data collected on-farm to provide farmers with an objective assessment of an animal or herd’s genetic merit.

Genetic improvement is not limited to dairy cattle alone, and in recognising the value of good feed to match good animals, much work has been devoted to establishing the Forage Value Index (FVI). This ‘BW for grass’ is a regionally specific ryegrass index that aims to match pastures with the needs of farmers and provide clear direction for pasture breeding across our industry.

Historically, genetic gain in the animal sector has been consistent and strong. Gains have averaged 1.38 percent a year over the past five years, and that gain is increasing.

It is anticipated that pasture genetics will follow in these
footsteps, creating another avenue for New Zealand dairy farmers to drive profit in their farm business.

**Quantifying the value of genetic gain**

Genetic improvement has a direct economic value to farmers. The rate of gain in the national herd is increasing every year and the value of those gains accumulates over time (see graphic below).

Each year, genetically superior heifers enter the milking herd. They add value initially through their own performance and then through the genetics passed on to their daughters. This is why the impact of genetic gain on farm profitability accumulates over time.

If we assume the average rate of gain over the next 10 years will be $11/cow/year, this value will accumulate to around $250,000/herd, or $3 billion across the dairy industry.

**Forage Value Index – unlocking the genetic promise**

To truly tap into the potential of genetic gain in cattle, our cows must have access to the best feed supply possible. That’s one of the reasons genetic improvement in pasture is so vital.

Ryegrass is the predominant feed source for New Zealand dairying, and measuring its suitability and improvements is critical.

For this reason, the industry is now also benefiting from the FVI. Based on a similar philosophy to BW, the FVI aims to incorporate a plant’s production (dry matter) into an index and rank it across four defined dairy regions.

Each dairy region has trial plots administered by the New Zealand Plant Breeding and Research Association, with ryegrasses that are independently recorded and measured for their performance. Researchers are working to incorporate other performance parameters such as metabolisable energy and persistence into the FVI (see page 12 story of this magazine).

It’s likely that including these other traits will reveal cultivars that have the best overall combination of traits for enhanced farm profitability.

With this information, farmers will be better able to ensure they’re selecting the best cultivars for their farm.

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**New database to reveal deeper detail**

The Dairy Industry Good Animal Database (DIGAD) was established within DairyNZ in late 2014 and is now an invaluable resource to the industry.

The database holds a wide array of animal data and its main function is to support routine genetic evaluations, which are now produced within DairyNZ.

Second to this, the data is available for industry-good research and has played a crucial role in a growing number of high value research and development projects.

To read more about this exciting industry initiative check out dairynz.co.nz/animal-database.

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**EFFECT OF GENETIC IMPROVEMENT ON FARM PROFIT**

Genetic gain is set to deliver $11 PROFIT per cow per year

Which equates to $4600 OF PROFIT on-farm

Based on the average herd size of 419 cows

The value of genetic gain compounds over time

Accumulated over 10 years equates to $250k per herd

$3 billion across the dairy industry

Which equates to $4600 of profit on-farm based on the average herd size of 419 cows.
Operators see gains using indices

Jennifer Saunders is a large-scale farm manager who oversees six farms stretched across South Waikato-Bay of Plenty. For her, it’s vital to acquire reliable, relevant information on which grass cultivars are best for her farms’ varied locations.

With a background in seed cultivar sales, Jennifer is well accustomed to sorting through plant data. Even so, she admits it can be a nerve-wracking exercise when many hectares are about to be committed to new grass, at significant cost.

She’s found the FVI and Cultivar Selector Tool have delivered a new level of transparency to cultivar selection.

“Before it was a bit like buying a car; every car in the lot is the best car. Until you get an independent assessment of each car, you really can’t be sure.”

Jennifer says she’s reassured that the tool lists the cultivars she expects to be the best in their region, at the top.

“You just get the clear facts on the grass’s performance. We use Trojan perennial ryegrass on the majority of farms, and it’s at the top of the FVI for us.”

“Pasture is one of your biggest assets and you should take your time to read about what you’re putting in the ground.”

She also finds the winter feed evaluations valuable, with the per hectare returns good for comparison to the per hectare costs of establishment.

“Farmers need to educate themselves beyond just what they’re told, or what their neighbour does. Pasture is one of your biggest assets and you should take your time to read about what you’re putting in the ground.”

Further south in Winton, farm owner Colleen Neustroski and husband John have taken steps to leverage all they can from genetic gain.

The Neustroski’s 560-cow herd is in the top five percent for BW nationally at $104, well above the national median of $67. The herd also has a highly-ranked Production Worth, sitting at $130 against the national average of $80.

Colleen says a key method for increasing the rate of gain has been to mate their heifers to high BW bulls, providing them with a wider choice of high BW replacements and surplus animals to sell for additional income.

This year the couple had 220 replacement heifer calves, but only needed 140. This provided valuable additional income in a tough year.

Colleen says mating heifers involves a time commitment – checking for heats and inseminating them as they come up.

“But we are closely involved in rearing the calves, so for us to carry on and have them mated as heifers is a natural progression of their care.”

The couple also pay close attention to record-keeping at calving time, and Colleen’s looking forward to the day when DNA testing becomes more affordable, enabling accuracy to be lifted even further.

She and John herd test “religiously” (four times a year) as well as having a DeLaval system capable of monitoring performance.

Colleen also focuses closely on cow performance when assessing potential replacements, careful to keep heifers out of her best animals.

“At the end of the day, a calf is the result of both her parents. The best selection you can often do is checking the dam – do you really want to keep a replacement out of that cow?”
Dairy farmers have long understood and appreciated the power of the Breeding Worth (BW) index when it comes to selecting the best dairy sires. For the past three years, another index as useful as BW has been evolving.

The Forage Value Index (FVI) helps farmers choose the best performing grasses for their dairying region.

It provides a star rating for each cultivar, with five stars being the premier cultivar and one star the poorest.

Like BW for sire selection, the FVI provides farmers with an indication of the likely annual benefits of selecting a ryegrass cultivar based on its performance value, weighted by appropriate economic values for each trait included in the FVI.

Performance values are based on how well a cultivar performs in a trait, relative to older ‘genetic base’ cultivars such as Nui perennial ryegrass. Economic values are the change in farm operating profit in dollars/hectare/year for a unit change in the trait.

If all farmers moved from using a three-star perennial ryegrass cultivar to a four- or five-star perennial ryegrass cultivar, it would contribute an estimated $160 million/year extra to the dairy industry through improvements in farm profitability.

**New traits coming**

DairyNZ forage value manager Cameron Ludemann says while dry matter production of the cultivars is the core means of assessment at present, seasonal metabolisable energy (ME) concentration trait star ratings will be included in the FVI Lists as ‘additional information’, without the data being included in the FVI calculation.

DairyNZ is also working with the NZ Plant Breeding and Research Association (NZPBRA) to incorporate a persistence trait value into the FVI. See page 12 article for more details on the new traits.
A tool for all farmers

The interface between farmers and the FVI is DairyNZ’s online Cultivar Selector Tool, which provides a simple five-step process to choose the right cultivar, as illustrated below.

Farmers can tailor their cultivar selection based on their region, forage type, endophyte need, tetraploid versus diploid, and heading date.

Access the Cultivar Selector Tool at dairynz.co.nz/fvi.

Five steps to choose the right cultivar

1. Visit website dairynz.co.nz/fvi
2. Click on cultivar selector
3. Select region and forage type
4. Select endophyte, ploidy and heading date
5. Table of results is presented

Farmer awareness growing

Waikato sharemilker John Assen was an early adopter of the FVI, and says time has proven it’s helped him make the right choices.

“It’s my first port of call for identifying strong performers for our region, with a suitable endophyte. We have quite a high stocking rate and prefer the diploids, and the FVI has proven to be accurate in helping with the choices we’ve made.”

John has found Trojan perennial ryegrass performs well and he’s also planted One50 AR37 perennial ryegrass because he prefers to spread the risk around.

“Both cultivars were ranked near the top and both have performed well over time.”

He’s found the FVI to be “farmer friendly” and is looking forward to seeing persistence incorporated into the index.

Further south, Nelson’s Michael Shearer was also a keen early adopter of the FVI. Having a passion for pasture and data, it was a perfect match.

“It held the same appeal to me as the BW, possibly even more so.”

He says the FVI has always helped narrow down his pasture options in an unbiased way, and he appreciates having a few choices presented to him through the Cultivar Selector Tool.

Like John, he’s looking forward to ME and persistence being included in the index figures.

“That should be a good level of information to satisfy the needs of most farmers looking for the best cultivar.”

Where does the data come from?

FVI data comes from the National Forage Variety Trials, which regularly evaluate the dry matter production of cultivars being assessed. With 25 years’ history, these long-running trials are administered by the NZPBRA in partnership with DairyNZ.

NZPBRA general manager Thomas Chin says the trials also go a long way to ease any farmer concerns about the independence of FVI data.

“While seed companies have their cultivars in the trials, they run them in conjunction with independent trial operators. The system has independent analysts and biometricians, sometimes including DairyNZ. The trials are at times run in commercial farm environments and, when they are not, they are simulated to match farm rotations and environments.”

Key points

1. The Cultivar Selector Tool website makes it easy to select ryegrass cultivars.
2. FVI results come from trials administered by the NZPBRA and independent analysis by DairyNZ.
3. The FVI has the potential to contribute more than $160 million/year to the dairy industry.
Q & A

What do seed companies think?

In this Q&A, we ask representatives from seed companies Agriseeds, Agricom and PGG Wrightson Seeds for their views on the Forage Value Index (FVI).

Has the FVI impacted your business?

Jen Corkran, Agronomist – Upper North Island, New Zealand Agriseeds Ltd

Our overall breeding program and objectives haven’t changed as we’ve always had a strong focus on seasonal yield. We used to run our own in-house advanced yield trials before a product potentially went commercial. Instead, these advanced cultivars now go into the national trial system that feeds the FVI.

Alick Elliott, GM - Marketing & IP, PGG Wrightson Seeds

Yes. We look at the factors and weightings driving the FVI and adjust our programmes accordingly. Even though all the factors may not be in place commercially, knowing what is coming has a big influence on what we trial for our existing and future programmes.

Mark Brown, Australasian Brand Manager, Agricom

Yes, we’re very conscious of the FVI’s increasing popularity. This has resulted in more of our pre-commercial breeding material being trialled sooner in an attempt to gain an FVI rating at time of commercialisation. This means greater costs as more candidate lines are being evaluated but we see this as important and necessary.

What are the FVI’s key benefits?

Jen Corkran, Agriseeds

It’s an independent tool farmers can trust. It splits NZ regionally, which means farmers can choose ryegrass genetics that will perform well in their area. Another key benefit is the seasonal growth information.

Alick Elliott, PGG Wrightson Seeds

The FVI delivers benefits to all of us in the industry, from researchers and producers to merchants and end farmer users. Key among these are the fact that it’s objective, independent, collaborative and science-based.

Mark Brown, Agricom

That it’s broken down regionally and takes into account endophyte type and performance along with seasonal growth differences. Also, that it’s independently managed, which is viewed positively by end user farmers.

How can the FVI and/or Cultivar Selector Tool be improved?

Jen Corkran, Agriseeds

The FVI is currently based entirely on yield. Our breeding objectives for perennial ryegrass also encompass persistence and quality so including these may further benefit farmers. Work is underway to do this. Within the industry we also need to help farmers become more aware of the yield star ratings for every season.

Alick Elliott, PGG Wrightson Seeds

The FVI and Cultivar Selector Tool aren’t always well understood by seed retailers and farmers. As a wholesaler, we work with our retail partners to address this at training sessions, as these reps are key to getting the message out about the FVI and Cultivar Selector Tool.

Mark Brown, Agricom

Through the addition of a persistency parameter. Ensuring the correct weighting for persistency is given alongside the dry matter and quality data will be important in ensuring the FVI’s future success.

Learn more about the FVI at dairynz.co.nz/fvi.
The value of high Breeding Worth animals

What’s it worth to you?

Farming is a complex business and with so many factors contributing to overall profitability, it can be difficult to see the value gained from your herd’s genetic merit.

Although farmers have multiple ‘levers’ to pull to increase their farm’s profitability, it’s the cows’ genetic merit that sets a foundation for what the herd can achieve, says New Zealand Animal Evaluation Limited (NZAEL) manager Dr Jeremy Bryant. “Farmers with high Breeding Worth herds are working from a stronger start point. A herd in the top 10 percent nationally is estimated to be generating around $30 extra profit per cow per year, or $12,600 extra per year, when compared to the median herd, if you imagine both herds were run under the same conditions,” says Jeremy.

Study supports value of genetic investment

Exactly how significant is genetic gain’s contribution to the productivity of our nation’s dairy herd? That’s a question being answered by NZAEL, the DairyNZ subsidiary charged with managing the national breeding objective for dairy cattle.

NZAEL has analysed 800 2005-born cows across 30 herds nationally, comparing the performance of cows ranked highest and lowest within each herd.

Each animal was ranked according to its Breeding Worth (BW), and the performance of animals in the top 20 percent was compared to the bottom 20 percent.

What NZAEL found establishes a sound case for farmers to focus on increasing the genetic merit of their herd, and reap the benefits in greater farm profits.

In the 2009/10 season, cows in the top 20 percent for BW generated an additional 17kg of protein, 18kg of milk fat and calved 4.5 days earlier than those in the bottom 20 percent for BW.

The liveweight and conformation scores of the cows were consistent across both the top and bottom groups.

Jeremy says the analysis, which was completed using the Dairy Industry Good Animal Database (DIGAD), offers a valuable insight into genetic improvement’s role in bringing stronger profits for farmers.

“It’s shown us that our research and our evaluations of genetic merit are on track with the reality of what’s playing out on farms around the country.”

The quality of your bull team is the number-one driver of genetic improvement in the herd.

Note: Values assume an average rate of genetic gain of $11/year.

The cumulative effect of genetic improvement on farm profit

Top 10% herds vs the national median

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<th>Median herd</th>
<th>Top BW herds</th>
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Inside Dairy | February 2017 9
Here are six actions to increase the rate of genetic gain in your herd and move into the top 10 percent. We asked Waitomo farmers Euan and Claire Reeve to share their experience next to each step. Despite tougher financial times, the couple have maintained a strong focus on genetic gain in their 370-head jersey herd, which consistently ranks in the country’s top five percent for BW.

1. Use high Breeding Worth AI sires
   The quality of your bull team each year is the number-one driver of genetic improvement in your herd.
   - Always target high BW bulls
   - Check the Breeding Values of the bulls in your team.
   If you’re interested in improving certain traits, such as fertility, then it’s worth double checking your team to ensure the bulls suit your individual requirements.

   When it comes to choosing sires, the Reeves put the biggest emphasis on BW. Following that, Euan looks at protein, milk volume and udder values.

   “By keeping the focus on BW along with a few key traits, I feel we are double banking them, because most are also weighted quite heavily in BW,” says Euan.

2. Keep detailed records
   Mating and calving records are used to assign a mother and a father to your replacement heifers. Keep careful records and avoid mix-ups in the calving paddock.

   The Reeves’ herd is 100 percent parentage recorded, and they ensure all staff are aware of the importance of accurate parentage records. Springer mobs are kept smaller and DNA sire verification is used to confirm any uncertain calf-to-cow matchings.

3. DNA verify the sire of a heifer if you are unsure about parentage
   Mix-ups with calving and mating can result in poor quality heifers coming into your herd. DNA verification is an effective tool to check the parentage of any heifers you’re unsure of.

   “We can always use DNA to confirm the parents and have about four percent of our calves DNA verified each year,” says Euan.

4. Measure cow performance (herd testing, weighing, calving and mating dates)
   Quality performance measuring will show which are your best and worst performing cows. The more data you collect, the more accurate your BW becomes.

   The Reeves herd test four times a year to ‘paint the picture’ on performance. They also weigh their herd once a year to identify their best and worst cows in terms of efficient production.

5. Use high ranking AI bulls over your best heifers
   Your replacement heifers will have higher genetic merit than most cows in your milking herd. Using artificial insemination (AI) over your best heifers offers more choice when it comes to picking heifer calves to rear. It also means calves from those top heifers will be in the herd one year sooner.

   The Reeves use artificial breeding (AB) on their heifers to leverage the high genetic value already in those younger animals. This accelerates the rate of genetic gain they can bring to the entire herd.

   “We can do it because the grazing block is close – only 3km away – so I can go down there every day over mating, check for heats and get them done relatively quickly,” says Euan.

   The programme delivers Euan and Claire an extra 15-20 heifers on average in addition to the herd’s replacements, and contributes significantly to their surplus heifer stock sale income.

6. Target replacements from your top BW cows
   Use BW to help decide which cows to keep replacement heifers from.

   As a rule, the Reeves target replacement heifers from the top 40 percent of their milking herd.

To read the full story about how the Reeves keep their herd’s genetic merit high, visit dairynz.co.nz/reeves.

Recent analysis shows high BW cows calve earlier and produce about 35kg more milk solids than their lower BW herd mates.

Herds in the top 10 percent for BW have the genetic potential to create about $12,600 more profit/year than the median herd.

There are many actions farmers can take to increase the genetic merit of their herd; farmers should choose those best suited to their system.

To read the full story about how the Reeves keep their herd’s genetic merit high, visit dairynz.co.nz/reeves.
6 STEPS TO BREED A HIGH BW HERD

1. Use high Breeding Worth AI sires

2. Keep accurate and detailed calving and mating records

3. Use DNA sire verification if you’re unsure about parentage

4. Measure cow performance
   - herd testing
   - weighing
   - calving and mating dates

5. Use AI bulls over your best heifers

6. Target replacements from your top BW cows

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![Percentage of replacement heifers that have recorded AI sires](chart)

<table>
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<th>Mid-range</th>
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<td>90%</td>
<td>77%</td>
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</table>

TWICE as many heifers are DNA verified in top ranking herds, compared to mid range herds (top range 27%, mid range 14%)

86% of top BW herds are herd tested at least 3 times/season (compared to 56% of mid range herds)
Foraging for new traits

To provide even better help for farmers when choosing cultivars, DairyNZ will be introducing new traits to the Forage Value Index (FVI) over the coming years. These new traits will offer a more balanced approach to how a cultivar endophyte combination contributes to farm profits. DairyNZ forage value manager Cameron Ludemann brings us up to speed on the changes.

Before the FVI was set up in 2012, DairyNZ recognised that annual pasture yield alone couldn’t be used as the sole indicator of how a cultivar performs. That’s because the economic value of dry matter varies by season.

As a result, the FVI was created with the five seasonal dry matter production traits you see today.

Plant breeders have made progress towards improved seasonality of pasture production. Historic rates of gain since 1990 have contributed about $30-$40/ha in farm profitability compounded each year.*

New traits for production and environment

Representatives of the pasture seed industry regularly meet with DairyNZ to improve the FVI through new traits.

We’ve decided metabolisable energy (ME) concentration information should be added to the FVI. ME is a measure of feed quality determined by the amount of usable energy – or metabolisable energy – in a given weight of forage dry matter.

This year, ME concentration trait data will be included in the FVI lists. Including the ME star ratings as additional information will get farmers to think about selecting cultivars based on seasonal energy yield rather than seasonal dry matter yield alone.

However, we will hold off using the ME data in the actual FVI calculation until we’ve captured more ME data from the North Island.

It’s no good having a high energy-yielding cultivar that doesn’t last long. So, DairyNZ is working with the NZ Plant Breeding and Research Association on how to include persistence as a trait in the FVI.

Persistence means different things to different people, which is why DairyNZ is undertaking a review of this trait for the FVI.

Once the key production traits are included, we aim to look at including environmental traits. Our current focus will be on introducing traits to reduce nitrogen loading and greenhouse gas emissions.

It’s great to hear how eager farmers are about including new traits (especially persistence) in the FVI. However, new traits require us to capture new data, which can take time to produce.


Key points

1. DairyNZ works closely with the pasture seed industry to improve the FVI of ryegrass cultivars through new traits.
2. Historic rates of gain in seasonal dry matter production have increased cultivar FVI by the equivalent of about $30-$40/ha/year.
3. Perennial ryegrass ME concentration data will be included in the 2017 FVI lists as additional information but not included in FVI calculation until we have sufficient data.
Keeping accurate records pays dividends

Collecting cow performance data on-farm is a powerful management tool that enables farmers to make informed decisions about which cows to breed from and which to cull. Cow data contributes significantly to the rate of genetic gain across the national herd by feeding information into the Dairy Industry Good Animal Database, which in turn improves the reliability of Breeding Worth (BW) and Production Worth (PW) indices.

Create a strong foundation with parent records

Calving and mating records are often used to determine the dam (mother) and sire (father) of a calf. Records create a ‘link’ between a calf and its parents, which allows data to flow between the animals. That’s why it is crucial to keep accurate records.

When a heifer calf is born, her BW is calculated as an average of her parents’ BW.

Once she starts her first lactation, any performance data collected will strengthen not only her own BW, but those of her mother and father as well.

FAST FACTS

- Quality cow performance data allows bulls and cows to be objectively ranked to help with breeding and management decisions.
- Breeding Worth ranks animals on their ability to breed profitable replacements.
- Production Worth ranks female animals for their lifetime performance to aid culling decisions.
- Getting calf data records wrong will slow genetic gain in your herd.

HOW COW DATA IS USED TO CREATE BREEDING WORTH

A NEW-BORN CALF TO A TWO-YEAR-OLD HEIFER

When a calf is born, her BW is calculated as the average of her parents’ BW.

A TWO-YEAR-OLD HEIFER ONWARDS

When she enters the milking herd, her own performance information will begin to contribute to her BW.

THE SIRE (FATHER) OF A HEIFER

A heifer’s performance data will flow backward to strengthen the BW of her sire (and dam). This is particularly important for her sire, as he cannot accumulate records in his own right.
Data drives BW accuracy

BW incorporates the genetic merit of an animal across eight different traits: milk protein, milk fat (kg), milk volume (l), liveweight (kg), fertility (%), body condition score, survival in the herd, and somatic cell scores.

Most of the data collected on farm flows into BW. Key measures include herd testing, weighing and accurate calving and mating records.

Herd testing

Herd testing allows us to determine a cow’s productive ability. Herds are typically tested on various days across the season and that information is used to estimate the somatic cell count average and the milk protein, fat, and volume yield for the season.

Herd testing is now more flexible than ever before. Advances in how herd test data is interpreted mean farmers can now choose how many tests to complete, and whether they’d like to

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Graphic produced using 2016 Economic Values
sample the herd at both morning and evening milkings, or just once a day.

Completing fewer herd tests or opting for a single sample herd test can save time and money, but there is a trade-off in that the production data will be less accurate. To obtain accurate genetic estimates for selection or culling purposes, DairyNZ recommends four double-sample herd tests each season. Read more about herd testing at dairynz.co.nz/herdtesting.

Weighing the herd

Weighing the cows in your herd will help you identify animals that are producing milk solids most efficiently.

A cow with a high liveweight will be less efficient than a lower liveweight animal with similar production. As an industry, we aim to increase the genetic potential of our cows for producing milk solids, while maintaining a constant liveweight.

It is beneficial for farmers to weigh cows at least once during their time in the milking herd as this is likely to have a noticeable impact on their BW and PW indices.

Calving and mating records

Keeping accurate calving and mating records not only provides vital pedigree information for the replacement heifers in your herd, but it’s also essential for estimating a cow’s genetic merit for fertility.

Cows that present for mating and calve earlier are generally more fertile. Therefore, it’s important to know a cow’s calving and mating dates to determine her genetic merit for fertility.

To learn more about the benefits of animal evaluation, visit dairynz.co.nz/nzael.

Verifying parents through DNA

DNA sire verification is a useful tool that can confirm the fathers of your heifer replacement calves.

- Use DNA sire verification across your entire mob of replacement heifers, or on a strategic basis where parentage is uncertain.
- A simple ear punch provides enough DNA to complete the test.
- The mothers of your heifers can also be confirmed using DNA verification, but this involves an initial investment to obtain a DNA profile for each cow in the herd.
- DNA sire verification costs around $30/animal.

Key points

1. Herd test throughout the season to know who your best and worst producers are.
2. Weigh your herd – this data combined with herd test results will show your most efficient cows.
3. Take care with calving and mating records to ensure your replacement heifers have accurate BW.
Records keep herd on target

Careful breeding decisions, good data and attention to the basics have helped Sharon and George Moss keep their costs low and optimise the potential of their herd near Tokoroa, South Waikato.

When making mating decisions for their 180-cow friesian herd, Sharon’s first criteria is Breeding Worth (BW). She selects bulls only from the top 50 of the Ranking of Active Sires list and with shorter stature. After that, she looks at fertility, somatic cell count and udder support.

“In terms of stature we already have reasonably large cows and don’t want them getting any bigger,” she says. “Udder support becomes critical over time as we want milkers that stay in the herd for as long as possible, and fertility is something we always focus on, rather than relying upon CIDRs (Controlled Internal Drug Releasers) or other treatments to get the cows cycling.”

Sharon says they have a clear goal to deliver a high-performing cow that can hold its own consistently through the season on the system two farm.

She and George make it a priority to monitor herd performance throughout the season. They do five herd tests a year: two prior to mating, one before Christmas and two after Christmas.

Despite the tougher milk price conditions, Sharon is adamant they keep herd tests in place.

“We have a smaller herd and a relatively low stocking rate, so we need to know every one of our cows is performing through the entire season. Herd testing is a vital tool.”

She pays close attention to age group performance and how individual cows within those age bands are managing.

Sharon scrutinises the initial ‘lab strip’ data to identify any cows with poor production or high somatic cell counts. Milk quality is another priority for the couple, who regularly earn milk quality certificates from Fonterra and aim to keep the herd’s average bulk somatic count under 150,000.

Both Sharon and George have been long-time advocates of weighing all stock. They weigh their milking herd every second year to increase the accuracy of BW in their cows. They also regularly weigh young stock during their first two years to monitor growth and detect any health issues.

Early in their farming career, the couple invested in a set of Allflex scales with two other farming couples.

Weighing has been vital in determining a start point for newborn calves when trying to achieve an appropriate weaning weight, Sharon says.

“It shows us the differences in birthweights and makes us
more aware of calves which are inherently smaller animals.”
Sharon and George also body condition score their milking herd four times yearly. This gives them an objective assessment of their herd which is used for management decisions.
Sharon aims for maximum days in milk (usually drying off early May) and says once-a-day milking is a great option for managing low-condition cows, while maintaining days in milk.
“It enables us to maximise production without slicing condition off the herd. We’ve found once-a-day is an excellent means to help cows get back up to weight and once they get there we may put them back on twice a day, especially if it’s earlier in the season.”

“In short, we’re looking for an efficient cow that’s a joy to milk and we want to have her for as many lactations as possible.”

The couple maintain detailed herd records throughout the season with accurate entries into MINDAPro for any calving or health issues, mastitis treatments or events.
“At the end of the season we can look back and identify any issues that may have been herd issues, or simply individual cow issues, and make some decisions accordingly to prevent them happening again,” Sharon says.
“All our new-born calves are tagged in the paddock with a temporary neck band to minimise mix-ups, and we require DNA checking only for the occasional uncertain pairing.”
In the long-term, Sharon is working to breed a slightly smaller friesian cow and she’s targeting an average liveweight of 520kg in the herd.

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**Top tips**
Here are steps being taken by Sharon and George Moss to improve the genetics in their herd.

1. **Selecting a bull team**
The Mosses choose AI bulls which rank highly for BW. They then refine their bull team to include only bulls which are strong in fertility, somatic cell count, udder overall and with shorter stature.

2. **Recording parentage**
Sharon diligently records matings and calvings to ensure accurate parentage for every animal in the herd.

3. **Measuring cow performance**
- Completing five herd tests per season.
- Weighing every heifer regularly from birth to two years old.
- Weighing the milking herd every second year.
- Body Condition Scoring the milking herd four times/year.

“In short, we’re looking for an efficient cow that it’s a joy to milk and we want to have her for as many lactations as possible.”
For more help choosing the right bulls for your herd, visit dairynz.co.nz/bullteam.

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**FARM FACTS**

**Owners:** Sharon and George Moss
**Location:** Tokoroa, South Waikato.
**Herd size:** 180
**Farm size:** 72ha (effective)
**Production target 16/17:** 85,000kg MS
**Breeding Worth:** 92
**Production Worth:** 85
**Breed:** Friesian

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Sharon’s goal is to breed a slightly smaller friesian cow.

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Making the most of pasture

Similar to a high Breeding Worth cow, a high genetic merit ryegrass cultivar won’t fulfil its potential if it’s not managed properly. The choice of plant species and cultivar plays a major role in maximising the life of pasture, the amount of feed available for cows and ultimately the amount of profit from every hectare of pasture.

Why does pasture renewal matter?

Pasture renewal is important for increasing pasture productivity and long-term farm profitability. Replacing poor-producing pasture is one of the simplest ways to invest on-farm for a significant and relatively predictable rate of return.

Pastures can grow indefinitely but, over time, factors such as drought, pests, and pugging will cause pasture to deteriorate with these adverse effects:

- total dry matter production drops
- desirable species decline
- weeds increase
- feed value reduces.

Benefits of pasture renewal

- New pasture is significantly more productive.
- Control over seasonality of production.
- Higher metabolisable energy.
- Access to new endophytes developed to solve regional problems, such as resistance to pests and diseases, and greater tolerance of drought.
- Cows on new pasture graze more grass, resulting in more milksolids production, and/or faster liveweight gains.

Identify poorest paddocks

Your poorest producing paddocks are the best ones to renew. That’s because they have the greatest potential for improvement, as long as underlying negative factors such as drainage problems and pests are addressed.

Use grazing and yield records to identify your best and worst paddocks. The more measures and assessments you have for comparison, the better and easier it will be to make decisions.

Farmers without accurate records may want to use the Pasture Condition Score Tool. Developed by a DairyNZ-led industry group, this tool outlines a plan for assessing and ranking paddocks based on the extent of damage from the likes of pests and pugging.

Check it out at dairynz.co.nz/pasturetool.

Get establishment right

If you want high quality pasture, you’ll need to spend time planning ahead and preparing soil before you start sowing. There are several key steps to consider.

1. Early sowing date

The first step in your preparation is to think about when to sow seed. In most districts, it pays to have seed in the ground by March 31, provided you’ve given attention to moisture retention in the seed bed. Sowing later means you’ll face a greater risk of pasture damage in winter and spring; reduced yield; and small, less densely tillered plants coming out of winter.

2. Seed bed preparation

A fine, firm, weed-free seedbed is ideal for plants to become established. Many farmers overlook the important step of rolling their seedbed to achieve consolidation prior to sowing. A consolidated seedbed conserves moisture and makes it possible to achieve the correct sowing depth, especially with a seed drill. Without consolidation, you may end up with a soft seedbed where wheel tracks are pushed down and coulter depths vary, leading to uneven seed depth and establishment.

3. Seed sowing rate

You also need to decide how much seed to spread. There is no ‘correct’ ryegrass seed sowing rate for New Zealand farms; the appropriate sowing rate will depend on your sowing method.

Both a standard and lower perennial ryegrass sowing rate can work well but lower rates need to be very well managed.

4. First grazing

Pastures grow slowly until they are ‘nipped off’ at first grazing, which accelerates both their growth rate and tillering.

To decide if a pasture is ready for its first grazing, make sure it passes the ‘pluck test’. This is where you check the plants are firmly rooted in the soil. If you can’t pluck them out by hand, they’re ready for grazing.
Careful summer management

Follow these tips for managing pasture through its ‘yearling’ establishment phase.

- Graze for the first time only when new seedlings cannot be pulled out by hand plucking. This is usually six-eight weeks after sowing.
- Graze consistently to the same residual through the first winter and spring, leaving 4.5-5.5cm in height. This encourages growth and tillering of new ryegrass plants and helps avoid shading and suppression of white clover seedlings (as well as maintaining pasture quality).
- Graze consistently at the same pre-grazing mass, (2800-3200 kilograms of dry matter/hectare depending on type of pasture). Letting a pasture get too long, particularly in late spring, reduces its density by shading out daughter tillers.
- Do not make hay or heavy crops of silage from new pastures in their first year as this damages plants (reduces tillering and root growth).
- New pasture responds well to nitrogen so make two small applications of about 25-30 kilograms of nitrogen/hectare over the first six months when conditions allow (i.e not water-logged and soil temperature is above 7° Celsius).

To be considered successfully established, a pasture must be dense, well-tillered and have survived a summer. Pasture management through summer has a major impact on future performance.

For further information visit dairynz.co.nz/pasturerenewal.

Pluck test

Use a pluck test to determine if newly sown grass is ready for the first grazing.

Grasp ryegrass seedling firmly between the thumb and forefinger, then tug in a single, quick movement (to mimic a cow biting).

Pass – if the leaves break off and the roots stay in the ground.

Fail – if the roots come out.
Attracting the best people

Getting good staff is just one of the challenges faced by dairy farming businesses. But are we doing enough as employers to create environments where good people want to work?

DairyNZ’s people team leader Jane Muir says to compete with other industries for great staff, we must make it a priority to offer world-class work environments on our farms.

Farmers who invest in their businesses to attract and retain the right people benefit from lower staff turnover. In turn, this reduces recruitment costs, stress, and downtime while new staff get up to speed with their role.

Also, when you provide good leadership for your people – looking after, rewarding and supporting them – they’ll do their jobs well and act on opportunities that benefit your business. That could mean they wash down efficiently to save water, manage pasture to maximise feed, or implement an improved irrigation model.

Moving from good to great

Recognising the key role people play in successful and resilient dairy farm businesses, Federated Farmers and DairyNZ launched the Sustainable Dairying: Workplace Action Plan just over a year ago. This supports farmers with tips, tools and resources to go from being good employers to great employers. It also sets out guidelines, expectations, and aspirational targets under five pillars of good people management:

- balanced and productive work time
- fair and competitive remuneration
- wellness, wellbeing, health and safety
- effective team culture
- rewarding careers.

As world-class milk producers, we should be aiming to provide a safe, rewarding and productive workplace, with a motivated team that’s working towards achieving shared business goals.

If each of us achieved that, we’d have no problems getting good staff. Wouldn’t that be something worth celebrating in 2017?

Become a friend of the Workplace Action Plan

Sign up and you’ll be among the first to hear about new initiatives and resources, and how we’re progressing against targets. Visit dairynz.co.nz/WAP.

Support for employees

DairyNZ has just released new online resources for farm employees. It covers practical skills and tips such as preparing a CV, finding the right job, preparing for interviews. It also offers useful information including what to expect as an employee on a New Zealand dairy farm, rights and entitlements, how to progress, setting goals, and training. Visit dairynz.co.nz/employee.

Quick and easy farm rosters

About 1500 farmers have signed up to DairyNZ’s online Roster Builder since its release one year ago. It lets you set up a simple roster in under five minutes and, with a bit more time invested, it becomes a powerful business tool for exploring different roster options and cost implications. For more info and to sign up, visit dairynz.co.nz/rosters.
Look back, think forward, act now

Looking for an extra $43,000? Could your pasture contribute more to your farm business? DairyNZ’s Bay of Plenty regional leader Sharon Morrell explains how to drive an efficient farm business through improved pasture eaten.

Taking your pasture management from average to great could be worth up to $429/ha/year – or nearly $43,000 on a 100ha farm (at a milkprice of $5).

Whatever your farm system or pasture types, pasture is the cheapest feed to produce. Wasted pasture is costly because you’ve already paid for it. It’s clear why pasture eaten (tonnes of dry matter/hectare: t DM/ha) is the most important physical key performance indicator (KPI) in a successful dairy farm business. What does this KPI look like at your place?

**Look back**

In relation to the potential of your farm, how much pasture and crop have you been harvesting over the last few years? DairyNZ has both a farm fact (1-16 Pasture and Crop Eaten - How to Calculate) and a downloadable Pasture Eaten tool to help you measure your own performance. These are available at dairynz.co.nz/pasture.

**Think forward**

During last autumn’s DairyNZ Pasture First workshops, farmers compared notes and realised the difference in pasture eaten between neighbouring farms was often 2-4t DM/ha. Is yours high or low? Your pasture eaten KPI should be at your fingertips in the same way as kilograms of milksolids/cow. A DairyBase Level 2 physical report is a great way to track your annual pasture eaten. If you’re unsure of what your potential pasture eaten could be, ask your local DairyNZ consulting officer.

**Act now**

To lift your pasture eaten, there are two areas of opportunity: growing more pasture (and/or crop) and eating more.

Growing more pasture may involve identifying limiting factors. For example, low clover content, excess weeds and obvious urine patches indicate soil fertility is limiting your pasture growth. There may be pasture or crop varieties more suitable to your farm. Grazing practices that promote optimal growth and survival of ryegrass will also help you grow more. DairyNZ’s Perennial Ryegrass Grazing Management in Spring guide offers great tips on pasture cover and rotation length.

Getting cows to eat more is often about avoiding waste. For example, not feeding supplements when there is sufficient pasture, or having robust wet-weather management practices.

When pasture and crops are grown to their potential and used well, they form the basis of an efficient farm system. This generally helps you achieve your wider goals, such as wanting to have more cash for a holiday.

**Autumn events**

DairyNZ will soon be running a series of Autumn Reset events to help farmers review their businesses and get their pasture contributing more. For event information visit dairynz.co.nz/events.
just quickly

Shocking melanoma stats

The latest statistics for melanoma in New Zealand are alarming. More than 4000 Kiwis are being diagnosed every year, and more than 300 people dying from it. Death rates are higher among men. One of the best ways of detecting melanoma is by regularly checking your entire body. Be safe and visit melanoma.org.nz.

Hundreds of entries for awards

More than 400 farmers have entered the 2017 New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards.

General manager Chris Keeping says that’s a fantastic result given the industry’s tough economic climate in the past few years.

“To achieve this number of entries, on the back of a low payout for the second year in a row, is a superb result and we are pleased with the high calibre of entries across the three competitions,” she says.

Of the 424 entries, 103 are for Share Farmer of the Year, 170 for Dairy Manager of the Year and 151 for Dairy Trainee of the Year.

Entrants will compete in one of 11 regional competitions during February and March. The 33 winners of those competitions will progress to the national finals in May. Visit dairyindustryawards.co.nz.

Talking about tillers

A new initiative has been launched by DairyNZ to help farmers become more profitable through better pasture management.

Tiller Talk will follow the progress of 16-20 farmers throughout New Zealand as they receive expert advice and support.

These farmers will share their farm system information and progress through field days, small on-farm workshops, and regular emails.

An online forum will allow you to benchmark your pasture performance against other farms, post questions and help others by giving answers.

Get involved at dairynz.co.nz/tillertalk.

Trees for just about everything

DairyNZ has created a set of handy new guides to help farmers understand the benefits of planting trees.

The guides explain how and why to plant trees to attract bees, prevent erosion, provide shade, shelter and fodder for stock, as well as adding character and visual appeal to your farm.

Download the free guides at dairynz.co.nz/trees.

To mow or not to mow

An experiment at the Lincoln University Research Dairy Farm is investigating the effects of pre-grazing mowing during a pasture surplus on pasture growth rate and animal performance (dry matter intake, milk production, body condition score and liveweight).

This trial is being carried out with high and low pre-grazing heights. The experiment will run until the end of February and preliminary results will be published as the trial progresses, with a final report due in June 2017. See trial updates at dairynz.co.nz/mowing-trial.
Northland farmers join forces

Find out how Northland farmers are working together to lift the performance of the region’s agriculture industry.

Over the next five years, 350 farmers will take part in Extension 350, a project launched at the end of last year to help farmers share knowledge and gain access to specialist advice.

Farmer mentors and local farm consultants will support a series of target farms as they work towards improving their performance. Neighbouring farmers will share their stories and learn from the host farmer’s experience.

Extension 350 is a collaboration between Ministry for Primary Industries, Northland Regional Council, DairyNZ, Beef + Lamb New Zealand and Northland Inc (Northland’s regional economic development agency).

Project manager Luke Beehre says he’s excited about what the project will bring to the region.

“This project is about shifting individual farmers on a wide enough scale to benefit Northland as a whole. Impacting 350 farms directly, it will have a ripple effect throughout the Northland economy,” says Luke.

“We are starting off small with 15 focus farms this year – 10 dairy and five sheep and beef – and plan to significantly add to this over time. We want to represent the diverse range of farming businesses in Northland.

“This is about farmer-to-farmer learning. The farmers are the ones who’ll drive the decisions and identify areas for opportunity.”

DairyNZ regional leader for Northland Chris Neill says farmers involved in the project will have a chance to reflect on all areas of their business.

“Through this project small clusters of farmers, centred around the target farm, will have an opportunity to look closely at their businesses and identify opportunities to improve.

“These farmers will benefit from the advice of consultants and the support of the wider dairy industry in Northland, who are eager to see this programme succeed.”

Farmers for the target farms are in the process of being selected. Details about their farms and updates on their progress will be made available online and through regular Extension 350 events throughout the year.

For more information and to register your interest visit dairynz.co.nz/northland.

Northland farmer takes the lead

Dairy farmer and former bank manager Luke Beehre started as the project leader for Extension 350 at the end of 2016.

He was prompted to take on the role because of his combined passions for agriculture and Northland. Luke and his wife Lyna farm in Hukerenui, near Whangarei, and also run a dairy genetics business.

“The opportunity to contribute to the success of businesses and people in Northland was too good to pass up,” he says.

“We have some really motivated people and organisations who want to make this project work and ensure farmers are supported to reach their business and personal goals.”
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.

FEBRUARY EVENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>SATURDAY</th>
<th>SUNDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|        |         | 1 Lower North Island  
Ashhurst and Colyton  
discussion group at Aaron and  
Fiona Campbell's farm.  | 3 | 4 | 5 |  
|        | 6 | 7 | 8 Northland  
Mini Milksmart Kaitaia  
– understanding your cows to  
reduce mastitis.  | 10 | 11 | 12 |  
| 13 |       | 14 North Waikato  
Orini Discussion Group –  
discuss seasonal issues and ideas  
for improvement on host farm.  | 16 Taranaki  
Midhirst Discussion Group –  
setting up for autumn.  | 18 | 19 |  
| 20 | 21 | 22 |       | 25 | 26 |  
| 27 |       | 23 North Waikato  
Taupiri/Orini Ladies  
Group – visit the Te  
Rapa Fonterra Factory.  |       |       |       |       |

**NORTH WAIKATO**

DairyNZ is bringing its Mini Milksmart events to the North Waikato in February as part of a nationwide 26-event roadshow.

Focused on practical ways to save time and money through efficient milking, the events feature the top farmer-rated topics from previous Milksmart events, presented by some of New Zealand’s leading experts.

Events in North Waikato are in Maramarua on February 9, and Te Aroha on February 10.

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

**BAY OF PLENTY**

A series of events will provide practical solutions to save you time and money through more efficient milking. Mini Milksmart will provide tips to help the whole farm team increase efficiency, reduce stress on cows, improve cow health and welfare, and improve the working environment.

Events in the Bay of Plenty are in Te Puke on February 10, Tirohanga on February 13 and Waiotahi on February 15.

Visit dairynz.co.nz/milksmart for details.

**SOUTH WAIKATO**

After completing 10 months as a trainee consulting officer in South Waikato, Michael Booth has taken on a permanent role covering Otorohanga/King Country.

As part of his training, Michael spent the last five months caretaking that region for Monique Dickson who was on maternity leave and who has now resigned.

Learn about events in Michael’s region at dairynz.co.nz/events.

**TARANAKI**

DairyNZ discussion groups are back in full swing after the Christmas break. Groups over February and March will focus on setting up for autumn and the season ahead.

Some groups will cover the break-even milk price and how that can be used to review the farm business and ensure it is ready for future volatility.

For more information on discussion groups visit dairynz.co.nz/events.
DairyNZ is running a field day in mid-Canterbury to encourage farmers to reflect on the past few seasons and set their business up for the future.

The event in February will explain how the break-even milk price and feed budgeting can be used as tools to review the farm business. Farmers can also look at their pasture targets from now until balance date and find out whether these fit in with their wider business goals and expense targets.

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

A field day on February 2 is the latest in a series of events providing dairy farmers and graziers with information on raising heifers.

The field day will be held at Neer Enterprise’s sheep, beef and heifer grazing block in Gladstone. The family business, which also runs 1100 cows on a 400ha dairy farm, raises around 250 heifers annually.

The field day will cover how Neer Enterprise’s heifers perform on crops and what action the business takes when feed is short. The event will also provide advice on managing the relationship between graziers and owners.

For more information on the field day, delivered in partnership with Beef + Lamb New Zealand, visit dairynz.co.nz/events.

Work is underway on the Southern Dairy Hub. A site at Makarewa, just north of Invercargill, is being converted into a working dairy farm and centre for science and research that will support the dairy industry in Southland and Otago.

The Hub’s principal shareholders are DairyNZ and AgResearch, who have each invested $5 million, while local farmers and businesses have added a further $1.25 million through the Southern Dairy Development Trust.

Full details at southerndairyhub.co.nz

A series of field days from February 7-10 will provide farmers with an update on the West Coast Monitor Farm Project.

The monitor farm project follows the progress of farms in Greymouth, Westport, Ikamatua and Kowhitirangi. Every year the farms are analysed to identify trends and a comparison is made between seasons (going back to 2008, when the project started).

The farmer-initiated project, supported by DairyNZ, provides farmers with regional information through emails, field days, discussion groups and weekly DairyNZ Farmwatch reports.

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

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Canterbury/North Otago

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The event in February will explain how the break-even milk price and feed budgeting can be used as tools to review the farm business. Farmers can also look at their pasture targets from now until balance date and find out whether these fit in with their wider business goals and expense targets.

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

Lower North Island

A field day on February 2 is the latest in a series of events providing dairy farmers and graziers with information on raising heifers.

The field day will be held at Neer Enterprise’s sheep, beef and heifer grazing block in Gladstone. The family business, which also runs 1100 cows on a 400ha dairy farm, raises around 250 heifers annually.

The field day will cover how Neer Enterprise’s heifers perform on crops and what action the business takes when feed is short. The event will also provide advice on managing the relationship between graziers and owners.

For more information on the field day, delivered in partnership with Beef + Lamb New Zealand, visit dairynz.co.nz/events.

SOUTHLAND/SOUTH OTAGO

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SOUTHLAND/SOUTH OTAGO

A series of field days from February 7-10 will provide farmers with an update on the West Coast Monitor Farm Project.

The monitor farm project follows the progress of farms in Greymouth, Westport, Ikamatua and Kowhitirangi. Every year the farms are analysed to identify trends and a comparison is made between seasons (going back to 2008, when the project started).

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