

# Policy Targets Higher Farm Gate Profits for Dairy Growth

## Happy New Year

Welcome to the first edition of Hotline for 2016. The Christmas, New Year period is typically busy with social events compounding time restrictions of running a dairy business. I hope you had some down time or even managed a couple of days off to refresh for the New Year.

## Season

At the time of writing, most areas of Victoria are still extremely dry and have received minimal summer rainfall. UDV, along with the regional RDPs, DA and DEDJTR have been liaising regularly to monitor seasonal conditions. The early identification of looming problems has worked well so far, especially with the welcome cooperation from authorities who appreciate the need for regulatory flexibility in finding solutions to water shortages.

The major short term focus is on stock and domestic water to ensure current resources are available to navigate through the later part of this season. It is also appropriate that we consider the long term macro water policy issues, especially with the competition we face for water right across the state. In fact, the difficult season highlights the need to update and develop a Victorian Dairy Industry Strategy.

## Social Licence

With increasing pressure on social license and the right to farm, UDV, ADF, DA and other key stakeholders are working through key driving elements for the future of Victorian dairy industry profitably. The global business environment is changing rapidly and Victorian dairy has an important role. However, ensuring all necessary policies, frameworks and resources are co-ordinated is essential to taking advantage of upcoming opportunities.

Specific issues include the use of cow induction, tail docking and dehorning/disbudding. The UDV will be holding Farmer Forums across the state over the coming months as an opportunity for farmers to contribute to these discussions. The Forums are a part of the policy review and policy development that will feed into the 2016 UDV Conference agenda.



(Left to right) John Verstedden, Cath Paynter, Ron Paynter, Lisa Parker, Adam Jenkins & Ken Lawrence celebrating the UDV and dairy industry contributions made by former UDV Deputy President Ron Paynter at a dinner in Warragul.

## 2016 UDV Conference

Mark Friday April 15 into the diary for the 2016 UDV Annual Conference. Once again it will be a full, one day event at the MCG. Agenda details will be available soon. The following day is the inaugural Farmers Football match at the MCG involving Richmond and Essendon that will highlight the contribution of farmers to our society.

## Dairy Growth

Growth of the industry is a frequent point of discussion, and yet has remained at around 9 billion litres for a number of years. Growth to a farmer means increased opportunities and profitability, not more production with limited margins. It is imperative the policy priorities are appropriate for Animal Health and Welfare, Trade and Investment, New and Emerging Technologies, Environment and Herd Improvement, Farming Systems and People development. We must ensure that the foundations for future economic growth are laid and capitalised by a United Industry.

## UDV Policy Council

As is the case each year, half the UDV Policy Council regional representative positions fall vacant and are open to members to nominate. The UDV President position also falls vacant and is open to all members to nominate. I encourage all members to

consider getting involved. As Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce says, 'Decisions are made by those people in the room'. You have the opportunity to be in that position. Details of the process can be found on page two of this Hotline.

Over the next 12 months the UDV will be working with farmers and stakeholders, advocating strongly by putting "Dairy First" in the minds of key decision makers. I look forward to catching up with many of you as I hit the road in 2016. Until next time, happy farming. Adam Jenkins, UDV President.

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# 2016 Look Over the Farm Gate Campaign

## Seasonal Outlook

Dry conditions, limited rainfall and increased temperatures are impacting farmers state-wide. Areas worst affected are not clearly defined by the regions of North, West or East. Some farms within these areas are facing difficulties, whilst others nearby are not. UDV and other industry organisations are working with government to finding solutions for those short of stock water. As UDV work towards these outcomes, maintaining your health and your community is essential. Below is some information that you may find useful. UDV encourages use and distribution of this information, please talk within the community and disseminate where possible.

## Look Over the Farm Gate

The partnered efforts of Victorian Farmers' Federation, Royal Flying Doctor Service, Country Women's Association, National Centre for Farmer Health and the Department of Economic Development Jobs Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) are providing *Look Over the Farm Gate*.

With difficult seasonal conditions, increased stress and longer working hours, the *Look Over the Farm Gate* campaign seeks to increase awareness of mental and physical health problems. The campaign aims to utilise community awareness of each other's wellbeing and encourage community driven support networks for farmers to reach out.

Typically, farmers are fantastic at providing support for others. However, whilst the *Look Over the Farm Gate* campaign recognises need for farmers to keep an eye on their neighbours, it also recognises the importance of asking for help yourself. Developing a culture of asking for help within the community is just as important as it is for people to give help.



(Left to right) Damian Murphy and Ron Paynter were all smiles as they shared stories during an appreciation dinner held for Ron Paynter in Warragul.

Where possible, take responsibility for distributing these resources to others and if you feel you need to use them we encourage you to do so sooner than later.

The campaign is broken into five key elements:

- ▶ **Mental Health Awareness:** Neighbours helping neighbours tackle mental health
- ▶ **Physical Health Awareness:** To encourage rural communities to recognise and respond to stress before it manifests as symptoms of distress and poor physical health. It aims to empower people to look after themselves and "check in on their neighbour".
- ▶ **Domestic Violence Awareness:** The campaign also recognises there is a high correlation between mental distress and domestic violence. The onset of drought and the financial, emotional and physical toll it plays can have detrimental effect on family relationships.

### ▶ Communities supporting each other:

Often the most effective support network is the local community network. This program aims to leverage this theory and utilise goodwill. It does this by training a select group to take care of their family, neighbours, and peers who in turn do the same. The creation of a virtuous cycle.

### ▶ Increased service utilisation:

A key success of the program is an increase in demand for the support services that are available. By doing this, the stigma about the mental health issues will be further diminished.

The UDV & VFF hope farmers will utilise this information. Farmers need to read and take ownership of physical and mental wellbeing in their communities and this information provides the tools required. Look after yourself, and keep an eye on your neighbours.

For further information, see [www.lookoverthefarmgate.com.au/contact](http://www.lookoverthefarmgate.com.au/contact) or contact the UDV Office on 1300 882 833.

## 2016 UDV Annual Meeting and Conference

The UDV will hold its 2016 Annual Meeting and Conference at the MCG on Friday, April 15.

Business of the UDV Conference will include:

- ▶ Elections of the UDV President and Commodity Council Representatives for Regions 2 (West Goulburn), 4 (Nth East Valleys), 6 (South Gippsland), 8 (Colac & districts) & 10 (Wannon)

All resolutions for debate at the 2016 UDV Conference and Office Bearer nominations should be submitted to the office of Graeme Ford, VFF Chief Executive Officer, by no later than close of business (5pm) on Friday, March 4, 2016.

Nomination forms are available on the [www.vff.org.au](http://www.vff.org.au) website under "Industry Groups" -> "Dairy (UDV)" -> "Conference tab".

Please contact the UDV office on 1300 882 833 if you require any further information.



Victorian Farmers  
Federation



# Animal Welfare and Livestock Management

Difficult seasonal conditions coincide with difficult farming decisions. Issues such as drying off, culling, and fate of stock are challenging. There are some key decision making criteria and planning tools that can ease the stress and best maintain animal welfare.

Obtaining all information from the outset is a key component. The Victorian State Government has provided a factsheet on key considerations for animal health and welfare during drought. The advice is formed on the basis that making decisions early increases animal welfare. Drought conditions expose

stock to additional welfare concerns such as predisposition to disease, changed feeding habits and poorer physical condition. UDV encourage farmers to get all the information, have a contingency plan and act on that plan sooner than later.

For more information on the welfare implications of drought and how to manage them, see: [agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au) and follow the links Agriculture > Animal Health and Welfare > Animal Health > Animal Health in Drought.

## Government Drought Support Programs and Resources

The State Government *Drought Response Package* includes beneficial resources for drought affected farmers. In particular, additional rural financial counsellors (state-wide), community engagement and support package and mental health first aid training, *Back to School*, water infrastructure improvements to improve stock and domestic water supply to rural communities and extension services to farmers. The package balances interests' of the community, rural health, and farm help programs.

For details on each of the programs, and information on other programs available visit: [agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au) and follow the links

Agriculture > Farm Management > Drought > Drought Response Package Overview

Whilst drought support mechanisms are beneficial, direct financial aid may be required. Drought concessional loans are also available through Rural Finance scheme. Rural Finance is administering loans on behalf of the State Government. A total pool of \$30 million is available for farmers, provided through concessional interest rates.

For more information, see the Rural Finance website: [www.ruralfinance.com.au/industry-programs/drought-concessional-loans-scheme-2015-16](http://www.ruralfinance.com.au/industry-programs/drought-concessional-loans-scheme-2015-16)



A crowd of 70 people attended a Wannon Branch meeting at Kirkstall. Attendees came from across the region to hear Irish born Koroit dairy farmer, Harper Kilpatrick, share his dairy experience of dairy farming in the Saudi Arabian desert. The company Almarai, milks 93,000 cows and is said to be the world's largest vertically integrated dairy business.

## Mental Health, Support and Assistance

When keeping an eye on yourself and others, it is important to know where to direct for further support. There is no expectation that you will need to provide people with professional advice. However, being able to recognise a person at risk, and directing them to professional support is often just as effective.

There are a number of different free, anonymous support services available to people in both rural and suburban areas. The list below contains a number of resources available to you:

### Telephone Counselling and Health Support

Telephone counselling services respond to callers with a wide range of concerns and personal emergencies. Services include:

**Lifeline** 13 11 14

**NURSE-ON-CALL** 1300 60 60 24

**BeyondBlue** 1300 224 636

**Mensline** 1300 78 99 78

**Family Relationship Service** 1800 050 321

Each of these organisations provides a different service. However, remember that in case of an emergency call 000.

### Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)

The Rural Financial Counselling Service provides free financial advice for farmers. The RFCS are available to provide advice ranging from urgent advice to financial assistance, business planning and succession planning.

The RFCS is location specific. To access this service you will need to contact your local representative. Their contact information can be found at [www.ruralfinancialcounselling.org.au/locations/](http://www.ruralfinancialcounselling.org.au/locations/) and following the links to your closest location.

### Speak to your GP

Your local general health care practitioner can help you to deal with stress. The maintenance of physical health is a major component of managing mental health, your doctor is a fantastic resource for developing a strategy for physical wellbeing. GPs are equipped with skills, resources and contacts that can provide support in all areas and fortunately, GPs are often the most accessible face to face resource in regional areas. Even if you are not struggling with stress or physical health, the UDV recommends frequent check-ups to gain the latest strategies for maintaining physical and mental wellbeing.

# Andrew's Government Unconventional Gas Policy Development

Onshore gas was one of the most contentious and heavily debated issues at the VFF in 2015. Members unanimously backed a call for farmers to have the right-to-veto over mining and gas companies on their land at the VFF annual conference.

The Victorian Parliament's Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry handed down its final report without a clear policy recommendation on the present moratorium late last year.

We are now waiting the State Government's response to the Inquiry and its gas policy. The Government has committed to maintaining the existing moratorium on onshore gas drilling, extraction and hydraulic fracturing until its policy announced, which is expected to be halfway through 2016.

Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio has said she recognises "that communities and industry want certainty – we will be preparing a response with full consideration of the economic, social and environmental impacts on Victorians."

The VFF wants to see the government commitment to protect farmer and landholder rights. The VFF policy remains clear on maintaining the present moratorium and we will fight any attempts by the government to lift it before at least 2020.

VFF has concerns around the potential environmental impacts. Farmers are looking to see the science proven; that it's going to be safe to mine without any detrimental effects, particularly to ground water.

The State Government has been working to better understand the risks to water resources, but more work needs to be done in this space.

The VFF believes the Andrew's government policy on gas needs to provide significant investment in getting the regulatory system right, with independent oversight and transparent decision making criteria over mining developments.

The VFF will work with the State Government to ensure the views of the VFF and rural communities are taken into account.

There was clear consensus in the Inquiry report that environmental, health and water impacts need to be monitored with safeguards in place before an unconventional gas industry can proceed.

These recommendations were consistent with the findings of the Victorian Auditor General that Victoria is not as well placed as it could be to manage the community and environmental risks of an unconventional gas industry.

The VFF Land Management Committee was pleased that strong recommendations were made by the Parliamentary Committee around legislating for stronger farmers rights. Recommendation 7 called for an equitable balance between farmers and mining companies in negotiating land access and compensation. There is still a lot of work required to ensure protections are in place to provide for the right of veto over access to private land.

The VFF is not calling for the ownership of the mineral resource to be taken away from the Crown; we are calling for the right of the landholder to say no to access by a mining proponent, unless the landholder is satisfied with the terms of entry onto their land.

This should bring more fairness into the negotiation process and provide a level playing field between the farmer and the mining company thereby reducing the need for a third party determination.

The Inquiry was successful in highlighting the lack of Victorian specific baseline information, the potentially significant risk to the environment and water, the concerns regarding fracking and the poor reputation of gas companies given events in other states.



*(Left to right) Ken Lawrence, John Verstedden & Cath Paynter at Warragul celebrating the contributions of Ron Paynter to the UDV and the dairy industry.*

The Parliamentary Committee did make robust recommendations on improved regulatory safeguards despite failing to agree on a policy position.

VFF members have also told us that they wanted to get more information into both sides of the issue – sighting there was not enough Victorian specific information about onshore gas.

The VFF will continue its process of engaging with industry and community on unconventional gas in Victoria. The VFF Land Management Committee has now established two sub-committees to better engage with members' views in the regions. For 2016 there will be a Western Victorian Mining and Gas Taskforce as well as a Gippsland Mining and Gas Taskforce established.

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