

## App makes herd decisions easier

**Dairy farmer: Paul Cocksedge**

**Region: Gippsland**

**Topic: HerdData**

It's not uncommon to see Paul Cocksedge staring at his phone screen in the yard surrounded by cows. Or at the dairy, or even down the paddock.

But rest assured, the production manager of a 400-cow dairy farm owned by the Vagg family at Leongatha South is actually working – making important decisions about the herd more efficiently than he ever did before.

On Paul's phone screen is DataGene's HerdData app.

Through this app he can access all the production, cell count, calving and joining records of the herd. It's at his finger-tips and this ensures quick and correct decisions on-farm.

“Every Tuesday is cull day,” he says. “I try to milk Tuesday morning so if there's a cow who is a bit suspect, I'll look her up on the app and get her cell count history and production history, when or if she's due to calve and to which sire, and make a decision to retain or cull her.”

“It also works with production. In the dairy we have flow metres which measure litres, but we are not paid on litres, we are paid on components. If she has low production through the flow metre, I'll look-up the app and check her components. Sometimes her production is a lot higher than I thought. Going purely on volume, a lot of cows would have met their end, but because you can see how many solids they are giving, it is not always low volume cows which get culled.”

Paul is the only staff member at the farm who currently uses the HerdData app, but there's moves to get more people involved.

He uses the app to assist herd decisions, even when he's away from the farm.

“If I'm away, I'll get a text message ‘what's cow123's cell count?’ I could be sitting on the beach in Queensland, look her up and text back sell or treat her,” he said.



*Paul Cocksedge uses the HerdData App to look up information about cows.*

The HerdData app makes it easy to enter herd records from anywhere and provides key animal information quickly on-farm. The app also makes data entry more convenient and enables information to more easily reach DataGene's genetic evaluation database. This helps the industry as the data provides more accurate breeding values and opportunities for new breeding values.

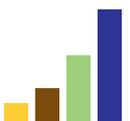
Paul has been using the app since it first came out about two years ago.

Herd testing data feeds into the app quickly. Paul said its available on the app later in the day following a morning herd test. Other data is fed into the app via the computer from the herd management software program Mistro, while some information is manually entered.

He uses the app daily during calving. A third of the herd, including Paul's 50 Paco Aussie Reds, Jerseys and some Holsteins, calve in the autumn and the rest in spring.

The farm sells bulls to local farmers and the app helps make decisions about what bull calves should be retained for this market.

“As we are calving, I do a visual appraisal of the cow and if she, and her bull calf, tick that box I will look up her production history and health history and if all those boxes are ticked, the calf is retained to grow-out and sell to other farmers.”



Joining details are entered into the app, but Paul also retains a hard copy. These work well together for different purposes, according to Paul.

The printed reports from Mistro are still used regularly while the app provides a quick and easy reference for calving dates and other information.

“The app automatically generates the cow’s ‘due to calve’ date. If there’s a cow I’m not sure about I will look her up for when she’s due to calve,” he said.

“Getting the dry-off dates, it saves us any potential milk withhold issues as well.”

The farm still uses a hard copy calving book to record births and this is due to necessity. Paul is not always on-farm and a central book makes it easy to maintain a consistent approach to record keeping.

But the app still plays a role in verifying these records. For example, Paul uses the app to check what’s written down. If a cow has been marked in the book as having calved within three to four days of her calving date, it’s generally assumed the record is correct. But occasionally, a cow has been recorded with her calf and she’s not close to calving or has already calved. The app helps rectify these issues.

HerdData provides information on-the-spot when it is needed, and Paul said this helps make better decisions.

“It’s for the day-to-day stuff and split-second decisions,” he said. “In the past, I’d not make a decision and wait to go into the house to look-up on the computer and make



*Paul Cocksedge in the paddock.*

a decision then. The depth of information is still on the computer - going back years and years- but what I need day-to-day is on the app.”

Enabling better decisions helps the farm business save money. Paul said the savings are in “ways that are not easily seen”.

“A perfect example is making decisions about selling cows and not overtreating,” he said. “We might have treated the cows if we couldn’t look them up straight away. We’d go back to the computer and it would be then we’d say ‘we shouldn’t have treated her, we should have sold her’.”

Paul also works part-time as a sales rep for herd improvement organisation HICO and is a director of Australian Reds breed organisation. He’s passionate about breeding and especially Aussie Reds.

When it comes to breeding, selecting for production is the first priority – especially components – followed by udder and body traits, including good chest width for capacity.

Paul uses proven bulls and a few genomic sires. He said Aussie Reds “are easy to work with”.

“They are the sort of cows that work for me, I don’t have to work for them,” he said.



*Paul Cocksedge uses the HerdData App to record newborn calf details while in the paddock.*

## CONTACT US

ABN: 78 613 579 614

DataGene Limited, AgriBio, 5 Ring Road,  
La Trobe University, Bundoora Victoria 3083



email: [enquiries@datagene.com.au](mailto:enquiries@datagene.com.au)



[www.datagene.com.au](http://www.datagene.com.au)



T (03) 9032 7191



Disclaimer: DataGene is an independent and industry-owned organisation responsible for driving genetic gain and herd improvement in the Australian dairy industry and is an initiative of Dairy Australia and industry. This report is published for your information only. It is published with due care and attention to accuracy, but DataGene accepts no liability, if, for any reason, the information is inaccurate, incomplete or out of date whether negligent or otherwise. Copyright © DataGene Ltd. All Rights Reserved.