

Informed decisions at Fleyas

Dairy farmers: Geoff and Jessica Fleming

Region: Western Victoria

Topic: Herdtest Dashboard



Jessica Fleming loves herd testing – not because of the work involved, but for the information it generates on the cows.

So getting extra information in the form of the DataGene Herd Test Dashboard free with the May herd test figures was a huge bonus.

“If there is more information we can have on the cows – and it’s free and involves no extra work – then I’m up for it,” Jessica said.

“Every bit of information we get helps in our decision making.”

Jessica and Geoff Fleming milk between 220 and 260 cows on their 170 ha property at Gorae West, near Portland in Western Victoria. The herd split calves with 40 per cent in spring and 60 per cent in autumn.

The herd is milked in a 16-a-side double-up dairy with a rapid exit and herd tested every two months.

“I love herd testing, because it produces up to date information on the cows,” Jessica said.

“I’m pedantic about facts and figures in the herd and how we can use them to make informed decisions.

“We have a system during herd testing where everyone has their specific roles and it works really well.



Jessica Fleming loves herd testing because of the information it generates about the cows, especially through the HerdTest Dashboard report.



“We’ve always herd tested but missed a year when we shifted dairies in 2009.

“The decision to skip herd testing seemed like the right decision at the time but in hindsight was a mistake because now we don’t have the complete figures on some of the cows.”

When herd test results come in via email they are uploaded onto the office computer’s EasyDairy program which then sorts the cows into their groups, such as calving dates. The results are used to look at production and how individual cows are performing.

“We can’t feed cows individually in the bale – all cows get 4-6kg in the bale throughout the year – but it is interesting to see the variation in production and which cows can excel in our system.”

When the Flemings received their May herd test results they also received an email from their herd test company offering them the Herd Test Dashboard.

“We got sent a Dashboard within 15 minutes of replying to the email,” Jessica said

The Dashboard report covers two pages on the individual herd and is accompanied by two pages which explain the terms, what levels trigger alerts and the action required to deal with alerts identified in the report.

The first page of the Herd Test Dashboard gives a herd overview. It sets out the overall herd cell count, the incidence of chronic and clinical mastitis, as well as the percentage of calving time mastitis in cows and heifers, the risk of acidosis and ketosis, recalving intervals at 365 and 400 days and the average cow yield.

“The Dashboard was very helpful – we had a heifer which wasn’t doing well and she was flagged on the Dashboard as having acidosis and mastitis. It made the decision to cull the heifer very simple.”

Jessica Fleming, Western Victoria, 220 cows, Holstein

It also includes a herd profile with a breakdown of the herd size, including milking cows, fresh cows, dries, culls, sold cows, unidentified sires and the trends which are showing up between reports.

The second page features individual cows which are approaching trigger points for a range of parameters such as individual cell counts mastitis, acidosis, ketosis, recalving intervals and cow yield and can be used by a farmer to follow up with a vet or nutritionist.

“The Dashboard was very helpful – we had a heifer which wasn’t doing well and she was flagged on the Dashboard as having acidosis and mastitis. It made the decision to cull the heifer very simple,” Jessica said.

A number of high-producing cows were also flagged as having subclinical ketosis – and will now be monitored and followed in future Dashboard reports. A copy of the report was also sent to the Flemings’ nutritionist.

“It is great to have a list of cows to look out for – and I’ll be certainly following any cow flagged with subclinical ketosis to see if this is contributing to their fertility.

“We can’t change our bail feeding to match individual cows but it doesn’t mean we can’t use the information and make changes elsewhere.

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