



*Barrie and Angela Molloy,
COBRICO
Victoria*

FEED PAD SAVES TIME, LABOUR AND THE PADDOCKS

The successful management of a dairy farm involves the optimum use of available resources - principally land, labour, capital and time. Barrie and Angela Molloy have found that their decision to install a Waste-Not Fair Go feed pad on their farm at Cobrico, near Cobden in Victoria's Western District has paid dividends on all fronts.

Barrie was previously herd manager of a 1300 cow dairy in New Zealand and he and Angela took over this farm in 2007. It covers 200 hectares (a fraction under 500 acres) of which Barrie says about 190 hectares are effective. The farm came with 280 cows, they bought in 80 from Cobden and a further 80 from up north of the state.

At the time of our visit in mid-April they were milking 320 of their 440 cows on their 44 unit rotary. Barrie and Angela rotate the morning milkings so that they each get a break every other day - they employ one full-time milker and several part-timers for afternoon milking.

It's a mixed herd of Holsteins, one-third Jerseys and a liberal sprinkling of other crosses. They calve three times a year; February, May and September and milk year round.

"That means that we are more selective in the cows we keep," explained Barrie. "We use all AI and we are looking for nice-framed cows with good udders, cows that will last. We've been using British Friesian semen and those first cows are now on their third calf."

EFFLUENT PLANNING IS ESSENTIAL

In December 2011 when they were preparing to install the feed pad right next to where the cows exit the milking shed, they pulled out all the old concrete, posts, fences and the odd tree, which took just over a week. The feed pad slopes back gently towards the dairy, with effluent running into a spoon drain and then into the ponds. Barrie says that this was an important aspect. "We moved an awful lot of material, and it's designed so that if we ever want to concrete the pad, the levels are right.

"But it's working so well, we can't see any point in doing that. At the end of this first winter with it, we'll know more so we can assess it."

The Waste-Not feed panels which constitute the feed pad are constructed with individual feeding spaces, between hi-tensile steel

arches, acting as voluntary head bails, so that uneaten feed falls back into the feeder. Importantly, it largely eliminates bossing and bullying. Each animal gets its fair ration, and trampling or soiling of feed is minimal. The Molloy's feed pad accommodates 88 cows down each side, equal to two rotations of the rotary. The Waste-Not system means that the cows have about 25 minutes access to the feed pad, twice a day after milking.

SAVING TIME EVERY DAY

Barrie said that their main reason to put in the feed pad was for ease of management and to save the paddocks, but they have found that they now have more time to get on with other jobs around the farm.

"The main thing is the time saved in not having to feed out. It's a big labour saving and we have less wastage - more so in winter, with the wet paddocks," says Barrie. "They can really bog up then, it's a huge advantage having the feeder."

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Barrie fills the feed pad as and when it needs it – “if there’s a clear space a bale goes in. We are using lucerne hay at the moment. We put in cereal hay during May and early June, depending on what the grass is doing.”

A feature of the Waste-Not Fair Go Dairy Feed Pad system is that farmers can select a quality and intake of feed at the pad to boost or balance the rest of the ration, grain or available pasture.

Feeding the same feed twice daily and refilling the feed pad as required, keeps the diet much less variable. In addition, if more intake is needed as pasture declines, or in wet conditions, cows could also be granted extended access to the feed pad – all afternoon or even overnight, to allow cows to fill up on whatever it contains.

They use a contractor for the round bale silage and only make silage on the property, buying in all their hay requirements. “We’d rather make good quality silage, than shut the paddocks up to make hay.

INCREASED LITRES

“We’ve definitely seen an increase in production in the time that we have had the

cows on the feed pad. We are getting 1000 litres per day more than the same time last year with the same number of cows – and it’s been a lot drier.”

Many farmers claim that the system has the ability to lift the ‘tail’ out of the herd production, and that the two and three year olds produce more as a percentage of the herd. Previously bullied cows have the security of knowing that they will get their fair share at the feed pad.

The Molloys feed the cows 8kg of grain per cow per day in the bail and are averaging 21.8 litres per cow per day at the moment. Barrie says that the protein hardly alters.

“With the cows standing at the feed pad, you can go for a bit of a walk and look at all of them, to check on them”, adds Barrie. “Our farm advisor, Tom Walsh from Timboon Vets, says that the cows are in the best condition that he’s seen them.

“We’re hopeful that we can lift fertility. We’re already seeing that we are getting

better results with the heifers. We’ve achieved 60 – 65% conception across the board at the first joining.”

It takes six minutes to move them off the feed pad, “We’re not hunting them hard – once they have a full belly they’re easy to move. The ones that came in early are standing ready to go out”, adds Angela.



Less than once a fortnight Barrie scrapes the manure into a pile at the other end of the pad, ready to spread it onto the paddocks.

“Our general management has resulted in calmer cows from when we first started here, but you probably can’t put that all down to the .”



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