



*Casey & Bonnie Taylor,
HEATHMERE
Victoria*

FEED PAD IS A GREAT MANAGEMENT TOOL

Casey and Bonnie Taylor from Heathmere, just north of Portland in Victoria's Western District, milk between 450 and 470 cows on their property, 'Surreylea', that they took over in 2001.

The home farm encompasses 300 hectares, and they have two additional blocks of 70 and 40 hectares as run-off blocks and for cropping. The Surrey River borders their property before flowing into the sea at Narrawong and a few years ago the area had a return to wetter autumns and winters.

The wet conditions presented lots of problems with feeding the cows so, after consultation with Terry Allan from Waste-Not Stockfeeders, the decision was made to install a Waste-Not Fair Go feed pad during April 2009.

"The best advice that we got from Terry Allan," Casey maintains, "was to do no concrete work for the first few years. That's worked very well."

They did some earthworks alongside the milking shed and created a simple gravel pad to accommodate the feed pad which holds 80 cows on each side. The Taylors milk on a 40 unit rotary, which was rebuilt in 2009.

Casey explains, "We pulled out the 30 year old original shed and put in a full DeLaval

set-up with automatic cluster removers and in-bail feeding." So each side of the feed pad holds the equivalent of two rotations of the rotary platform, and that gives the cows 20 to 30 minutes of eating time, each milking.

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.

NOT BIG DOLLARS INVOLVED

"The way that we are going about it now is a lot different from what we originally thought," says Casey, "it's not big dollars to set up the pad and you can build on it."

The Taylors have found changes in the way they run their cows. They have more time to look at the cows, which is important in identifying an individual animal's health and there is more time for other jobs. It means that when feeding is running smoothly better decisions follow. It is a simple solution and opens up options for herd improvement.

Casey keeps the gravel pad scraped and well cambered for liquid effluent to run-off and be stored in the effluent pond. He says that the surrounds of the pad need re-gravelling

after three years and that he might bite the bullet and concrete it now - now that he knows more about it.

They have a mixed herd of Friesians and Jerseys and for the past five years have been introducing Aussie Reds, as Bonnie says, "To keep the hybrid vigour".

"I'd always wanted to milk cows", said Casey. He had been working on a couple of dairy farms and bought this farm where he had been working previously. Bonnie was an apprentice race jockey at Cranbourne, just out of Melbourne, until a fall put an end to that. She went on to be a vet nurse at nearby Heywood, where she met Casey.

A full-time employee, Daniel Ross, does five milkings per week, and looks after the majority of the tractor work. They also have two relief milkers, a school-based dairy apprentice and Casey's mum and dad, Peter and Wendy, also help out.

The Waste-Not feeders are designed to ensure that all the feed is contained in the unit and eating takes place within the feeder. A skirt eliminates valuable leaf being blown away by wind or trampled into

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the mud or dust. The stock have access to all the valuable protein which enhances production, and many farmers claim feed savings of up to 30 or 40%.

The cows get 2kg of grain per day in the bail and Casey says that would appear to be less than the usual amount given by many dairy farmers, but as he says,

Instead of silage or hay feeding being an all-or-nothing decision, the feed pad enables farmers to select a quality and intake to boost or to balance the rest of the ration, grain or pasture.



'Casey Taylor uses a Claas telehandler to fill the feed pad.'

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 can also be granted extended access to the feed pad – all afternoon or even overnight, to allow cows to fill up on whatever it contains.

Many farmers claim that it 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 something at the feed pad, especially if they find themselves in the last batches through.

Although the farm would appear to run a fairly high stocking rate, Casey says that the number of cows suits their farm well. The biggest limitation is how wet the farm gets, "The feed pad is an extra management tool. We can hold them longer in wetter times to ease the pressure on the paddocks."

When they are selecting semen for AI breeding, they look for plus indicators in solids as well as good feet and legs, "Some

The Taylors make all their own pit silage, and hay is no longer made on the property. "That's made springtime a lot easier to manage. We just cut for quality. We are starting to feed out silage a week later than usual, and we are getting a lot more regrowth."

Last year they bought in 180 tonnes of top quality cereal hay from the Wimmera for the springing cows.

FEED SAVINGS

Casey explained that their own silage goes into the feed pad. "When we put it in, we cut down our hay consumption to about one-third. All our surplus grass goes into pit silage. On springing cows we save about 40% of feed." He said that it is not practical to bring all the pit silage back to a central point. Some is left in the paddock and fed out on a home-made feed-out cart.

They fill the feed pad with silage every two days, which takes about 20 minutes with their Claas Scorpion telehandler, or half an hour with the tractor. That's about 10 tonne of wet silage, plus the cows are getting the extra silage in the paddocks. It works out to around 2000kg of dry matter per day, or about 4.44kg dry matter per cow per day through the feed pad.

"I'm a grass-grower, and our cows are giving 500kg of milk solids per cow per year. We have seen a little improvement in fertility, and having the feed pad as a management tool means that we can manipulate the feed. It saves wear and tear on the tracks and it really improves cow flow from the shed. It makes the job of drafting cows from the feed pad a lot easier.

IMPROVING THE SOLIDS

"An interesting thing is that our fat and protein figures have stabilised. Previously we have had around ¾% fluctuation over winter and spring. Controlling the fibre intake and the energy means that we utilise the feed more efficiently and that improves the protein and fat tests."

Butterfat is currently at 4.9% and protein is 3.7%.

The capability to fine-tune the feeding regimen for the cows is one of the features of the Waste-Not Fair Go Dairy Feed Pad system. It arises from the ability to control the intake in each cow quite accurately.



'Casey and Bonnie - with Banjo and Jack - admire their feed pad which they say saves wear on the tracks and improves cow flow from the shed.'

of our cows are grazing 2 kilometres away from the shed." They have been utilising sexed semen recently to improve on cost efficiency.

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