

## QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER 37 - MARCH 2006

### EDITORIAL

Bureaucracy and more bureaucracy! When will we say enough is enough? There is a continuing stream of new regulations and fines for everything imaginable. This is supposed to be a free, democratic society here in Australia. As other totalitarian regimes in countries like Russia and China have crumbled because overregulation does not work, we are seeing our governments applying more restrictive practices.

I have been lambasting our peak agricultural bodies for some time about creating a message, a mission if you like, via the mass media to get the sympathetic ear of the urban voter as to just how their country cousins are looking after the countryside.

I was pleased when Agforce announced they were going down this track. Then what a let down when the first amateurish, poor quality ads came on. These ads must have cost an arm and a leg and are useless.

For Heaven's sake! Get smart and hire someone to create a message that is marketable, and if it is, the media will do the rest.

How do you think the environmental green movement got started? Not by spending big dollars on ads.

Australia depends to a degree for its wealth on tourism and as such, if we wish to continue, we must change and streamline some of the entry practices at our major points of entry. As I am a frequent traveller to SE Asia, I do see how other major airports work.

I have been subjected, along with the other passengers, to a ridiculous procedure upon landing at Cairns. The aircraft has docked, the land bridge has extended and the aircraft door has opened. Everyone has risen from their seats, retrieved their cabin luggage - and then an

announcement requesting everyone to return to their seats! The reason: someone on the flight has a temperature and so the whole disembarkation has to be halted until health officials come on board and interview the person, which usually takes 15-20 minutes.

We must have health surveillance – sure – but what a “Welcome to Australia” message to passengers who have just completed a long overnight flight! For two years Hong Kong has had auto-temperature reading cameras that check all passengers' temperatures as they enter the terminal. Hundreds of thousands of passengers transit that airport every day.

We pride ourselves on our technological supremacy - why not use it to make overseas airline passengers happier and comfortable?

And a few more friendly smiles at airport cabin luggage security check-ins would be better than the scowls we get now.

Airline passengers are victims of this wave of security 'hoo hah,' not perpetrators. Terrorists make up a miniscule percentage of the air travelling public, so how about treating the rest of us with friendliness and consideration?

*John Rains*

*The best way to succeed in life is to act on the advice you give others.*

### SOUTHEDGE SEEDS' NEW PREMISES

Southedge Seeds relocated their office and seed store during January to the new premises at 24 Tinaroo Creek Road, Mareeba (at the corner of the Kennedy Highway with Tinaroo Creek Road), a highly visible spot on the edge of town.

Please note new phone number: 4086 2400 and fax number: 4092 2345. However we can still be reached on our present numbers for a time.

The postal address and all email addresses are unchanged.

### ON THE ROAD

*Australian Brahman heifers born in Vietnam*

### CLIMATE WATCH - WHAT DRIVES OUR CLIMATE?

- Dave McRae, QDPI&F -

A large contributor to climate variability in eastern Australia is the interaction between the central Pacific Ocean and the atmosphere above it. The Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) and sea surface temperatures (SST) anomalies are used to monitor the state of this interaction.

The Walker Circulation is the major atmospheric circulation cell moving air between the eastern and western sides of the South Pacific. Changing SST patterns in the equatorial Pacific, from the west coast of South America to the Indonesian region, drive changes in the Walker Circulation. These changes are reflected as a see-saw or oscillations in

atmospheric pressure between the eastern and western Pacific.

This see-saw in atmospheric pressure can be measured by the SOI. The SOI is referred to as simply the difference in barometric air pressure between Darwin and Tahiti.

It ranges in value from around plus 30 to around minus 30. While measured on a daily basis, it is usually the shift in value of the SOI on a monthly basis that is considered as a reflection of SST patterns and strength of the Walker Circulation.

There are five different phases of the SOI and they are used to categorise shifts in monthly value of the SOI from the end of one month to the next. The phases are:

- Consistently Positive (SOI remains in positive values from one month to the next)
- Consistently Negative (SOI remains in negative values from one month to the next)
- Rapidly Rising (SOI significantly rises in value from one month to the next)
- Rapidly Falling (SOI significantly falls in value from one month to the next)
- Consistently Near Zero (SOI remains in a stable pattern near 0 from one month to the next)

By using SOI phases and historical climate data (rainfall, frost, hail, temperature etc), a relationship can be developed to indicate for example, whether the coming three months is likely to be wetter or drier than normal. This relationship can also be used to investigate the chance of extreme climate events.

It is worth noting that the SOI influence on climate varies across Australia (greatest skill is for eastern Australia) and between seasons (usually greatest skill is for winter, spring and early to mid summer). Therefore users of the SOI are urged to investigate the relationship for their location by using such tools as Rainman StreamFlow.

Generally though, periods of widespread prolonged drought, especially across eastern Australia, are associated with a Consistently Negative SOI phase (eg monthly values of the SOI remaining below minus 5.0 and often an El Niño SST pattern). A negative SOI value is a reflection of barometric air pressures over northern Australia being higher to those in the central Pacific. This may slow or stop the flow of the south-east trade winds as well as reduce the occurrence of rain depressions (and cyclones). Typically a drop in the chance of getting median rainfall will occur during winter, spring and early summer.

Positive phases of the SOI (average monthly values of the SOI above plus 5.0 and often associated with a La Niña SST pattern) reflect barometric air pressures over northern Australia being lower to those in the central Pacific. This helps increase the intensity of the monsoon trough across northern Australia and increase the occurrence of rain depressions (and cyclones). Typically, there is a rise in the chance of getting median rainfall in winter, spring and early summer.

Autumn is a key time to watch for developing trends in both the SOI and sea surface temperatures (SST). For more information contact the DPI&F Call Centre on 132523 or (07) 3404 6999.

#### **BEEF 2006 PARTICIPATION - ROCKHAMPTON**

Once again this year we will be attending BEEF 2006 in Rockhampton in the first week of May. We will be located at Site 6 (ringside) at the Trade Fair from Wednesday 3rd through to

Saturday 6th May. So be sure to call in - we will be more than happy to see you.

*One reason you can't take it with you: it goes before you do.*

#### **INFORMED DECISION MAKING YIELDS UNBELIEVABLE RESULTS!**

2600kg milk solids per hectare, less than one tonne of grain per cow annually, and all from New Zealand Genetics jersey cows!

Believe it or not? Well, it's all true and it is being achieved at Brunswick Junction in southwest Western Australia.

Mike & Tracey McLaughlin, with their six children (aged 18 months to 16 years) are living the great Australian dairying dream, and rewriting the farming textbook in the process.

After 17 years as a computer programmer and consultant in Zimbabwe, Mike felt a need for a lifestyle change, so the family upped sticks and headed for Australia.

After six months travelling around Australia, the McLaughlins settled in WA and worked for wages on two of the state's large dairy herds. This didn't completely fulfil the dairying dream however, as lifestyle combined with cow ownership was the ultimate goal.

Using his computing skills, Mike formulated a computer model to pinpoint the best place to milk cows, and which breed of cow to milk.

Two clear answers emerged: farm in southwest WA; and milk high component, moderate statured, pasture proven New Zealand jerseys with low maintenance requirements.

Although deregulation of the Australian Dairy Industry was a distant possibility, Mike knew the only sustainable farming system would be one which followed the New Zealand 'cows eating grass' logic. Gaining access to an extensive array of dairying research from around the world, trying things out and adhering to sound guiding principles has been the basis of Mike's farm management success.

"Being a computer programmer meant I wasn't constrained by accepted norms – what was or wasn't right. I simply looked at how Mother Nature works and went with the flow," Mike said. "I wasn't worried about going against the norm as long as it worked." Mike initially leased a 10 hectare farm, with 8.78ha (approx 22 acres) in pasture on which he milked 74 cows, followed by 20 heifers and 39 calves in 2002/03. That's a stocking rate of 8.4 cows/ha for the milkers alone!

The farm yielded 2671kg MS/ha (milk solids) from the 74 cows, with only 756kg of grain per cow. "I think I might have overdone the stocking rate this year," said Mike, "I increased the total Milk Solids per hectare over 2001/02 but dropped my per cow production below what I think is acceptable." 2003/04 will see an additional 3.1ha brought into the equation, which drops the targeted milkers SR down to 6.5 cows/ha. "I will achieve similar per hectare performance, through better per cow yield." The farm is predominantly Kikuyu, which is very summer active, and winter dormant. "I sow tetraploid annuals and perennials in the autumn, as my research shows the local climate is conducive to Mediterranean type plants. The amount of grass we grow is mind boggling," he laughs.

Cows are grazed 24 hrs per paddock, with a fresh paddock being offered in the afternoon. "Grass leaves have three times the water soluble carbohydrates in the

afternoon as they do in the morning," says Mike, "so it makes sense to give the cows the highest quality feed at the right time."

Mike's theory suggests the base of the grass plant increases its sugar content due to defoliation, and the cows then eat this the following morning.

The young stock follows the cows.

The herd is grazed off for six weeks over winter (July-August) and calving starts mid August. As the result of a synchronized joining, 65% of cows are calved in 14 days, 75% in four weeks, and all done in three months.

Fertiliser applications are also scientifically based. "Basically I've calculated the nutrient removed by animals for milk production and maintenance, and what is returned in the form of effluent etc.," said Mike. 1.5t/ha of 'Springburst' fertiliser (13:3:12:15) is applied in 10 dressings annually. "Low calcium is a major problem, so I experimented with Gypsum. Lime doesn't work here as it's calcium we need, not a move in pH. "Irrigation water is applied every 70mm of evaporation. I access the Water Corporation web site and use the standard weather station parameters. I only pump water during the day, to preserve the wildlife that shares the waterways," he said.

The story of where Mike sourced his start-up cows is a tale in itself. As jerseys were what he wanted, he approached a particular farmer who had jerseys and offered to buy them. The farmer declined to sell, but 12 months later he died and the herd was put up for sale. This was no ordinary herd. It had been together for a long time, but for the past 20 years the cows had been turned out to the bush and run wild as 'pets' on the owner's property.

Mike secured the one year old heifers for around \$60 each. Of the 34 purchased, only 15 ultimately ended up forming the foundation of Mike's herd in 1993. These heifers were joined to New Zealand Genetics bulls Bayly Brass Albert, and Forbro Adventurer.

Sires are selected on body size, components and the New Zealand Breeding Worth Index. The workabilities, especially temperament, are a major criteria in the selection process.

There are a lot of stories out there about the 'gunnas'. They are 'gunna do this, gunna do that.' Mike and Tracey are doing this, and it's working. Adhering to sound basic principals and keeping an open mind can achieve amazing results.

*- used with permission of M McLaughlin*