GROWING MORE FEED FOR DAIRY COWS

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Six Hunter Valley dairying families are working to break through the barriers to increasing their farm's productivity.

Working with Industry and Investment (I&I) advisers Anthea Lisle and Kerry Kempton the group is among the first dairy farmers to apply FutureDairy's Complementary Forage System (CFS) under commercial conditions.

A CFS involves allocating a portion of the farm to intensive production to increase productivity from home-grown feed. It usually involves cropping, sometimes double or triple cropping.

Crops may include a legume for nitrogen fixation, a bulk crop such as a cereal or maize for silage, and a brassica (forage rape) to break pest and disease cycles.

FutureDairy project leader, Associate Professor Yani Garcia said the CFS is an option for farmers who have already achieved high levels of pasture utilisation and are unable to access more land or water.

"Our research at the University of Sydney Camden campus has shown that the CFS can achieve high levels of forage utilisation; and is economically viable and environmentally sustainable," said Assoc. Prof. Garcia.

At the Camden trials, about a third of the farm area was allocated for growing a complementary forage rotation, with the rest used for pasture (kikuyu over-sown with short rotation ryegrass every autumn).

The complementary forage area was either double cropped (Persian clover and maize) or triple cropped (forage rape, legume and maize).

Over the past two seasons the CFS has achieved more than 25t DM/ha of utilised forage across the whole farm, and nearly 30,000L milk/ha from home grown feed.

"Being an intensive system, the cost of inputs is high but the potential yield means the cost per tonne of feed is comparable to pasture," he said.

Because it relies less on bought-in feed, the CFS is relatively less sensitive to changes in the price of grain.

"The on-farm trials will help us identify management practices that are critical to success of the CFS under commercial conditions."

The farmers involved have experience with some aspects of the CFS approach, for example growing maize and double cropping.

"What's new is putting it together as an intensive plan to increase milk produced from home-grown feed," said Assoc. Prof. Garcia.

The farmers trialling the CFS are the Williams family, Ian and Maria Simpson, George and Elizabeth Allen, Rodney and Stacy Richardson, David and Cindy Butler, Ross and Cheryl McDarmont and Tim Freeman.

Each of the farms is being monitored fortnightly to track milk production and feed consumption.

For more information contact Associate Professor Yani Garcia ph (02) 9351-1631 or email sergio.garcia@sydney.edu.au or www.futuredairy.com.au

George Allen (centre) is one of six Hunter Valley dairy farming families growing FutureDairy's complementary forage system. Pictured with FutureDairy Project leader, Yani Garcia (left) and project officer, David Deane.