

TECHNOLOGY AGE REACHES DAIRY PASTURES

Advances in technology are allowing dairy farmers to use a combination of data from their own farm and climate records to 'learn' from seasonal yields. This new learning function will enable farmers to determine the causes of poor pasture performance and to identify ways to improve yields.

FutureDairy senior research fellow, Dr Cameron Clark, highlighted some of the opportunities offered by new technologies for improved pasture production at the Dairy Research Foundation's annual symposium, held at Camden in early July.

"Technology is transforming pasture management from an approach of 'working from averages' to dealing with individual paddocks. This is important, given the large range in pasture yields between paddocks. For example, the best paddocks typically yield double that of poorer performing paddocks on the same farm," Dr Clark said.

"Advances such as automatic pasture meters have greatly increased the amount of data available to farmers but the challenge is to convert this data into meaningful information for making management decisions."

Dr Clark said software programs had been developed to 'learn' from pasture data collected across a farm, also drawing upon climatic records. They can help determine the cause of low pasture yields and define areas for similar management.

"This is likely to be an 'add-in' function to the pasture management or feed budgeting programs currently used by many dairy farmers and their advisors," he said.

Dr Clark said these advances allow dairy farmers to place greater focus on soil: for example, customising soil testing and fertiliser application at the paddock level and selecting the most suitable paddocks for cropping.

"The application of these technologies on farm is in its early stages but it has the potential to dramatically change the way we approach pasture management on dairy farms," Dr Clark said.

The software is likely to be available to New Zealand dairy farmers in the near future.

In the meantime, Dr Clark suggests those without paddock yield records can identify poor production paddocks by keeping note of grazing days for each paddock, and focussing attention on the paddocks with few grazing days.

"Nearly every dairy farm has the potential for improved pasture yield, and a good place to start is by lifting the performance of poor performing paddocks. Taking a shovel out to dig a few holes will often highlight a problem. For individual paddocks, there can be surprisingly big gain in yield for a small effort and cost," he said.

For more information, contact Dr Kendra Kerrisk, FutureDairy project leader ph 0428 101 372, email kendra.kerrisk@sydney.edu.au or www.futuredairy.com.au



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Caption: FutureDairy researcher, Dr Cameron Clark, says software programs have been developed to 'learn' from pasture data collected across a farm, to determine the cause poorer-performing paddocks and to identify ways to improve yields.