Dairy Pre-Farm Gate PGP Quarter 2, 2012/13
(October- December 2012)

Executive Summary

The pre-farm gate programme has made considerable progress. Strong platforms have been established through many of the projects that are now moving to implementation. Significant highlights for this quarter are reported below.

1. Theme 1 – On Farm Innovation and Research

Transition of the Core Database into industry good stewardship is underway: The transaction of core data into an independent industry owned entity will improve the efficiency and functioning in data use throughout the industry network. Negotiations between industry and Livestock Improvement Corporation (LIC) have cumulated in an 88.2% LIC shareholder vote for the transition. This cements LIC's commitment to the transition. Legislative changes will be required before establishing and building the Dairy Industry Good Animal Database (DIGAD).

The development of the Dairy Data Network is supported by a number of subprojects to develop the protocols, networks and relationships that will provide linkages to the Dairy Data Network.

Supporting subprojects include:

- On-farm capture of farm data by Original Equipment Manufacturer companies so information from distributed milking systems and in-line or automated milking systems can be included;
- Validation of the Fertility Focus Report for New Zealand systems;
- Further development of data systems and relationships with trained professionals to deliver animal performance products;
- Pasture Growth Forecaster developed so that farmers have real-time prediction of pasture growth; and
- Development of Dairy Network Data standards around ownership of data, best practice in data access and permissions, and data interchange standards.

Use of phenotypic data for improving the estimated fertility breeding value is showing promise: A significant outcome from the "fertility" work is finding three traits that are good candidates for further evaluation. These traits include: calving at first oestrus, calving interval and heifer calving rate. The data was carefully scrutinised and the heritability of the fertility traits was demonstrated. It was found that the quality of the data needed to be improved through adjustments such as correcting sires, removing cows treated with hormones to cycle and removing cows that were induced early. The potential improvement in rate heritability of fertility gains rose from 5 to 20 per cent. This analysis is on-going.

2. Theme 2 – Building Capability for a Sustainable Future

This theme is also progressing well, and in a number of areas the outputs of the projects are now being implemented.

Nutrient management certification under a new company: A new company, Nutrient Management Advisor Certification Programme Ltd, has been formed to oversee implementation of the certification process that was developed in the first two years of the programme. The Board of the company is made up of nominees from NZIPIM, DairyNZ, Balance, Ravensdown and NZ Fertiliser Association. A company structure was recommended as the most secure means of delivering the certification programme to ensure long term success. Certified Nutrient Management Advisors (primarily Fertiliser Representatives) will have the necessary expertise and level of proficiency to deliver nutrient advice to assist farmers in operational and tactical nutrient planning.

Effluent Management design parameters are becoming embedded: The Institute of Professional Engineers NZ (IPENZ) Practice Note on the Design and Construction of dairy effluent ponds, along with an associated booklet titled “A farmers guide to dairy effluent storage ponds”, released in 2011, are becoming embedded in the dairy and effluent service industries. These resources are used in training programmes aimed at improving the skills and knowledge of personnel as well as during pond design and contraction to ensuring fit for purpose effluent systems and effective effluent management plans are operating on-farm.

Outreach to schools continues: Two “Principals in the Field” events were held in Christchurch and Palmerston North where 40 Secondary School Principals, Board of Trustees and/or School Heads of Departments attended. They were hosted at agricultural research facilities, commercial farm business and agricultural value businesses on a bus tour with guest speakers. The feedback has been universally positive with the consistent message being that they were unaware of the range of career opportunities within the agricultural value chain. Providing Principals and key influencers with a positive and informative experience should help to address the poor perception and miss-information issues in relation to agricultural careers. Changing attitudes at the senior level within Secondary Schools is critical to making headway with the number and type of student considering a career in agriculture.