

# EDUCATION&THE WORKFORCE

A collaboration between Deakin University, South West Local Learning & Employment Network and South West Institute of TAFE

## It's raining jobs around the farm

To many people the dairy industry is nothing more than milking cows. In reality, the industry is far more involved and varied and offers an evolving and expanding range of jobs both on farms and in supporting industries. The dairy industry is arguably the biggest economic driver in south-west Victoria. This region is responsible for nearly a quarter of Australia's milk and has recently passed Gippsland as Victoria's most productive dairying region. A preliminary background economic analysis of the Great South Coast prepared by Warrnambool City Council shows the annual output from dairy products is \$1.03 billion and from dairy cattle \$835 million, the two highest levels from 109 sectors in the region. Each year \$859 million worth of dairy products and \$510 million worth of dairy cattle are exported from the Great South Coast. The industry easily outstrips the "value-added" output of the likes of tourism, even though the broader public might not recognise these facts. Dairying directly employs 3595 people but has spin-offs in creating jobs in other sectors. Weather conditions in south-west Victoria continue to support a robust dairy industry and climate change predictions indicate this region will continue to grow as a major food bowl for Australia. This edition of Education and the Workforce looks at some of different jobs related to the dairy industry and how people have moved into the roles.



Dairy connections: Rebecca Dickson (NCDEA), Jocelyn Bevin (WestVic Dairy), John Dalton (farmer), Robyn Vale (careers co-ordinator) and Darren Matthews (Terang Co-Op Dairy Services).

## 100 roles that keep our milk flowing

**W**ESTVIC Dairy executive officer Mike Weise thinks he can name 50 jobs connected to the dairy industry in south-west Victoria.

But after a few minutes of listing roles ranging from cheese makers, tanker drivers, herd recorders and land agents to financial planners, artificial inseminators, agronomists and pesticide advisors, Mr Weise has to reconsider his estimates.

"Actually I can name 100 — and there are probably more than that," he says.

One of Mr Weise's roles as

the executive officer of the dairy industry development body for western Victoria is to implement priorities identified by local farmers as essential for the industry. Filling those 50-plus jobs is nearly always at the top of the list.

"Attracting and retaining staff and assisting with their professional development have been issues for the industry for several years. The people component of dairying is constantly identified by farmers as a high priority for investment of their levy," he said.

"We are working with



Mike Weise: great industry.

agencies to promote some of the careers available in areas such as farm management, processing, finance, animal health and herd improvement," he said.

Mr Weise has experienced a fair portion of those 50-plus

dairy jobs in his career. He started milking cows as a holiday job in the UK when aged 16 and progressed to tractor driving and relief herdsman by the time he was 21. "I lived in the city and it looked far more attractive to be working in the country out in the fresh air. It was a great buzz to be involved in an industry where you help feed people."

After eight years of milking cows and managing a farm, Mr Weise decided on a new course of action. "I got my degree in agricultural and agricultural economics and found I liked lecturing in a centre similar to Glenormiston so went off

in that direction." Mr Weise took another new direction in 1993 when he did a 12-month exchange in Australia with a lecturer from Melbourne University. He returned to the UK but in 1998 made the permanent move down under. "There were a lot of adaptations to be made in Australia — I basically walked around with my eyes and ears wide open."

After eight years with the Department of Primary Industries, Mr Weise joined WestVic Dairy as executive officer in 2006 where his role includes collecting the priorities of the region's dairy

farmers, helping the board use those priorities to seek results, attracting funds and resources and overseeing work plans for the 17 staff to achieve.

Dairying, according to Mr Weise, is a great place to be.

"I have been able to grow personally and feel really at home among the people in the industry," he said.

### TELL US YOUR STORY

ARE you working in a job that you never dreamed about when you were younger? If you are, send your story to [reception@swllen.net.au](mailto:reception@swllen.net.au)

### The science of farming

**G**RAEME Ward could have stayed on the family farm at Kyneton to become a fifth generation farmer.

Instead he chose to keep his hand in agriculture by pursuing an interest in science.

Mr Ward, a dairy research officer based at the Department of Primary Industries in Warrnambool, was raised on a mixed farming property near Kyneton. "I probably should have become a fifth generation farmer on that land but for a number of reasons, including the tightness of farming land in the area, I was encouraged to go on with further study."

However, living off the land was in Mr Ward's genes. "I was motivated by my farming background to stay involved

in agriculture and I liked the science side of things rather than the business side so I enrolled to do a Bachelor of Agricultural Sciences at Melbourne University."

He later went on to complete his Masters of Agricultural Science while working as a pasture extension officer with the DPI. When the South West Dairy Research Group was established 16 years ago, Mr Ward took on his current role as dairy research officer.

His research projects have varied greatly from irrigation scheduling and wet soil management to sustainable re-use of dairy effluent and reducing greenhouse gases. "I basically moved from being an agronomist to being a soil scientist to fit in with what is needed," he said.

### From paramedic to farmer

**W**hen John Dalton went through a career about turn in 1993 he knew he needed to quickly learn the ropes of his new profession.

A paramedic with 11 years experience, Mr Dalton knew a lot about helping people in medical emergencies but little about the industry he was about to start, dairy farming.

"I wasn't born and bred on the farm," Mr Dalton said. "The opportunity came up for us to take over my wife Kathy's parents' farm at Naringal. I could see the potential for asset growth and wealth creation and if we could set it up correctly it would create income for us later in our lives."

He enrolled in every course he could, from farm management to

artificial insemination. As deputy chairman of WestVic Dairy, Mr Dalton now takes on responsibility for education and careers for the industry's regional development agency.

"There is better structure in place these days than when I started," he said.

Dairy Australia established an industry-based training model, the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia, about five years ago which includes a base at DemoDAIRY at Terang.

The depth of development in the dairy industry has resulted in more courses, ranging from relief milking to an Advanced Diploma of Rural Business Management, being offered at South West TAFE's Glenormiston College.

### Matching people and jobs

**T**HERE are so many different jobs on farms — including those which struggle to find suitable applicants — that a dairy careers co-ordinator is now needed in south-west Victoria.

Robyn Vale has taken on the role, a first for the dairy industry in Australia.

Ms Vale was previously a Local Community Partnership facilitator for South West LLEN and worked in health and safety in the meat processing and retail industry for a decade.

Ms Vale's education had initially set her on another career path.

"I have a bachelor of arts in professional writing — I'm a qualified script writer," she said.

However, the prospect of

working alone in an office at a computer wasn't to her liking and Ms Vale reinvented herself in people-oriented roles.

This included theatre administration, public event organising and library work and ongoing education.

She has educated herself to the ways of the dairy world by "observation, inquiry and lots of careful listening".

Over the first few months of the position Ms Vale has confirmed a desperate need for general farm hands and assistants and farm and herd managers.

"The biggest challenge is making connections and finding accessible ways for schools to provide opportunities to enjoy an experience with dairy.