

# Darren & Stephen Berkefeld

## Mt Gambier, South Australia

Through their family partnership, Berko Pastoral Company, cousins, Darren and Stephen Berkefeld, run a 1500-cow dairy near Mt Gambier in south east South Australia.

Having achieved a high producing herd (10,900L/cow), Darren and Stephen are now increasing their focus on efficiency and business management.

“With an operation of this scale, small differences in efficiency can have a big impact on bottom line profitability,” said Darren.

Being involved in FutureDairy’s Forages study provided them with the opportunity to try a Complementary Forages Rotation (CFR) with close monitoring of production, efficiency and sustainability.

The Berkefelds will implement a modified CFR, designed to suit local conditions, particularly the cold winter months. It has been simplified to allow easier management on a large scale operation. Their rotation will involve two sowings a year:

- Maize (grown mid October to April)
- Brassica, legume and ryegrass (grown April to September).

The CFR trial will be done on 28ha area under centre pivot irrigation that will provide feed for young stock and dry cows. The aim is to produce 40t DM/ha.

A number of maize varieties will be grown to identify which provide the best yields when harvested early (mid March) to allow establishment of the second crop before winter.

The Berkefelds are supported by a group of local dairy farmers and advisors, including consultants, Horizon Farming. At critical stages of the trials, the support group discusses options and provides input to assist the Berkefelds in making management decisions. Horizon Farming works with the FutureDairy team to collect data, and undertake the detailed monitoring required for this trial.

By working with the Berkefelds, FutureDairy hopes to develop a CFR suited to South Australian conditions. Insights from the Berkefelds experience will help the FutureDairy team develop management guidelines that are relevant and feasible on-farm.

### **Status: May 2007**

The summer maize has been harvested. Winter crops are being sown in autumn.

Key points are:

- A range of yields were achieved for the different varieties sown, with an average of over 20 t DM/ha being achieved across the whole area.
- Wind and frost early in the crop cycle negatively affected yield as did the drought
- Much was learnt about how best to manage short season maize varieties with further trials to be conducted next season
- Brassica has been sown and established, however growth rates have been slow and there is little evidence to suggest why. Tissue and soil testing will be conducted to explore possible reasons. Poor performance of autumn brassica is not uncommon in SA, so getting to the bottom of this issue should reap some rewards for the region (climate is similar to Maffra but growth rates are about ½ )