



Chairman's Profile



Chook was born and raised on a small dairy farm in New Norfolk, which was a town milk supply farm.

He moved to Gretna with his dad when he was 21 years old, where they bought a property which is still in the Downie family today.

Over the years they added a little bit to the property but they have always been predominantly dairy farmers. They dabbled in sheep, poppies, peppermint and fennel but consolidated to total dairy operations in 1995.

Post deregulation they swapped supply to Bonlac and became seasonal spring milkers, although the milk still goes into the National milk factory.

Chook's son, James, is working the property now and Chook is slowly disentangling himself from the property although he is still involved to a small degree.

Chook has retired to a small 40 acre property in Middleton.

In addition to his role on TFGA's Dairy Council, Chook has also held a number of other positions both within TFGA and industry itself. These roles have included TFGA Director, Director on the Board of Australian Dairy Farmers, six years on the Tasmanian Dairy Industry Authority and nine years on the Tasmanian Herd Improvement Organisation.

Commodity Chairman: Chook Downie
Executive Officer: Gwen Norman (current)
Jayne Badcock (to February 2005)

Overview

The TFGA Dairy Council as the representative voice of Tasmanian dairy farmers has made a conscious effort to actively connect with the whole dairy supply chain throughout 2005.

This direction is in keeping with the December release of the Priorities for Collective Action for the Farm Sector document that was instigated by national workshops with the farm sector. It was clear from this document that farmers are looking to be recognised, highly valued and sustainable within an operating setting reflecting balanced social, economic and environmental factors. Another important highlight of the document was that farmers are looking for a united voice through key organisations.

Working as One with the Australian Dairy Farmers

As a member of the Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF), the Dairy Council is actively participating in national issues that affect Tasmanian dairy farmers. Dairy Councillor, Alan Davenport, is the Association's representative on the ADF Board. ADF undertook a number of projects during 2005, many of which have directly assisted our Tasmanian farmers.

1. Improved Farmgate Returns via Trade Reform

As the Australian dairy industry exports approximately 55% of its production, world market conditions greatly affect farm gate price. Mr Allan Burgess, the Chairman of ADF who also holds the position of NFF Trade Committee Chairman, has worked tirelessly to gain further market access and better conditions for world trade during 2005.

2. Improving Conditions for the Dairy Farming Business in the Domestic Market

ADF opened the doors in 2005 to promote closer working relations with milk companies and Dairy Council participated in discussions with all Tasmanian supply companies. These meetings enhance business relationships and provide an active conduit for farmer to milk company dialogue. Dairy Council also supported the retention of collective bargaining through lobbying the ACCC in conjunction with ADF.

3. Developing a Sustainable Market for Dairy Heifers

ADF has worked hard to develop a sustainable market for dairy heifers to China, by successfully negotiating processes to address quality assurance aspects of trade.

4. Improved Farmgate Returns from Innovation and Competitiveness

Dairy Council, both individually and through ADF, has lobbied to ensure politicians and key stakeholders have an ongoing understanding of the dairy industry environment. Through ADF the Dairy Council has supported the retention of programs such as Taking Stock and other innovative extension programs.

5. Bio-Security and Animal Health Outcomes

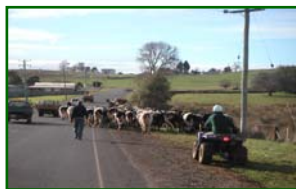
Through ADF the Dairy Council has monitored and had input into the National Vendor Declarations. Dairy Council supports the National Animal Welfare Strategy as the accepted description of best practice in the dairy industry and the Council provided significant input into the TFGA submission on the Review of the Animal Welfare Act.

6. Secure Access to Natural Resources

Natural resource management is a complex area and ADF and Dairy Council worked with other bodies during 2005, such as Dairy Australia, to ensure dairy farmers were equipped with the appropriate management tools and had sustainable access to natural resources. The National Dairy Alliance Effluent project and the Dairying for Tomorrow program are examples of management tools that have been made available to assist dairy farmers.

7. Support of ADIC & ADHIS

Dairy Council, through membership of ADF, supports the Australian Dairy Industry Council (ADIC), which is where dairy farmers and dairy companies come together. The Australian Dairy Farmer magazine is owned by ADIC and is sent to all dairy farmers free of charge. Similarly, Dairy Council supports the Australian Dairy Herd Improvement Scheme, which provides dairy farmers and artificial breeding companies with credible Australian Breeding Values for dairy traits.



Education & Training

Education and training was a key industry focus during the past twelve months given the looming skilled labour shortage. To this end, Dairy Council worked with industry stakeholders to reinvigorate the Taste of Dairying program and Dairy Council will be the first point of contact for the program, which will be held in August 2006.

Tasmania is not alone when it comes to a shortage of skilled labour, so a national forum on dairy personnel education was held in 2005 and was attended by representatives from Dairy Council. The forum proved to be very worthwhile and the outcomes were certainly instrumental in instigating the move towards creating the National Education Centre for the Dairy Industry.

International study tours provide farmers with a unique learning opportunity and through Dairy Council two deserving young dairy farmers were able to explore the New Zealand dairy industry. David Jones from Hamilton was the successful Tasmanian candidate for the ADF Young Dairy Farmer Business Tour to New Zealand, which was fully funded by Dairy Australia. For the first time ever, a representative from Tasmania joined the UDV Dairy Apprentice Tour to New Zealand in 2005, and Nicholas Martin was the successful recipient. His trip would not have been possible without the financial support of Dairy Council, De Laval, Agritech Pty Ltd and Cape Country Rural.

Materials on Roads Code of Practice

Dairy Council was instrumental in the development of the Code of Practice to Minimise Agricultural Materials Deposited on Public Roads. The Code was a joint initiative between TFGA and TAPG to assist local government in Tasmania maintain standards on rural roads affected by livestock movements and material deposited from vehicle movements involved in farm operations.

Throughout the development of the Code, TFGA worked hard to ensure that unnecessary restrictions and controls on rural operations were minimised.

TFGA Annual Conference

The 2005 TFGA Annual Conference provided an excellent forum for two high profile dairy farmers to promote their excellence in the fields of pasture management and occupational health and safety.

On Farm Issues

Dairy Council has actively supported industry events, promoted extension programs and voiced congratulations to all key players.

Through the cross commodity services of TFGA, the Dairy Council has delivered on submissions to the Review of the Water Management Act, the Review of the Animal Welfare Act, electricity issues, milk pick up issues, local government issues and OH&S compliance.

Membership Drive

In keeping with the theme of unifying the industry into one voice, the Dairy Council has worked consistently to increase membership. Two Dairy Council meetings have been held away from the TFGA House. One was held at Smithton in June and the December meeting was held at the Government Offices in Prospect to accommodate industry and young farmers.

Encouraging young dairy farmers into the organisation is a particular focus and to meet that aim a Young Dairy Farmers Forum was held on 14 December 2005. Dr Rachel Hawkin, Dairy Research Scientist from the Dairy Co-operative Research Centre, Robert Poole, Deputy CEO of Australian Dairy Farmers Ltd and John McKew, Industry Relations Manager with Dairy Australia, addressed the young farmers and other attendees on topics including overall industry confidence and an update of what's happening in the 'big picture' of dairying.

Need for Stable Power Supply

Both the North West and the North East have had more than their fair share of inconsistent power supply during 2005.

Burnt out motors and loss of production have been the result of this inconsistent supply as well as the subsequent difficulties for irrigation and water supply. Dairy Council through negotiation and lobbying has received assurances from Aurora that they will inform TFGA of future planned outages.

Dairy Council representatives attended the Aurora meeting at Togari Community Hall late in 2005, at which the planned upgrade of poles for the Brittons Swamp area was outlined. Only a week later the upgrade scheduled for March 2006 was partially started after a damaging wind storm swept through the area in mid December that left dairy farmers without power for over ten hours.

Dairy Council will continue to work closely with power suppliers to ensure consistent supply and the timely dissemination of information on any outages.

Priority Setting & Strategic Planning for Tasmanian Dairy Industry

Dairy Council actively participated in a two day workshop during 2005, the aim of which was to get a picture of how the dairy industry would look in ten years time. This information was collated on a national basis and used to determine key priorities for the national dairy industry.

2005 saw the commencement of the review of the five year strategic plan for the Tasmanian dairy industry. Dairy Council, TIAR, DairyTas and DPIWE set the scene for the remainder of the review process, which includes a dairy farmer forum in 2006. The strategic plan review will take into consideration the National Dairy Priority Setting document and the Priorities for Collective Industry Action for the Farm Sector report to ensure alignment with these other important strategies.

In summary the Tasmanian dairy industry is vibrant and growing. The TFGA Dairy Council is committed to providing the role of guardian of the Tasmanian dairy industry.