

## HEAD: Keeping cows cool

Kylie and Peter Squires know what it's like to be hot. Dairying near Dubbo in Central New South Wales, the temperatures reach 45 degrees Celcius or more for several months every summer.

The heat takes its toll on the cows and milk production. Tapping into the Cool Cows alert system late last summer gave the Squires a glimpse of how much they stood to gain from cooling their cows.

"I suppose we just accepted that heat stress went with the territory if you dairy out here. But getting involved with Cool Cows helped us focus on the things we can do to reduce the impact on cows and production – and just how much it's worth," said Mrs Squires.

With help from their son Jayden, Lisa Coman (herd manager) and Kathleen Coman, the Squires milk 300 cows year round on their 295ha property, Buckhobble.

The Squires pastures are irrigated with three centre pivots, so there are few trees in the paddocks for shade.

"In the past our main strategies were to delay the afternoon milking until evening and to allow the cows to spend the afternoon near the river where there's shade.

"We also had limited water sprays in the dairy yard but milk production still fell in the hot weather, especially in February."

Late last summer the Squires subscribed to the Cool Cows Email alert service which sent a message when the weather forecast for the area indicated cows would be subject to high-extreme heat stress in the next few days.

"The alerts were a timely reminder to give the cows access to river shade on hot days. They were very handy when we were away on holiday. I could forward the message to our herd manager as a reminder," said Mrs Squires.

February milk production didn't dip as low as it usually does, just by being more vigilant about providing shade.

"That got us thinking about what else we could do. And there were plenty of practical ideas in the Cool Cows book. One thing in our favour is that our heat is dry, not humid, so water sprinklers and fans provide good evaporative cooling," she said.

Over the winter, the Squires put together a plan for managing heat stress in the longer term. It involves installing shade cloth sails and more overhead sprinklers at the dairy yard and building a shade shelter with facilities to feed hay.

As it involves a significant capital outlay, the project will be done in phases as finances allow, with the shade shelter already under construction and plans afoot for the yard shade and sprinklers.

“By this summer we’ll have a shade shelter to house 150 cows. It’s not an elaborate system – just an open shed but we will be able to feed hay there. Further down the track we can install fans and extend it,” said Mrs Squires.

By summer the Squires will also have the shade cloth sails and overhead sprinklers at the dairy yard which will accommodate up to 200 cows.

They plan to split the herd in two for the summer. In very hot weather, one herd can go the shade shelter and have ad lib hay, while the other can cool off at the dairy yard.

“We’ll still be relying on pasture so we’ll get our nutritionist to help us work out the system to ensure all cows get fed properly,” she said.

The Squires expect to recover the cost within a year, through improved summer milk production.

Research shows that cows start seeking shade once the air temperature reaches 25 degrees so there’s at least six months of the year that the Squire’s herd will benefit from shade.

Dairy Australia’s Dr Steve Little who developed the Cool Cows material says there’s plenty of low cost ways to reduce the effects of heat stress, and the return is almost immediate.

For ideas to keep your cows cool this summer, or to subscribe to the heat stress alert service, visit [www.coolcows.com.au](http://www.coolcows.com.au)

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C:\files4BU\Monkscom\Grains2Milk\photos\SquiresDubboOct09\DP\_7625.jpg  
DP 7618: Kylie with herd manager, Lisa in the dairy plant room .  
DP 7625: (L-R) Kylie Squires, daughter Giaan, sons Jackson(green top) and Mitchell(yellow top), and Peter Squires. Standing in ryegrass fodder crop with some of their dairy herd behind.

## BOX ARTICLE HEAD: GRAINS2MILK

The Grains2Milk program provides dairy farmers with the training, resources and support they need to make better decisions about using grains and concentrates in their businesses. It is funded by dairy farmers through Dairy Australia. For more information, contact Dr Steve Little ph 0400 004 841 or email [slittle@dairyaustralia.com.au](mailto:slittle@dairyaustralia.com.au).