

ANIMAL HEALTH

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Reduce losses by beating the heat

AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED heat stress expert has contributed to new Cool Cows resources on cooling infrastructure that will be released by Dairy Australia in time for next summer.

Dr Bob Collier of the University of Arizona shared his knowledge with Dairy Australia and Victorian dairy farmers on a short tour to Australia last month.

Heat stress for cows is emerging as an issue in south-west Victoria as climate variability impacts on the region.

The advent of more hot days and heat-waves in the south west prompted the first Cool Cows farm workshops to be held in the region to help farmers protect their herds.

Cool Cows is run under Dairy Australia's Grains2Milk program. Grains2Milk program leader Dr Steve Little said although farmers in northern Victoria, NSW and Queensland were well aware of the impact of heat stress there was less understanding in southern areas of Victoria.

"The heatwaves in mid December and mid January were a reminder for everyone in the south-west that we live a more variable climate and need to be on alert and able to help cows cope," Dr Little said.

"It doesn't take really high temperatures to trigger heat stress in

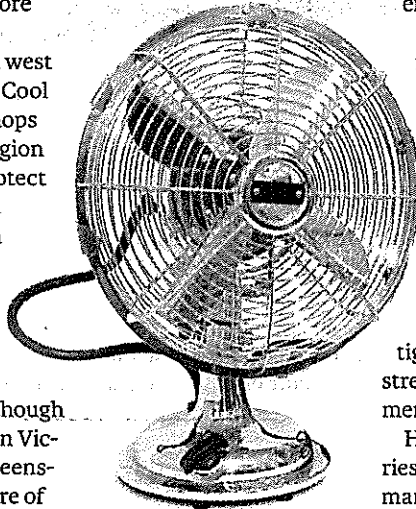
STEPHEN COOKE

dairy cows, especially when humidity levels are significant. Dairy cows start to feel uncomfortable once temperatures hit 25 degrees."

Dr Collier outlined ways that heat stress can be effectively managed on farm with ideas for providing shade and evaporative cooling.

He said financial investment in cooling options can be recouped within one to three years.

He gave the example



of a 10-day heatwave in California in 2006 that cost the US dairy industry \$1 billion in lost production.

"I've since pointed out that you can buy a lot of cooling for \$1 billion," he said.

"California is improving its heat stress management because they know heat waves will happen again in the future.

"Major heat waves don't occur every year but if you're not prepared when they do occur the result can be catastrophic."

Periods of sustained heat can have a sustained impact on milk quantity and quality and long-term health effects on the animal.

"It has carryover effects on lactation and milk yield as well as disease status and fertility.

"Heat stress can have an impact of getting cows in calf and mastitis risks also increase as stressed animals seek environments to cool themselves, including muddy water with high pathogen populations."

Dr Collier said producers are becoming more aware of the impact heat stress has on their herd but now need to investigate ways to reduce stress through management practices.

He said there are a series of tested and proven management practices, including a sprinkler system in the dairy yard to help cool cows before milking, and these are explained on the Cool Cows website (www.coolcows.com.au) which he highly recommended.

"It's the best website that I'm aware of – its user friendly yet detailed. You can also get the information sent to you in print form if you're not familiar with the internet."