



Local Land  
Services  
Hunter



## *Mid-Coast Adaptable Dairy Farming Systems Project*

**Progress Report – July 2016**

### **Adaptable Business Support Group Foundations & Fundamentals Two Day Workshop**

The 2 day Foundations & Fundamentals Workshop for the Adaptable Business Support Group (ABSG) of the Mid-coast Adaptable Dairy Farming System Project was held in Taree on **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup>** and **Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2016**.

Pat and Louise Neal have bravely signed up to the project, and have brought together a group of farmer peers and service providers that will support them on their journey as members of the Adaptable Business Support Group (ABSG). This group will play a key role in determining the path that the business will follow. Over the next 2 years the Neal's will work with all members to identify opportunities to balance the business performance and manage business risks.

The project model is about real farming families making real decisions which are influenced by factors both specific and broader to the NSW Mid Coast. The project uses the real life scenario of a local farm to explore how a dairy farming business can build resilience through greater adaptability, resulting in a business that can “ride the waves” of the unpredictable and better identify the opportunities of predictable influences (financial, physical, environmental and personal) which are experienced by many dairy operations of the region.

As part of the project the Neal's will need to deal with the balance required to achieve longer term strategic goals while managing the seasonal conditions the business will face over the project period. Unlike projects that control the environment, this farm in the spotlight will need to deal with ‘real issues in real time’. It's a unique challenge but it can be very rewarding to have a support network to add to the decision making processes.

The project started with the workshop that was designed to build shared understandings so that each ABSG member could contribute to future discussions and debate on ways to improve the Neal's business performance. The workshop was delivered by Phil Shannon (Shannon Farm Consulting) who will facilitate the bi-monthly ABSG meetings on the farm and Open Days for the duration of the project. Participants were encouraged to relate the concepts presented and to openly debate them.

The aim was for all ABSG members to:

- Build a shared understanding of farming systems and the challenges in balancing profit and risk;
- Understand the role of business analysis in good decision making;
- Understand data interpretation methodologies to be applied; and
- Ensure all members have a common understanding of the decision making processes which will be used throughout the project.

**Day 1** provided participants with an understanding of the aims of the project and discussed the concepts of profitable dairy farming.

**Day 2** consolidated the discussions on the concepts of profitable farming with a focus on understanding the importance of the investment business, and the operating business. It also provided detail on how business analysis is conducted and interpreted. One of the key messages was, that while each season and business is unique, an understanding of the concepts that underpin profitable farming is constant. Farm managers that understand the concepts of 'profitable farm business management' are better equipped to deal with change.

Comprehensive information on the Neal's business was provided to participants during the workshop. Due to the confidential nature of some of the information provided, this will not be made available to a wider audience at this stage, but the key messages will be provided at the first project Open Day on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016.

The next step for the group is to meet on-farm on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2016 to view and build a solid understanding of the physical aspects and resources the business has to manage. The ABSG will also review an historic business analysis of the Neal's enterprise to generate a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). This SWOT analysis will then be used to set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound) goals for the Neal's and the ABSG to tackle over the next 2 years.

The general farming public can be kept up to date on the project through a number of communication opportunities. There is a project Facebook Page (search project name), a dedicated page on the Hunter Local Land Services website and ongoing links to information posted on these sites will be communicated in the regional dairy e-newsletter, the Dairy Droppings. A number of Open Days will be conducted for general community attendance, the first of these being on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016.

For all media, communication and further information on the *Mid Coast Adaptable Farming Systems Project* please contact:

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**Above:** ABSG Members on Day 2 of the Foundations & Fundamentals Workshop (Absent: Wendy & Michael Fraser, Alan Mudford & Galina Barrett).



**Above:** ABSG Members with Phil Shannon delivering the workshop content

**Below:** Louise Neal, Pat Neal and farm consultant (project facilitator) Phil Shannon of Shannon Farm Consulting will be working closely together along with the ABSG over the next two years.

