

Fert\$mart planning for dairy farmers in Tasmania

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The Fert\$mart program has been developed by Dairy Australia to ensure dairy farmers are provided with appropriate knowledge and support to make good decisions about fertiliser application, thereby reducing nutrient runoff from their farms while still ensuring maximum pasture growth.

Fert\$mart provides farmers and advisors with a planning approach and the know-how to produce more feed at no extra cost. Fert\$mart plans are developed one-on-one with farmers and the key messages are that fertiliser is expensive, don't waste it and that using fertiliser is about right product, right rate, right time and right place for maximum profitability.

Tasmania currently has three Fert\$mart advisers with others seeking accreditation. Ninety Fert\$mart plans have been delivered over the past 18 months. The Fert\$mart plan involves a number of steps. These include: Collection of farm data so that farm production goals and feed requirements are known, access information for calculating the nutrient budget, a farm map, accessing previous soil tests, collection of soil samples, soil analysis, understanding the effluent disposal system and disposal areas, assessment of pasture and soil condition including soil structure and drainage.

Soil testing of more than 1200 paddocks found that only 3% of paddocks were in the optimum ranges for all soil fertility indicators of pH, P, K and S. This indicates that there is a huge opportunity to improve performance of Tasmanian dairy pastures by strategic application of lime and fertilisers to get more even fertility across farms. Soil testing is critical to targeting money spent on fertiliser, especially in tight seasons.

Farmers are doing several things differently because of their Fert\$mart plan including: Effluent going on different parts of the farm, more soil testing, changed fertiliser mix and application rates, targeting fertiliser to specific areas and increased liming programs.