

Our Farm, Our Plan

success stories



Natasha and Rod Yarrington farm on the Dingo Creek in the Manning Valley near Wingham in NSW. Rod is the sixth generation from his family on this farm, while Natasha grew up on a dairy farm 30km away.

The original 50 acres of the farm has been in Rod's family since 1852 and started dairy production early last century. The Yarrington's now operate Yarona Park Brown Swiss stud and milk about 100 cows.

The flats they farm are good country, though parts are susceptible to flooding sometimes. Last year they were impacted by severe flooding that caused significant damage to fences and infrastructure. They do have some irrigation and their aim is to be drought proof after experiencing the impacts of the drought three years ago.

Natasha describes herself as the herd manager and Rod as the pasture manager. Rod is a mechanic by trade which is more than handy on the farm where it is just the



Wingham, NSW

two of them working apart from relief milkers on occasions. Their aim is to work smarter, not harder and spend more time with their growing family of four children ranging in age from 7–13.

Natasha has had a strong connection with industry programs through the Dairy NSW, the Young Dairy Network and the Women in Dairy, and has always enjoyed the opportunities to connect with other farmers and people in the industry. She and Rod knew people involved in the Our Farm, Our Plan team, and heard about it through them.

"To have the chance to take part in something that was beneficial for both Rod and me was really appealing," Natasha said. "We really wanted to focus on the farm

and what we want to do. Rod was a reluctant starter and doesn't normally buy in to what he calls the 'mumbo jumbo' stuff but we both recognised that we needed to take a bit of time to step back and take a look at the overview of the business."

Rod's father passed away two years ago so the time was right to assess where they were going and manage the things that come with making a business transition. "We now sit down at the beginning of the week to discuss what's on, so the planning discipline has been really useful," Natasha said. "We have much more open communication about what's on our plate. We also didn't ever sit down and talk about the bigger picture stuff, but knew we needed to, so that's been good."

The Yarrington's participated in Our Farm, Our Plan workshops online. This involved seven x 1-hour Zoom sessions with other farmers and two facilitators and tapping into content on Dairy Australia's e-learning platform Enlight.

"The online delivery worked really well for us. We got to meet other farmers from other places who were using different farming systems and had their own stories to tell," Natasha said.

"For Rod especially, the chance to talk with other farmers was fantastic. It was so convenient too – we didn't have to leave the farm. The facilitators did a fantastic job of making us all feel welcome and comfortable online, and to get us interacting with the other farmers in the group."

Natasha and Rod have done other programs that aimed to help with their planning, and rate Our Farm, Our Plan as the best they've done. "The way the whole program is set up was one of the best things I've done. It made us look at all aspects of our business and also made us look at ourselves. We also discussed our vision and the personal goals we have, as well as the goals for the farm," Natasha said.

The Plan on a Page proved to be an easy way to get the Yarrington's plan down on paper. "It's something we've both got ownership of, and we are definitely motivated by ticking off the things we achieve," Natasha said. "The fact Our Farm, Our Plan has helped Rod to come more on board with this has meant he feels a part of it and is owning it, with skin in the game. So it's not me running a separate plan for my tasks but it's a shared approach and we can all see the plan."

The Yarringtons say they are communicating better and planning together more, so the pasture manager and the herd/business manager are talking better and on a more regular basis. This has been helped by the one-on-one session that they have had with the consultant delivering to their group. They found that it was good to check in and see where we're up to, and the session made them feel more accountable for their plan.

"To talk through where we're up to with our goals and actions was great and made us come back to the plan. One of our goals was to set up the business to get some more time to ourselves. Life is full, so we need to actually plan how we use our time and prioritise things, both on the farm and with the family," Natasha said. "We definitely feel more in control."

When asked whether she would recommend Our Farm, Our Plan to other farmers Natasha's answer was "absolutely." "I would definitely recommend it to other farmers, especially anyone who hasn't got a clear view of where they're heading. It's valuable for anyone who's gone through some challenges like we did with the floods last year, but also just as valuable for people who are travelling well," Natasha said. "It's the same old story about not trying to come up with ways to manage a crisis during the crisis. You're better off doing Our Farm, Our Plan when you're not under pressure so that you're able to step out of the day-to-day business and take a broader view together. You'll be better prepared for when the next challenge comes along if you do."

Natasha even thinks that Rod would recommend it.

"We're both motivated by achieving the things that we put down on our plan. How else do you know if you're getting anywhere? If we don't write things down and plan for them, they typically don't happen, so Our Farm, Our Plan has definitely helped us to make things happen," they said.

"For us to have a program like this available to us through our levies and the NSW Government's Farm Business Resilience Program is amazing and something that I hope all farmers tap in to and get value. I know we are better for doing it."

The Our Farm, Our Plan program is provided at no cost to all Australian dairy farmers as one of the service benefits delivered through the Dairy Australia's dairy levy funding. The program is delivered with the support of the Gardiner Foundation and the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund, through Agriculture Victoria, NSW DPI, Tasmania's DENR and PIRSA in South Australia.

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