



Tasmanian farmer John Leech dropped his per-cow, per-day grain reliance and is still ahead of production budgets because of his strategic use of high-strength probiotics. Photo: The Paperbark Diaries.

# Probiotic numbers add up

**NUMBERS DON'T** lie. And John Leech loves to count.

John manages a 900-cow operation on 500 hectares at Scottsdale in north-east Tasmania. His focus on cow comfort and animal health led to some operationally significant results during the 2020 spring calving.

He has been able to drop their per-cow, per-day grain reliance from 10kg (in 2019) to 4.5kg (in 2020), and still be comfortably ahead of production budgets at more than 480kg milk solids per cow on a herd that walks up to 7km a day.

This spring they flew through calving with unprecedented ease, which undoubtedly contributed to half the herd getting AI during the first week of joining at an average 57 days in-milk.

John believes the “X-factor” has been a strategic use of high-strength probiotics.

The farm feeds the full range of Australian Probiotic Solutions’ products—from the calf pens right through to the milking herd.

## Secret probiotic ingredient

With the lower gastrointestinal (GI) tract driving 70 to 80 per cent of all mammals’ immunity, John resonated with the theory that if the cows were healthy, they could fight infection and illness themselves.

John uses BioCalf and BioBoost in his calf shed, and BioPro Direct Fed Microbial (DFM)—an in-feed probiotic rumen stimulant—in the dairy. The DFM has negated the need for well-known antibiotic in-feed buffers.

In spring 2020, he introduced BioPro SuperStart—a pre-calving high-strength probiotic-based lead feed supplement—16 days before calving.

It has 29 professionally formulated compounds, including high strength probiotics, anionic salts, vitamins, minerals, digestive enzymes and live yeast.

“One of the things with our business is that everything is cost driven,” John said.

“We have been able to drop the grain ration and hold production, because the

cows can utilise the feed better with the probiotics.

“It’s costing us 16 cents a cow a day for the DFM, our components are higher, and we have fewer animal health challenges.”

## Easy calving

This spring, the 700 cows who were fed the BioPro SuperStart calved in with the following results:

- Five assisted calvings (0.7 per cent).
- Five milk fever cases (0.7 per cent).
- No left or right displaced abomasums (LDAs or RDAs).
- No retained membranes.
- No ketosis.

(Note: The 700 included 250 cows who were fed DFM last season and the BioPro SuperStart this season. Those individuals had a 0.4 per cent assisted calving result.)

The vet in Australian Probiotic Solutions’ team, Robyn Plunkett—who is a former dairy farmer—said the BioPro SuperStart represented the next generation of lead feed.

“Because the lead feed contains the full complement of anionic salts, as well as high levels of probiotic bacteria, enzymes and yeast, it acts by driving appetite, and the cows don’t stop eating during those 24 to 48 hours prior to calving,” Dr Plunkett said.

“That leads to higher blood-glucose levels, additional energy at calving, stronger uterine muscle contractions and ultimately a swifter, and trouble-free, calving.

“Stronger muscle tone and energy and the correct balance of minerals also reduces the incidence of milk fever and retained membranes.”

With the established herd already carrying high levels of probiotics, BioPro SuperStart simply completed the circle.

## Better SCC average

Last season the herd’s average somatic cell count (SCC) consistently ran at 220,000. For the same

cows in 2020—who are in their second year on the DFM—their average SCC numbers have dropped 65 per cent to 77,000.

With the exclusion of 44 high-SCC cows (who were included within an additional group of 450 bought-in animals during 2019 with no grain-fed or probiotic background) the 900-cow herd average SCC is now running at 90,000.

It came off the back of a wet autumn and winter, which included 1056mm of rainfall to November.

“To pull off an SCC drop that drastic in that amount of time, over that number of cows with a decent production [29-litre average] in a wet season—with no other change—proves to me the probiotics have worked,” John said.

John’s nutritionist Jim Wade wasn’t surprised. “What’s so positive is that the high production is across the whole herd, and their overall health is good,” Jim said.

“The high levels of probiotics in the blend [35 billion colony forming units per dose] stabilise the rumen, so it’s protected against acidosis, and that encourages the cows to eat more grass.

“That, in turn, reduces the cows’ reliance on grain to achieve production.

“What we’re seeing in this herd is that these cows aren’t milking off their back—despite them being fresh, and not being given a big grain ration.

“Because ultimately production reflects the amount of grass cows are able to digest.”

John said for him, probiotics were the best way to manage animal health.

“I’m very conscious of trying to do better by the animals within farming,” he said.

“I believe these results have only happened because of the way we’ve used and managed the probiotics.

“I couldn’t imagine farming without them now.”

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