

Hydroponic oats beat drought

Dry weather and shortage of fodder supplies no longer worries Dallarnil dairy farmer Mr David Scholl.

He said his 60 cow herd had a continuous supply of lush green feed.

He grows oats hydroponically in a self-contained shed adjacent to his milking shed.

Grown in individual trays, with an eight day turn around, the oats with a protein content of 11.5 percent costs only \$40 per tonne to produce.

At a field day last Friday, Mr Scholl and his partner Ms Diane Ormisher hosted dairy farmers from as far away as Goombungee, who came to see the system which could revolutionise dryland feed production.

Director of Fodder Factory Australia, Mr Peter Ryan who perfected the unique climate controller was present to explain the advantages of his product.

He said he had financed the first prototype shed and equipment several years ago, after being approached by an engineer who designed the complex system.

"The idea of hydroponics was first used in World War I by the American forces to feed their horses," Mr Ryan said.

"I was attracted to the idea of being able to produce feed regardless of weather.

"I run 200 deer and 30 cattle at Wingham in New South Wales. The feed I produced was invaluable to me during the 1991 drought.

"With no prospect of irrigation on this farm, we looked for an alternative method of growing feed," Mr Scholl said.

The system is simple in operation, and is working well, after a few fine-tuning problems since installation last July.

"By changing to feeding oats from a prepared ration

Mr Scholl said the \$40,000 outlay for the shed and system would be recovered within four years.

"We hope to build another shed then, and lot feed beef cattle."

Department of Primary Industries dairy advisor Mr Greg Stanley said the system had benefits for dryland farmers.

"We ran the system

through our Rumnut, (Ruminant Nutrition) computer program, which suggested that extra energy in the form of molasses could be fed as well as the oats to further increase production."



Dallarnil dairy farmers (from left) Ms Diane Ormisher and Mr David Scholl with Mr Peter Ryan of the Fodder Factory, show a tray of hydroponic oats they feed to their milking herd.