

Calving change tools coming

A Massey student is researching autumn calving to help provide information to farmers wanting to make the switch. **Samantha Tennent** reports.

HELPING on the family farm after school and in holidays kept Jake Jarman busy but it was an ag teacher in high school who planted the seed to study agriculture.

He is now nearing completion of his master's research into transitioning to solely autumn calving.

"There is a lot of information around steady-state autumn systems but a gap when it comes to making the transition," he said.

He is working towards an ag science masters degree through Massey University with support from the DairyNZ Master's Scholarship.

His work will help farmers considering the change and could spark interest in others. It is based on the Kavanagh Dairy Trust Taranaki Farm that transitioned between July 2017 and March 2019.

They extended a lactation to make the transition, which meant milking consistently for 18 months and skipping spring mating.

When Jarman got on board early last year the transition was nearly complete and he was given an extensive set of data to analyse.

He spent his first semester on campus in Palmerston North learning the skills to



Debbie McCallum from the Dairy Trust Taranaki and Jake Jarman on one of the trust farms where he was researching the transition process to autumn calving for his thesis.

complete his thesis then relocated to the DairyNZ head office in Hamilton last year where he has been working with the data.

"The farm information had been recorded in a range of programmes and a lot of my initial work was getting the data into an understandable format that is easy to work with."

His findings have highlighted not all cows will milk for the extended lactation, which creates workload challenges as farmers need to manage both their milking cows and their dry cows well to get them ready for the following season.

The youngstock will be off-farm for a longer period, which incurs further grazing costs.

There is an opportunity when transitioning to have a clean slate and establish a tight calving pattern, which was seen on the Kavanagh farm in the first autumn calving. But it also highlighted underlying management challenges can hinder progress in subsequent seasons.

"There are carry-over effects into the next lactation. The first calving post transition won't be a perfect example of what lies ahead."

From his findings he will formulate some recommendations and considerations to make the transition. DairyNZ will use the information to build some tools and resources to support farmers considering the option.

His family farm is near Inglewood and owned by his grandparents. His parents, Paul and Dale, are variable order sharemilking 410 crossbreed cows under a System 2 with in-shed feeding.

After finishing high school Jarman went to Lincoln University to complete an agricultural commerce degree. He wanted to learn about the business side of agriculture, recognising biological performance is fundamentally linked to financial performance.

He was fortunate to have support from a DairyNZ scholarship for his undergraduate studies and



Jake Jarman and Dairy Trust Taranaki's Debbie McCallum at the Massey University scholarship prizegiving last year where he was awarded the Colin Holmes Memorial Scholarship for post-graduate study in dairy science.

he appreciated the breadth of the scholarship package.

"It was more valuable than just the financial support. There were great opportunities to meet a range of people.

"We had dinner twice a year with great guest speakers and there was a variety of people that sat at the tables with us that

we got to meet and chew the fat with."

Throughout his study he had regular catch-ups with DairyNZ's industry education facilitator Susan Stokes. During a catch-up in his final year he mentioned he was considering doing a masters through Lincoln.

Stokes encouraged him to investigate

the scholarship programme and he successfully secured a spot.

"It was a big jump from undergrad to post-graduate study and moving universities made it trickier. They're both good but they do teach differently.

"There were things I found Massey assumed I knew so I had to do a bit extra to understand some parts.

"And there is a lot more independence in post-grad study, more is on the student to get things done and in on time and the requirements for what you have to do are broader."

Being based at the DairyNZ office has allowed him to treat his study like a job. He is included in the office culture, has a dedicated workspace and is surrounded by industry experts to learn from and bounce ideas off.

"It's great not to be camped in a library battling through without a routine. It was a big draw-card to the scholarship having the structure and opportunity."

He had planned to go travelling once he finished but with an uncertain landscape now he is revisiting his plans and will start looking for a suitable role in agriculture. ■



Murphy the family dog helps Jake get the herd in for milking.