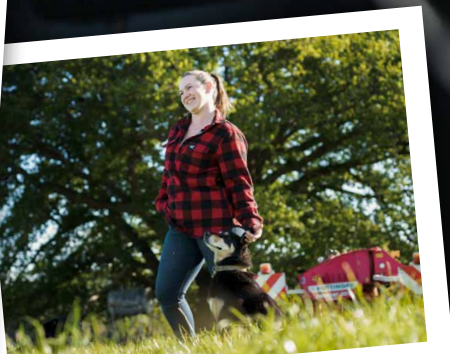
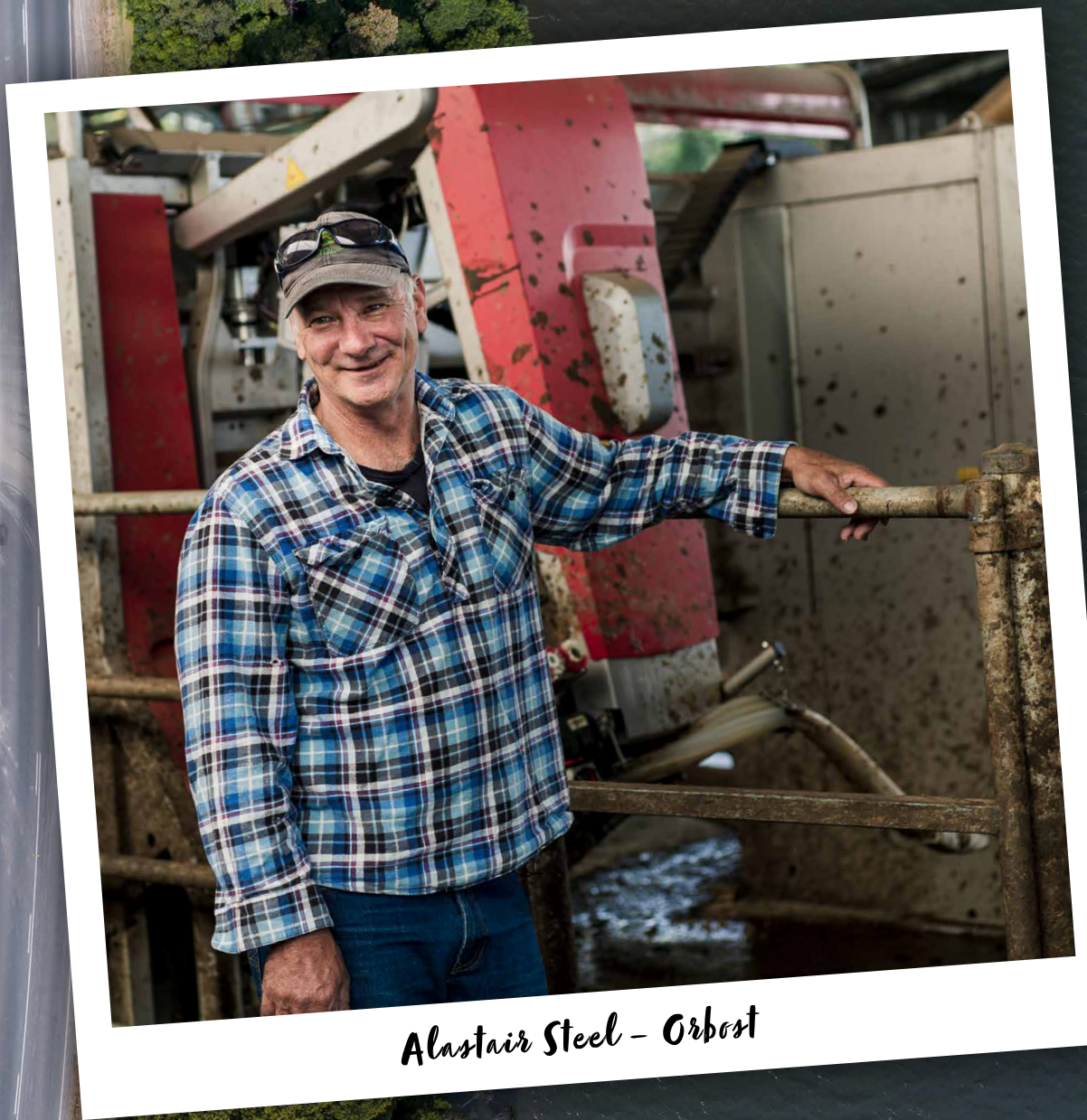


# THE HANDS that feed you

Tales of strength and resilience  
from our dairy farmers

2022 CALENDAR





*Alastair Steel - Orbost*

**JANUARY**

# Alastair Steel – Orbost

**‘Don’t conform with everything that’s out there, think outside the box sometimes. Think individually, what’s good for your neighbour isn’t necessarily good for your farm!’**

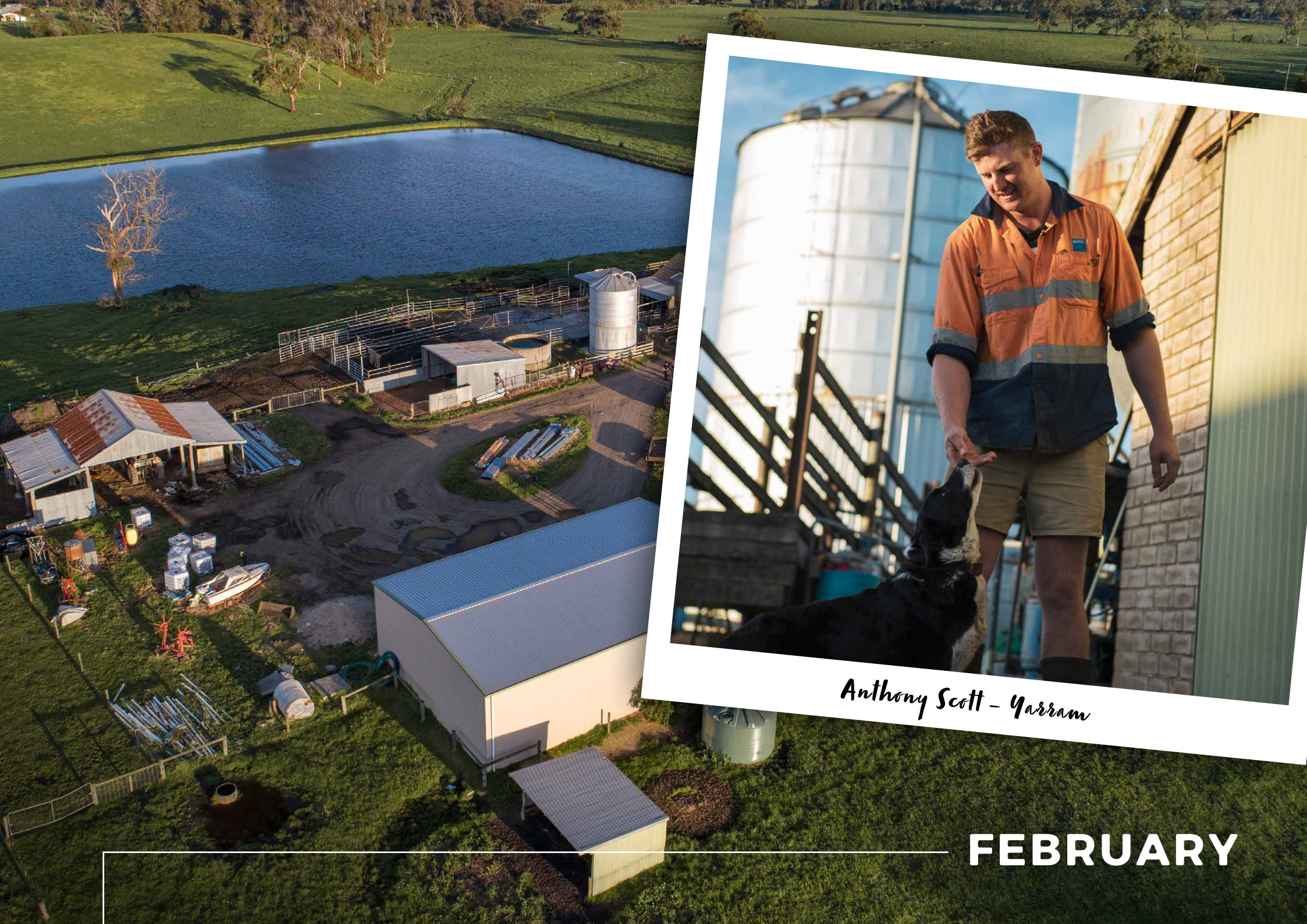
Originally beef farming in Alexandra, Alastair, his wife Mandy and son James, travelled Australia’s east coast and Victoria looking for the perfect place to establish a new farm, finally settling in Orbost. This farm provided Alastair an ideal climate, rainfall, fertile soil and a close proximity to the beach. As a keen surfer, this was a must on his checklist. Since buying their land in Orbost Alastair has finally implemented many components to ensure a great work life balance.

Alastair has always found dairy farming relentless (24/7), particularly during calving. He felt he was stuck on the farm without any outside interaction. 10 years ago he adopted an automatic calf feeding system and knew that he was on to a good thing. So, in the Autumn of 2021 he moved to a robot milking system also. Alastair says that he now enjoys milking and doesn’t experience the same emotional fatigue he used to. He finishes work much earlier in the day too. Alastair says that everyone thought he was ‘bloody mad, but they’ve said that for all my farming practices’, however, some locals are now showing keen interest in his setup.

Alastair enjoys the science behind growing grasses organically and in accordance with the type of soil he has on his property. He does the calving in Autumn, utilising the summer feed, which is too wet in winter to feed dry stock, and which easily grows on his land. He says he chooses to farm with the way his land lays. Alastair attributes much of his farming successes with ‘gut instinct’ and often goes against the advice given to him by consultants as he believes that what is right for one farm, isn’t necessarily right for the next.

Alastair believes the key to managing the everyday stresses that dairy farming can bring is by having an escape from work. He enjoys going to the beach, catching up with other surfers and having discussions that don’t centre around cows. Being by the ocean has a calming effect on him. Dairy farming can be a 24/7 vocation if you don’t take the time to focus on other things.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30	31 Term 1 Begins					1 New Year's Day
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26 Australia Day	27	28	29



*Anthony Scott - Yarram*

**FEBRUARY**

# Anthony Scott - Yarram

**'I was too busy chasing more, that I ended up with less. Don't take the people in your life for granted in the pursuit of a bigger dream.'**

In 2016 Anthony and his partner at the time, Mads, bought 277 acres in Yarram while they were still in their early to mid 20's. Anthony loved being able to see his two young children during the day. However, he was striving and working so hard to build the farm's profits that the things he loved most began to slowly slip away. The farm came with great reward, but also a huge private cost.

Anthony believes the reason he and Mads were able to invest in a farm at a young age was by developing a network of farming mentors. They surrounded themselves with financial advisors, doctors, counsellors and others able to assist them in their business plan. Anthony began working so hard that he ended up with a back injury which meant Mads, who wasn't from a farming background, had to step up and take on most of the farm work.

Anthony and Mads separated in mid 2021 due to the pressures of running the business. Anthony describes this time in his life as a really difficult period. He feels that he could have come close to suffering with ill mental health, however, feels proud of how well he managed to pull himself out of his shell. He found that keeping busy with calving, which yielded great satisfaction, and by re-adjusting his priorities to spend more time with friends at the pub and as the Yarram cricket captain, he was able to recapture the positive person he had lost sight of. He had been too caught up in the big picture of producing a thriving and financially stable business.

The Spring of 2021 is providing such optimal farming conditions that he wants to remind other farmers to maximise on this. Loosen up, be silly, make time for mates and laugh with your partner. He wishes he had remembered to focus not just on the big picture stuff, but the smaller day to day stuff too, and had loved just a little more.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28					



*Ben, April, Seth & Ava Damschke - Trafalgar*



**MARCH**

## Ben & April Damschke – Trafalgar

**‘The ground may be dry, even on the stormiest of days, but just remember, the most important thing in life; to hold on to your family and friends’.**

Ben and April share-farm in Trafalgar. They run 420 cows on a rotary dairy that sat idle during one particularly difficult season, during the milk price crash and the Gippsland drought. For nearly four years, they didn't run a profit on the farm and nearly gave up. As much as April wanted to leave and find alternative work, Ben's stubborn and competitive streak just wouldn't let him quit.

In 2015, when Ben and April began farming, things were going along well for them. They had two beautiful children, a strong relationship and arming conditions were fruitful. 10 months later, however, Ben received a distraught call from his milk officer which changed his life. Milk was suddenly dropping from \$6 per kg/ms to \$1.91. Together with the farm's owner, they made the decision to dry off the cows and stop milking for the remainder of that season. April, who had been managing her mental health well up until then, spiralled into a depressive state, rendering her in bed for days on end. Ben managed the house, children and farm. Things got even worse for them when the rain didn't come for six months in 2018. He lost feed for his cattle and straw cost \$120 per bale. He was beginning to burn out and lose hope.

When the rain finally started falling and the milk prices improved, Ben recalls doing a nude run through the paddocks in the rain, grateful that his stubborn streak had seen him through; he never gave up on his family or his farm. Ben looks back on those years now and can see that his time spent each week at the local football club, chatting to mates about things other than farm stress, helped him get through, as well as the encouragement he received from the farm consulting group he was a part of. April's doctor and her own ability to pull herself out of depression, implement a daily routine again and the love she has for her family, helped her overcome her depression. Ben and April are now in the best place they have ever been and put this down to a passion for farming, a 'can do' attitude, time off the farm for hobbies and belief that things will always get better.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14 Labour Day	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		



*Cassandra, Leigh, Shya, Kryton & Keonte Tama - Denison*

**APRIL**



## Cassandra & Leigh Tama – Denison

**‘We refused to inherit dysfunction. We learnt new ways of living instead of repeating what we had lived through. It was up to us to break generational curses’.**

Cassandra and Leigh work on a farm in Denison . When they began in 2016, they were totally new to the dairy industry, neither having stepped foot in a dairy shed before. In fact, it was then that Cassandra learned that the ‘little, brown cows’ are called Jerseys and don’t actually produce chocolate milk as she was led to believe as a child. She can laugh at this now, looking back with pride at just how far their determination and resilience have allowed their family to come.

Cassandra and Leigh were both born in New Zealand. Their lives there involved gangs, violence, alcohol and toxic familial and cultural cycles. Leigh’s father was president of one of these gangs and Leigh knew that it would be his role to step into his father’s shoes eventually. On the eve of Leigh’s initiation into gang life Cassandra gave him an ultimatum; either go to Australia with her and the boys to work on a dairy farm with her cousin or stay in New Zealand and continue this cycle of poverty, drugs and violence. In agreeance, they packed one bag of clothes each, bought one way tickets to Australia with the little bit of money they had and left their New Zealand way of life behind forever.

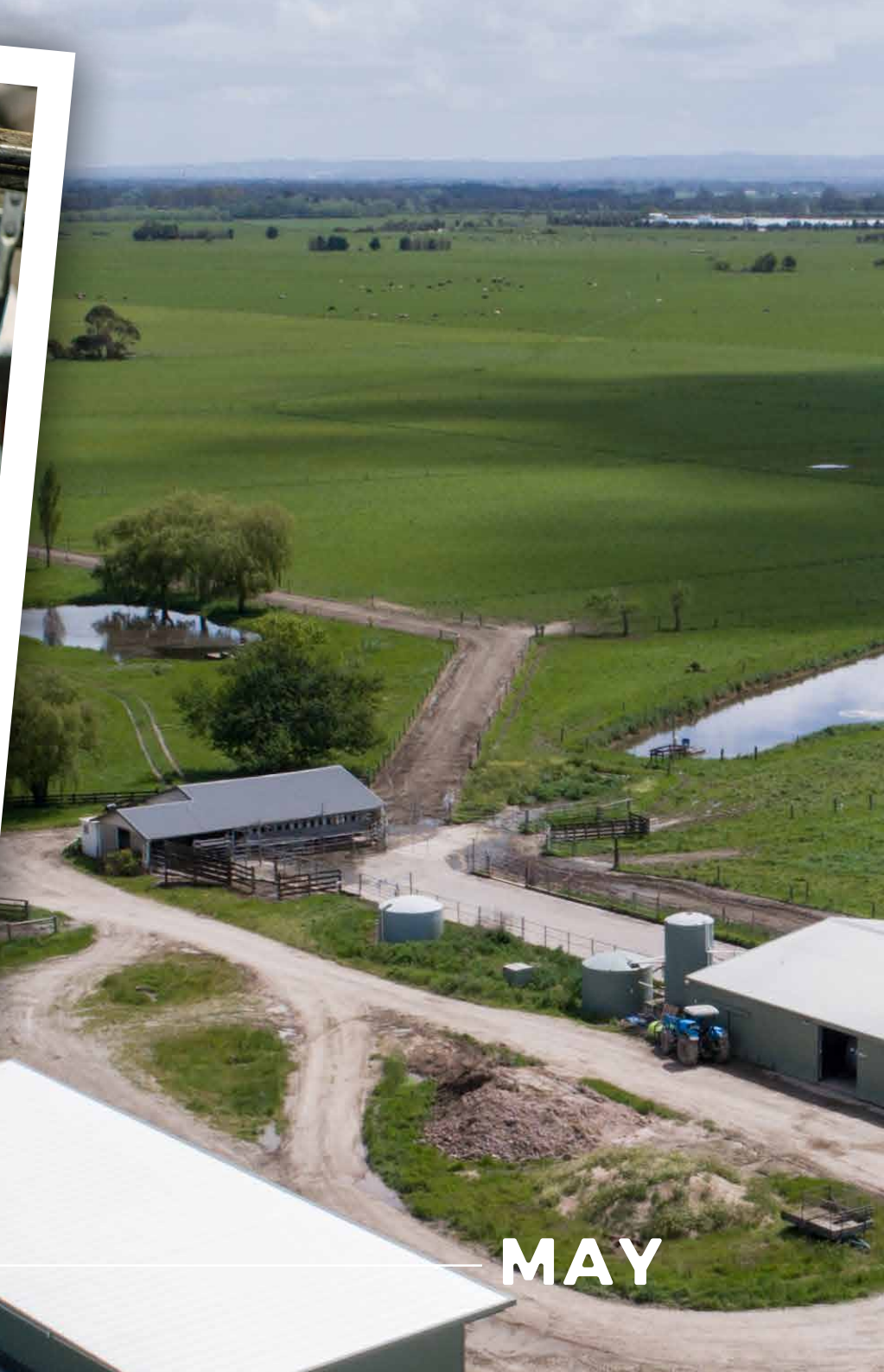
Leigh had difficulty adjusting when he first arrived. On his second day he was asked to bring the cows in, a whole new experience for him and he wondered, ‘what have we got ourselves into?’ Learning how to operate a farm with long days and leaving his extended family behind, caused him to feel so much guilt and exhaustion that he slipped into depression, often unable to leave the couch. His father stopped talking to him and his mother sadly passed away. Leigh says that he overcame this depression when he realised that he did what he had to do for his children to have a better life. If his family couldn’t support his decision to move, then they didn’t deserve him.

Cassandra says the most difficult thing about life on the land is the early mornings. She doesn’t think she will ever get used to waking up early after settling a small baby through the night and riding out in the dark to do the milking, often three kids in tow. At times they have been so close to giving up and going home but Cassandra believes good things take time. She knows that if they give up, they will fall victim to the same cycle they were determined to break. The lifestyle they have created over the past few years and the way their two boys have opened up and blossomed on the farm outweighs any struggles. Cassandra and Leigh can see that their brave decision to move overseas has caused others in their families to find the strength to break the cycle of poverty in their own lives also. Now surrounded by family here in Australia they are happier than they have ever been and, Leigh, once again, has a close relationship with his father.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8 Term 1 Ends	9
10	11	12	13	14	15 Good Friday	16
17 Easter Sunday	18 Easter Monday	19	20	21	22	23
24	25 ANZAC Day	26 Term 2 Begins	27	28	29	30



*Evan Campbell and Kellie Price - Yannathan*



**MAY**

# Evan Campbell and Kellie Price Yannathan

**'We love the lifestyle farming provides but know it can be isolating and stressful. When we meet other farmers, we try to be empathetic to what they might be going through.'**

Evan and Kellie lease a 460 acre dairy farm on the plains of Yannathan. Despite growing up on a dairy farm, as a teenager Evan never imagined he would become a farmer later in life. However, now as an invested dairy operator, he wouldn't have it any other way, and they both enjoy the lifestyle that farming offers.

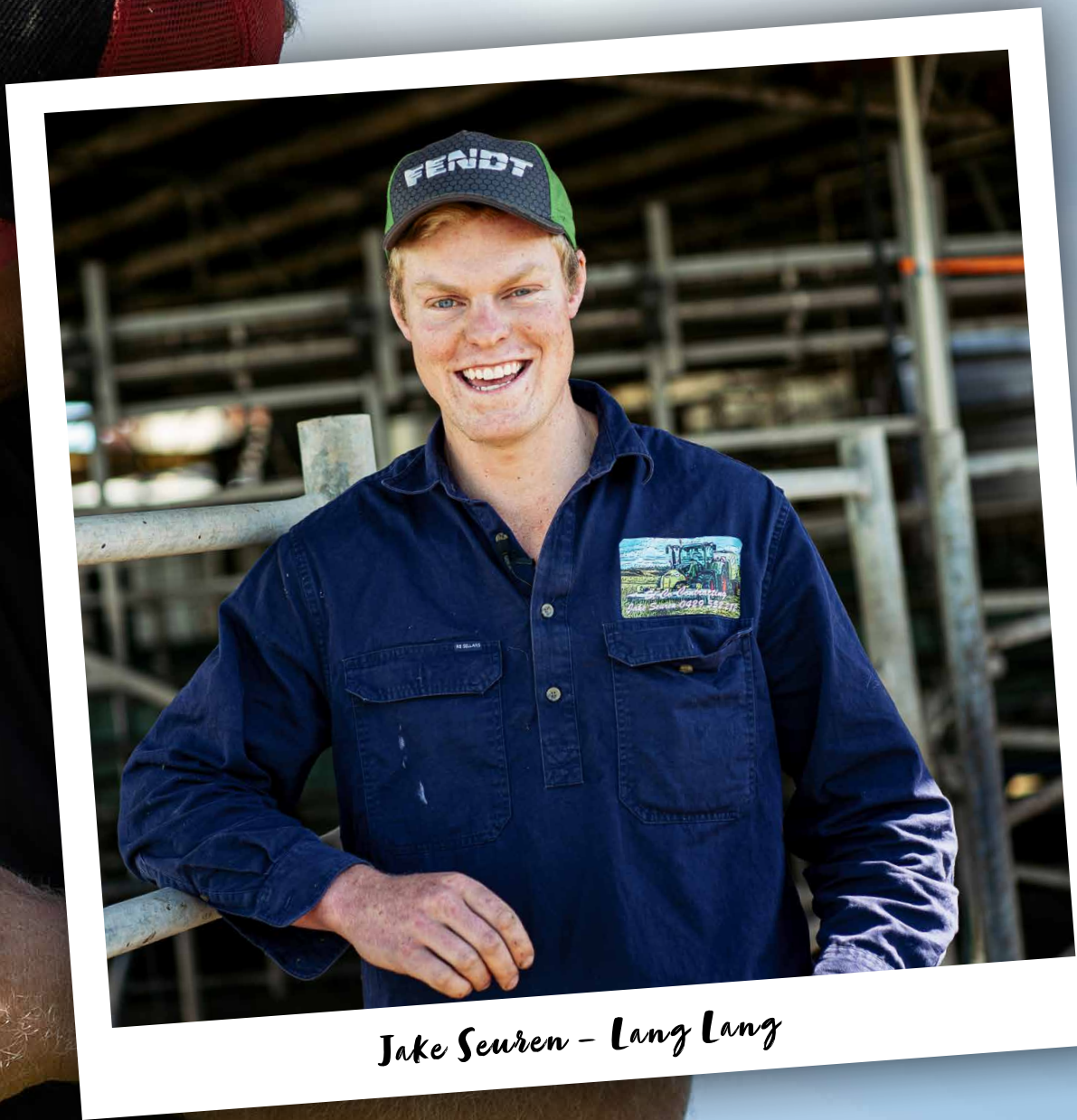
After graduating university and working in the oil industry in the Middle East for five years, Evan developed more of an appreciation for the way he was raised. He now sees the beauty of life on the land. Dairy farming offers him the chance to learn new things every day. Despite elements that are out of a farmers' control, like the weather and milk prices, he has risen to the challenge and prides himself on continual improvement. After receiving a double degree, Evan has a passion for growth and understanding and his commerce studies at university have served him well in working the farm's budget and seeing dividends. However, despite being introverted, there were days that Evan felt isolated and lonely on the farm, he called these days 'dark patches'. Evan says these dark patches have caused him to be aware of managing his emotional and mental health. Meeting fellow dairy farmer Aaron Thomas, and listening to his journey with depression, encouraged Evan to open up about his own struggles.

When Kellie moved on to the farm with him in 2021, Evan found himself less lonely and says that he is now in the best place he has ever been. Together, they make a great team, able to lift each other up emotionally with their differing strengths, abilities and perspectives.

Kellie has been through personal challenges over the past few years herself, after significant life events that left her feeling despondent. She says the key to overcoming this for her was the support she received from family and friends. At the time she was the farm manager of 500 cows, by herself and raising two young children as a single mother. She looks back now and realises she made it through due to the encouragement she received from her network of people and Evan.

Evan and Kellie believe that the stigma attached to mental health conversations is slowly eroding. They have become more aware of the need to be mindful of not only their own emotions, but the emotional state of others too.

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29	30	31				



*Jake Seuren - Lang Lang*

JUNE

# Jake Seuren – Lang Lang

## 'No matter what life throws at you, never give up!'

At 21 years old, Jake has been through many trials and challenges, also triumphs. He possesses a wisdom beyond his years and a fire in his belly born from adversity. To talk to him, you'd come to realise that he is a young man with ambition, strength and smart business savviness. Yet at the heart of him, he has a sensitive soul, a man who just wants to help those around him and give back to his community.

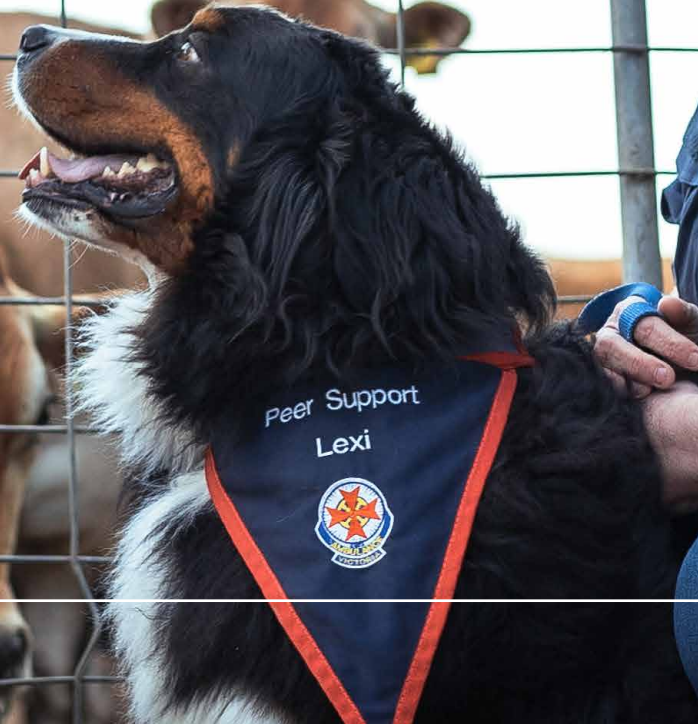
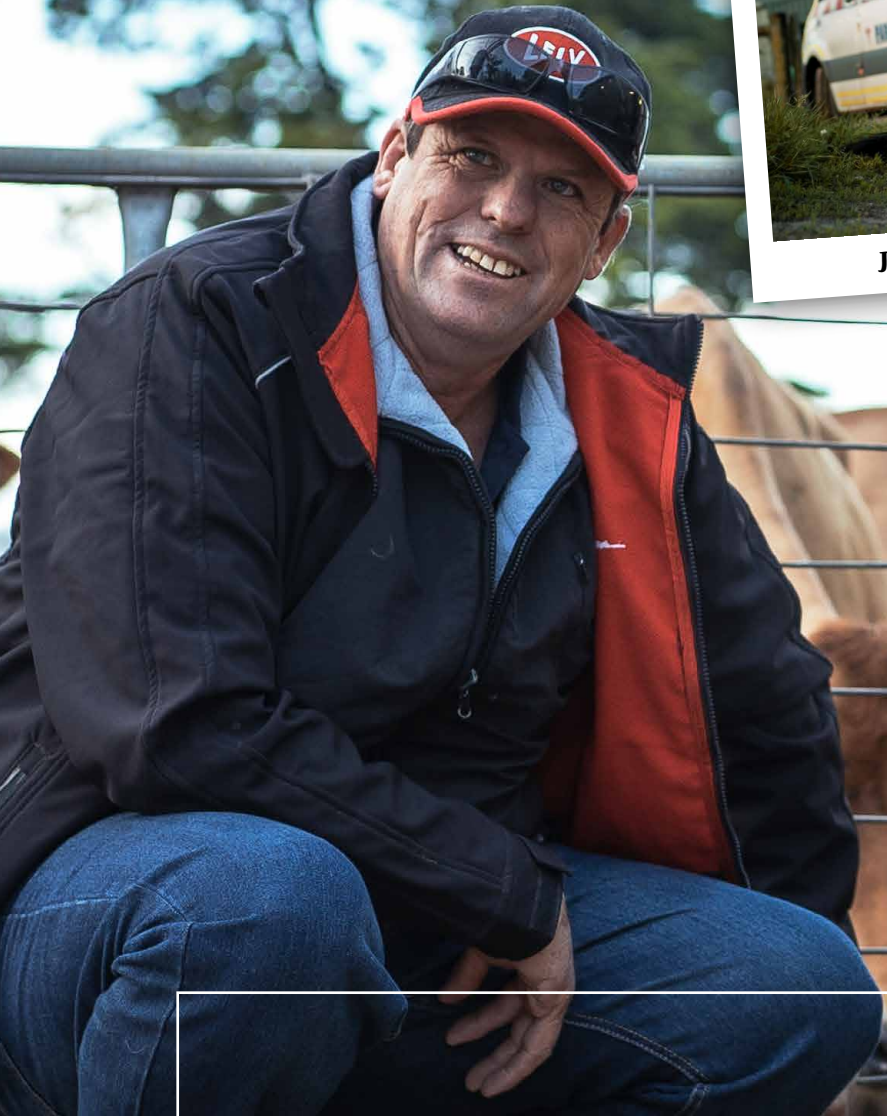
Currently working on the farm he was raised on Jake has battled through drought, milk price crashes and a salmonella outbreak in the cattle that meant he and his father, Michael had to either bury or sell off most of their stock. Jake also watched his parents go through a divorce in his teenage years that caused Michael to spiral into depression. Jake says that his mum walked out on the family, leaving the business in such a hefty deficit that Michael had to sell some of his machinery and stock to continue making lease payments. Eventually a mining company bought the land and Michael felt no other option than to work for that same company to make ends meet. They were slowly able to buy up cattle again and begin making a profit. Over time Ainsley came into Michael's life, and Jake believes she helped his dad to overcome his depression.

Jake has managed to gain a Cert IV in Agriculture and go on to not only gain his diploma but receive a nomination for best trainee in the top three in Victoria. He has started up a farm contracting business (he says it took him a long time to convince the lender since he was only 18 at the time) and, with the help of family too, saved enough money to recently purchase two Fendt tractors, new mowers, a combo bailer and 50 stud jersey cows. Jake acknowledges that these achievements haven't come without stress. He says he always worries 'will I get contracting work, will it rain, will the cows get sick?' He manages his mental health by spending time with his girlfriend Tayla, hiking to waterfalls, kayaking, spending time with mates and contributing funds to the local football and cricket clubs. Jake's five year plan is to continue his contracting business and farming endeavours to save enough money to buy the farm that his father has always dreamed of. He would do anything to support the man who has been there for him throughout his life.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13 Queen's Birthday	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 Term 2 Ends	25
26	27	28	29	30		



*Jr. Dave and Lexi Algie - Kor Wee Rup*



**JULY**

# Jo, Dave and Lexi Algie

## - Koo Wee Rup

**'Mental health, like cancer, doesn't choose who it effects. The thing about mental health is, even though it's unseen, it's still an illness'**

Dave and Jo live in Koo Wee Rup on the dairy farm Jo was raised on. They are advocates for promoting mental health awareness. A unique way of engaging with people to initiate mental health conversations, is in the form of a beautiful Bernese Mountain Dog, Lexi. Dave and Jo bought Lexi as a pup, having no idea at the time of the great gift that Lexi would be to people.

Jo has been a Paramedic for 13 years and Team Manager at the Drouin Ambulance Branch for the past few. Jo was initially involved with a pilot program in Ambulance Victoria (AV) with a Peer Support Dog Program. She was hesitant to involve Lexi due to the extensive assessments and the toll it might take on Lexi's welfare. However, she decided to go for it when she realised that Lexi was born with an ability to break the ice and get tough conversations started with people in a powerful way. Lexi has an incredible penchant for singling out people in need. Over the summer of 2019/20 Jo took Lexi as part of the AV Peer Support Dog program and visited employees, first responders and their families, and other members of the community in East Gippsland that had been heavily impacted by the Black Summer bushfires. Lexi would follow certain people around in the hall where everyone was gathered and sit beside them. Eventually, they would kneel down, cuddle her, and cry. Unknown to Jo at the time, every single person who Lexi had singled out that day had lost their homes to the fires. Jo says Lexi sits and soaks up their tears, she never pulls away, just lets them hug her as long as is needed. Jo realises she has a very special dog and Lexi is a great way to help her to promote mental health awareness and, as one of the Peer Responders, has recognised that there is a need for people to feel heard and supported. Jo says many people try to be stoic around others but seem to feel free to let their guard down around animals, and thus begin 'the chat'. Jo was honoured for her work across AV with the Ambulance Service Medal, a Commonwealth honour under the Order of Australia, in 2021.

Dave and Jo are aware that dairy farming can be isolating, so a few years ago they implemented a robotic dairy system and now they have more time to enjoy getting away from the farm, even if only for a few hours for dinner. They take great joy from the many animals they have around them, their work in the health industry, and in milk production. Their hope is that as conversations around mental health evolve things will get better for farmers and those suffering in silence.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11 Term 3 Begins	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30



*Krystal and Nick Bermingham - Nambrok*

**AUGUST**



# Krystal and Nick Bermingham

## - Nambrok

**'If you want to farm, go out and just give it a crack. There are so many people out there to help, so there is no point feeling like you're alone. Don't let pride get in the way either, benchmark yourself against your own business and just enjoy it.'**

Krystal and Nick's love story began on the farm. At 19 years of age Krystal was working at the Rosedale pub and saw an advertisement online, by Jason Bermingham, for a farmhand. She jumped at the opportunity to work on the land full-time. 12 months later, after falling in love with Jason's younger brother, Nick, they were dating. Together now, they have bought the family's farm, built a house there and have three children together, however it hasn't come without its fair share of struggles.

Nick began working on his family farm in Nambrok as a teenager. He helped build the dairy that currently operates there. Nick believes that the key to running a successful dairy operation is setting the benchmark against yourself, not your neighbours. He utilises outside resources and advice from vets and agricultural experts to help keep the farm operating well. During the drought seasons Krystal sought outside employment to help pay the bills which she found to be a difficult juggle with small children and cows to milk. Their youngest child, Harry, went through some extensive health issues which also meant ongoing hospital trips. During this time Krystal kept a small support network of friends and family around her to help manage her mental health. This ensured that her and her husband worked as a team, even when things were really tough.

Krystal and Nick have had times throughout their relationship where they've said a few choice words to each other, however, they say the key to keeping the relationship and family healthy during times of stress is to practice open communication, no silent treatment, to leave work frustrations at work and develop a good network around them to help with the pressures of owning a business.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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28	29	30	31			



Mark Johnston - Heyfield



SEPTEMBER

# Mark Johnston - Heyfield

**'Open up, find someone to talk to and if you have any underlying issues, just talk. Talking is the best medicine.'**

Mark Johnston doesn't steer away from hard conversations, in fact, he welcomes them. Mental health is something that he has personal experience with from within his own family and has helped him to relate to others that may be travelling the same road. He is excited to share his story and spread the word that talking about struggles in life is a valuable and important tool for managing mental health.

Mark was brought up on a dairy farm in Heyfield with his parents, Peter and Christine alongside six siblings. He says his dad is a proud and capable farmer; he hasn't had a sick cow in years and still gets out of bed each day at 3:00 am to hand strip each of his 100 Canadian Jerseys before milking. Ideally Mark would love to take over the family farm from his father, however, is currently working in farm maintenance, which he says is the next best thing to dairy farming. This career enables Mark to see many different places and meet many different people. One of Mark's gifts in life is getting people to open up and talk. Having personal experience with mental health, Mark says he can now tell if someone's disposition has changed and will encourage them to talk about the things in their life other than farming that bring them joy. Being a support network for people in his life brings Mark a lot of personal fulfilment, he knows that dairy farmers often dedicate their lives to their work and can become consumed by it, it's not just a job, it's a lifestyle. His own father says he doesn't know what he would do with himself if he wasn't still farming. So often, chatting about life away from work can be cathartic for those suffering emotional fatigue.

To manage his own emotional health Mark enjoys taking his four children camping, playing sport, talking to others, spending time with his wife and getting together with the extended family on the farm. They all love the farming way of life and Mark appreciates first-hand the great effort farmers put in to ensure people receive high quality milk.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16 Term 3 Ends	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	



*Ryan, Lauren Zac & Ellie Williams - Fish Creek*



OCTOBER

# Ryan & Lauren Williams

## - Fish Creek

**'Don't let work get in the way. Do things for yourself and put your happiness first.'**

Ryan and his wife, Lauren, live in Fish Creek, on their 290 acre dairy farm. Ryan has implemented some great strategies to keep his emotional health in check with the difficulties that life can sometimes present, including the isolation that dairy farmers often experience. Together they know what it is to experience moments in life that can jeopardise a person's mental health.

Ryan and Lauren, a dance teacher, love the lifestyle that farming provides them and their two small children, Ellie 2, Zach 1 and baby number 3 due in March 2022. Working with cattle, especially the genetic and DNA engineering side of breeding, is something Ryan particularly enjoys. However, a few years ago, the young family experienced a really difficult time. Lauren suffered a miscarriage at 12 weeks, while feeding the calves. Sadly, after having come through this event, Lauren suffered another miscarriage at 8 weeks. Struggling with grief and desperate to be by his wife's side, Ryan was grateful to receive unconditional support to run the farm from extended family and his business partner. For Ryan, family always comes first, and he understands the daily juggle that dairy farming, coupled with family life, can present. The cows always need milking, so Ryan has no guilt in employing relief milkers to share the workload, providing he and his family the balance that they need.

As the cricket coach of a local team, Ryan ensures he is asking the young men how they are travelling, knowing the importance of supporting people's emotional wellbeing. Farming can be isolating and stressful, however Ryan tries to never let work interfere with family time and time for the sport that he loves. Ryan says that surrounding himself with a support network and making time for things in life, other than just the farm, are the key to helping manage his mental health.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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2	3 Term 4 Begins	4	5	6	7	8
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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29



*Scott, Lee-Anne Tye, Blake & Kayley Robinson - Jarrahmond*

**NOVEMBER**

# Scott and Lee-Anne Robinson

## - Jarrahmond

**“Communication is key; it needs to be open, consistent and go in both directions. Just because you might have differing opinions doesn’t mean either one is wrong.”**

Scott and Lee-Anne have recently started leasing the farm that Scott was raised on in Jarrahmond. A fourth-generation farmer, Scott says that dairy farming hasn't come without its struggles, but the key to managing mental health is open communication and time away from the farm. 2021 saw many changes for the family that has meant Scott and Lee-Anne are now thriving in their business, marriage and family life.

Scott knows first-hand that dairy farming can be all consuming, keeping a farmer locked onto the farm with no escape. Throughout his career it has only been him and his father, Mick, milking. At times it has been a long, hard slog, battling droughts, floods, fires, fatigue and financial hardship. Together Scott and Lee-Anne have begun to implement changes to their business that will hopefully see farm life become easier to manage financially, physically, mentally and emotionally. For example, Lee-Anne has sought to ensure that they seek advice from experts regarding business management. She describes particularly draining days for her during Covid restrictions and remote learning. She acknowledges that on these days she has taken news from consultants in a negative light, while Scott, after a great day on the farm, has taken the same news well, so they find it important to share their interpretations for a broader perspective and to remain 'on the same page'. After 20 years together, they have recently come to realise just how much open communication can create a healthier dynamic at home and in their business.

Scott has begun to juggle work and family life well. He plans to regularly lock in trips and weekends away to spend quality time together with Lee-Anne. Scott also realises that managing his mental health is important. Catching up with mates and other farmers to talk about farming operations and life in general is a good way of staying on top of it. Scott says he took courage from other farmers discussing their mental health journeys in previous Gippsland Jersey calendars, and he hopes others will too.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Melbourne Cup	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			



*Siahn and Kev Le Brocq - Bravington*

**DECEMBER**



# Siahn and Kev Le Brocq – Bravington

**‘Don’t be a dickhead, go talk to your doctor if something doesn’t feel right. Just bite your pride.’**

Siahn grew up 2km down the road from the farm she is currently share-farming with her husband, Kev, and her grandparents. The business is called Oak Jerseys and Siahn says this name encompasses everything special to her, as on the farm, a 120 year old oak tree grows in all its majesty. Over the years this tree has become a part of her story in more ways than Siahn could have imagined.

Siahn remembers spending every chance she could at Oak Jereys. Her nan, someone that she has always looked up to for her capabilities and resilience, would spend hours playing with her under the oak tree as a child and it’s where she holds some of her fondest memories. Her and Kev would later go on to marry underneath its branches. Even when Siahn ventured off to university, she would dream of the farming life and of how the oak tree just felt like home. After two years she decided to leave the student life behind and go back to the farm.

It was during her second pregnancy, and after a series of challenging events, that Siahn felt herself begin to spiral into mental illness. Despite being a mental health advocate with her friends, she ignored her own growing inner turmoil. Looking back now, she realises she was likely suffering with post-natal depression. Then, during her third pregnancy, she was confronted with one tragic event after the other in her personal life which lead to peri-natal anxiety and a deep ache in her heart. She began to give up on living. She was tired of being the one who always stayed strong for others. What stopped her from following through with her dire plans that day? She looked up from the dairy pit and through an opening spotted the old oak tree. It reminded her of all the things she had loved growing up, all the memories she had made along the way. She just couldn’t imagine not seeing it’s grandeur ever again. After a long and arduous battle with her mental health over many years, she finally admitted to herself that it was time to call her doctor and ask for help.

Siahn is excited to be part of this mental health awareness calendar as she recalls a story from the first edition regarding one of the farmer’s wives suffering with postnatal depression and anxiety. It helped her realise she wasn’t the only one. She hopes her story will help others also, to know they’re not alone and to seek help when they need it.

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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20 Term 4 Ends	21	22	23	24
25 Christmas Day	26 Boxing Day	27	28	29	30	31



# JANUARY

2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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29	30	31				

**Gippsland Jersey has four wonderful farming families that supply premium milk to our factory. We appreciate that they are on this journey with us and respect and value peoples (and their own) mental health. Without these hard-working farmers, there'd be no milk!**

Another year has ticked over and I'm struggling to find the right words to summarise 2021. Personally, I've probably spent more days in bed crying than I'm willing to admit. I've tried to look after myself as best I can and use all the tools in my toolkit (because I'm an advocate for better mental health right?). I've been to see various doctors, a psychologist, kinesiologist, along with exercising, eating better and surrounding myself with good people. I'll admit I'm not the best homeschool teacher.

This calendar project is such a special part of my work life and merges into my personal life too. It provides me with the self indulgent experience of getting to know 12 more gippsland dairy farmers and visit their farms. Sometimes we sit at the kitchen table and drink cups of tea, other times we drive over the paddocks in the Ute and admire the farm vistas. Each farmer and their story fills my heart. There's been special moments shared and I hope this experience is as indulgent for the farmer as it is for me.

Originally my reason for creating this calendar was in honour of my dad who took his life in 2016 due to ill mental health. He needed his type of people to help him through, however, unfortunately five years ago nobody was speaking up about their mental health. Farmers need other farmers - they speak the same language, they understand the challenges and feel comfortable amongst each other.

My father battled depression and psychosis for 3 years (possibly longer without us being aware). A strong man, with the capacity and strength of two and a heart for fighting injustice. He was an entrepreneur and a dreamer and despised the fact that being a farmer gave him no say on the price of milk. In the 80's, he decided to build a milk factory next door to his milking shed and value add to his product by churning out national, award winning, ice cream. Dad was onto things before they were trendy.

I was 33 and had just given birth to my third baby when my dad walked in my back door one Sunday afternoon and started crying. I'd never seen my dad cry or be in a state of helplessness. I still to this day, feel very sad remembering the three year battle we journeyed with him. Never could our family imagine that he would die by suicide because the pain was simply too much, even for Dad to endure. It still makes my eyes water thinking about this. Many lessons and insights were learnt during dad's battle - but none more than the significance of the kindness shown by people who showed up, cared and were present in his time of need. The best cure is in we, the people. We are designed for connection!

After losing my precious father to suicide five years ago, I was determined to create a milk brand that pays Australian dairy farmers a fair price whilst smashing the stigma of mental health. The Gippsland Jersey annual calendar began as an honour project to my late father. I created a simple calendar that is industry (dairy) and region (Gippsland) specific. There is power in storytelling because it has the

ability to not only impact lives... but possibly save them. I know my Father would have loved to have read these types of stories.

People who are experiencing mental illness can often identify themselves in the calendar stories and find a comfort in understanding that they're not alone. To realize that it is not about individual failure or the inability to cope, but knowing that the bloke down the road is also battling with the same thoughts and challenges. If this calendar can help one person or save one life, my work is done; I have honoured the life of my father. Storytelling is a powerful tool, in our nation wide journey, in removing the stigma around mental health. It breaks it down. It makes it real. Not a statistic in a magazine or newspaper, but honest and relatable people battling real struggles in our own backyards. Each year, our calendars are distributed via milk tankers to 1000 dairy farms in the Gippsland region where it is hoped that they will serve as a resource for farmers suffering mental health struggles. The calendar includes the numbers of available health services, some of which are more helpful than others. It's important for people to remember that the first person/service they speak to might not be a good fit, and to therefore keep trying different options. However, that is easier said than done. It is incredibly hard to pick up the phone and call for help. It's great that there are services out there which offer virtual support to anyone who might be struggling. I know that tractor cabins in the back paddock make for very accommodating consulting rooms.

Male farm owners and managers are dying from suicide at twice the rate of the national average of other males. Farming is recognised nationally as an industry with a high suicide risk. Social factors, a forever changing and tumultuous climate, the daily grind of farm life, increasing financial pressures and consolidation of the industry are all factors found to have had impact on farmers' mental health. All of which are not inclusive of the exacerbating factors on mental ill-health such as geographic isolation, the limited availability of local help services and practicality of even being able to leave the farm to seek help.

This calendar project is a special and personal tribute to my journey. I have to thank my business partner Steve Ronalds for allowing me to indulge myself in the annual creation. For me it's an opportunity to reflect and heal. I am incredibly honoured that so many Gippsland farmers have felt they can share and open their hearts and homes and trust me to tell their stories. It is incidental counselling both ways and I feel very privileged to have this opportunity of journeying through life with these incredibly resilient farmers who show up everyday to produce food for our nation. There are about three dozen stories that have been told in the Gippsland Jersey calendar. After the calendar was launched on my family farm in Lakes Entrance (and where the Gippsland Jersey milk processing factory is situated), we have continued to add each new farmer to our 'Calendar Crew' Facebook messenger group. It's like adding new cows to the herd - a

bit awkward for a while until everyone understands it's a safe space to share lowlights and highlights. Often there is very early morning banter, sharing of sunrise photos, bogged tractors and situations that only dairy farmers can relate to. Farmers in the group talk about the weather, ask each other for cow health advice, the sharing of mental health tips ... and sometimes the opening up of hearts - some admitting to crying their eyes out because of a current situation. These special and honourable farmers find the courage to reach out and unwaveringly have each other's backs - a beautiful thing to witness amongst the natural disasters and prevailing mental health challenges we face. A Channel 10 TV series called 'Beyond the Fire', featured the calendar and showed first hand how it's more than just a calendar, it's a connection tool. One that is genuinely making the Gippsland farming community feel more connected.

There's no handbook on how we should reach out for help, or reach out to help others. The best way is to trust your gut and to take action; to start somewhere, anywhere! The fires and drought were, and remain, a stark reminder of what it was and is to be Australian. These stories have shown the resourcefulness and resilience of our nation and our local farmers. They have also shown how in tough times Australians come together as a community ... and it's a beautiful thing. People need people! And to all our farmers out there - we need you.

**Sallie Jones**  
Co-founder  
Gippsland Jersey





The communities of Gippsland have been through it all with droughts, bushfires, and COVID-19. The courage of the farmers who have shared their stories in the 2022 Lay of the Land Calendar is indicative of the strength and resilience that resonates across all communities in Gippsland. The leadership shown through their stories, in reaching out for help, talking to a mate, and checking in on a

neighbour are examples of the connectedness we share as a community and a reminder for us all to be aware of our own mental health and wellbeing and the mental health and wellbeing of those around us.

The Connect Well East Gippsland and Wellington Partnership is supporting communities during these difficult times. We are doing this with a focus on improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes through counselling, resources, information, training, and connectedness. We know that support that comes from the grass roots is powerful, and Connect Well East Gippsland and Wellington is focused on working together to help those communities still reeling from the impacts of drought and bushfires.

We also know we have a better chance of improving access to mental health and wellbeing supports and resources, especially for those who have experienced the trauma of natural disaster, when we work together. For more information about Connect Well East Gippsland and Wellington, visit [www.connect-well.com.au](http://www.connect-well.com.au) and share your story, your journey on the Connect Well website.

Congratulations and thank you to all those who participated in the development of this calendar.

**Anne- Maree Kaser**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Gippsland Lakes Complete Health



I was asked recently where and what Gippsland Jersey would look like in five years, the thing I blurted out was our brand pillars (a fair price to farmers, suicide prevention in rural areas, and kindness). We aren't budging, this isn't a fad, it's not marketing spin. Personally the conviction is growing more and more. Yes farmers have had some mojo given back with some better pricing for the product they make. Even seasons have been favourable now all throughout Gippsland (perhaps too favourable!). But the mental challenges are still at the front. Scars are deep. Overdrafts are still relevant. Farmers exiting the dairy industry is still happening. Covid, floods, extreme weather, all still hit farmers between the eyes. We won't be changing the narrative and mental health and it's demons are still as relevant five years after GJ started!

**Steve Ronalds**  
Co-founder  
Gippsland Jersey



Hi, I'm Sheree.

I've helped pen the stories of the amazing farmers who have come forward to share their lives in the Gippsland Jersey, and collaborating partners, calendar over the past four years. When Sallie first asked me to be part of a mental health calendar project I couldn't wait to jump on board and be involved. Gippsland Jersey is absolutely breaking ground in this area and I couldn't be more thrilled!

I work full time as a therapist through my business To The Heart Family Counselling through The Warragul Wellness Centre and have a passion for mental health awareness. I also have a real love for farming, it runs in my blood.

What a privilege it's been to meet the farmers on this calendar journey, to hear their stories of resilience, pain and overcoming. To cry with them, to laugh with them, to encourage them and to see the ways in which they have helped others in their communities.

When we talk about difficult times, and bring them into the light, we make it more acceptable to open up about mental health and aid in crushing stigmas associated with these conversations. I couldn't be more proud of the farmers involved in this project, paving the way for future generations.

**Sheree Braden**  
Bachelor in Counselling  
& currently completing  
a Masters Degree  
in Psychotherapy.



Warragul Wellness  
Centre



**Key contacts**

**Emergency  
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**Crisis  
Lifeline - 13 11 14**

**Your GP**

**Local Health Service**

