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LAST month the heading was "where is the industry heading", to figure out where we are heading lets have a quick look at where we sit globally.

The NZ dairy industry is interesting, the graph below is supplied from the new department of primary industries.

On one end we are a major player, on the other end we are not.

Where we don't do so well is production per cow, and that figures, for years we been adding land and cows and followed the same production (capital gain) growth model, very few farmers have been looking at actual efficiencies, however it's the efficiencies which drive production per cow, and ultimately how we need to compete on the world stage. I know some may argue its production per hectare, but is that relevant at all? You can only grow so much /ha and if you were to feed it all through the mouth and not lose 30 per cent of it in the process you can only produce so much Ms/cow/ ha, so in my view that measure only applies if you only feed grass and nothing else.

Any additionally produced milk must come from other sources, which should and

Where do we stand in the world?

cannot be attributed to the lands production capabilities. So if you grow production per cow you need to be efficient, use every blade of grass, use every kernel of grain or whatever other feed you grow or buy. It needs to get "through the mouth" to the milk veins, not in the mud, or in keeping cows warm, or cool or just "happy".

Genetically a cow can eat well over 8 ton of Dm, and if converted at 11Kg Dm/KgMs would equate to well over 700 Kg Ms the average in NZ is 365Kg Ms. You see we have some way to go! And lets not call it high input farming, its called efficient farming! And with that we can also manage the nutrients, collect them where ever we can and then redistribute them when the grass is growing and when the ground conditions are right.

An eight-year-old cow is the most efficient and profit producing cow, paid off all her debts and learned how to survive, yet we see very few eight-year-old cows. At a replacement rate of 23-25 per cent the average cow is only just four years of age. It cost

you \$2000 plus to raise her... so how can you make money from that ratio? (assuming there is no capital gain)

If efficiencies would drive the business a good target would be to raise the average age by say two years to start with. This with an increase in feed utilization and nutrient collection and redistribution means we could easily double the nations output per cow and not even need any more land. Some would call this the road to sustainability. I call it common sense..

• Comments or feedback to harmen-heesen@me.com or to the editor

