

**De Heus On-farm Challenge** Author: Mark Willment (Technical Advisor: Dairy)

The De Heus On-farm Challenge held in KwaZulu-Natal again produced some outstanding animals and really showed the class of some of the animals to be found on the farms in KwaZulu-Natal.

Over the week 25 farms were visited and farmers showed their best animals. However, they also showed much more. Many farmers have been through and are still experiencing difficult times because of the drought. They have been under tremendous strain and have had to make difficult decisions to keep their businesses operating.

The dairy farmers in KwaZulu-Natal and around the country have shown an incredible perseverance and passion for farming. Their skills as farmers were evident in the dairy cows many of us were lucky to see during the week. Cows were in good condition, showing just how well these farmers had handled the drought and some top quality animals were presented to the judges.

The cows in the older classes showed their style with almost all farmers presenting in the class 10 years and older. This year the champion of the competition was a 13 year old cow presented by the Shewan family. With so many old cows being presented, conversation soon turned to the value of these cows, especially during tough times.

These gracious old cows have been working tirelessly and sometimes unnoticed on farms for more than 10 years with some on their 11th lactation and looking as if they have even more to give.

If we take a moment and think that some of these cows have produced 80 000 - 100 000 litres of milk during their lifetimes, we realise the economic contribution to the farmer, the staff, Agriculture businesses and the millions of people who enjoy dairy products. The next time you see a milk tanker on the road give it a thought that one of these 10-year-old cows could fill 4 tankers during her lifetime!

So how do we breed and manage cows so they can reach their potential? I believe it is a combination of good breeding goals, a well-managed feed program and good animal health. Dairy farmers now have access to genetics from around the world and should be given the productive life value consideration and concentrate on management traits to breed towards longer lasting cows.

During the week it was a privilege to spend time with like-minded people who are willing to share their ideas and help their fellow farmers during difficult times. It gave many farmers the opportunity to learn, refocus management systems and breeding ideas, but most of all it gave everyone time to appreciate all that these beautiful Holstein cows give us.





**2-3 Year Old**  
Denleigh Farm: Stubbs  
Sire: Nokia



**3-4 Year Old**  
Struan Farm: Willment /  
Robertson; Sire: Taranaki



**4-6 Year Old**  
Keate Farm: Shewan  
Sire: Nokia



**6-10 Year Old**  
Keate Farm: Shewan  
Sire: Sabi



**10+ Year Old**  
Keate Farm: Shewan  
Sire: Alvin



**Progeny Group**  
Burnview Farm: Stokes  
Sire: Nokia