



DAVE'S DAIRY

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We have had rain, but not enough!

I suppose I ought to have had more sense than to sound off last week about the desirability of Clarkson arranging some rain before long. I had hardly posted the diary to the Editor when it started to rain, and, of course, we only had the shed half full (this was Harold's fault). So the rain has really messed up the shearing.

This means when the banker rings up anxiously each night to see how many bales we've got I have to tell him we haven't got any at all. This is inclined to upset him.

The 80 points of rain that we had wasn't enough. It was enough to work up another paddock of grass ground for oats and it was also enough to keep alive the grass and clover that had germinated with the February rains. And I must admit I was surprised to find how much of this had struggled through.

Just when I was getting a bit despondent about other people who had more than 80 points, blow me down if we didn't get another 16 points over the weekend, and this altered the complexion of things again.

Of course it stopped shearing as we hadn't expected the rain (nor had the forecaster).

So that means shearing has been held up yet again.

But it has kept the ground nice and wet and it does look as if perhaps the clover and the grass are really going to get away.

Of course, this will all depend on what the next four weeks hold.

I have known it to be very hot at the end of March and up to the middle of April, and if we get a hot, dry time our position would be far worse for having had this rain.

But, all the same, I can't help feeling optimistic that we have had enough to give us a reasonable start, and if we have really had this in March, it is a credit to all concerned (including Clarkson).

Of course, he takes all the credit for it, although he is rather more hesitant to accept responsibility when it doesn't rain.

We are feeding the sheep with silage and oats. Whether this is wise is impossible to tell at this stage. If the season is going to keep going, it is the right thing to do. But if it comes out dry and hot and the grass dries then we will wish we hadn't, because we will need every little bit we have got to see us into the winter.

Clarkson tells me that Canberra is still all worked up about the desirability of constructing big concrete dams here, there and everywhere to do away with drought.

This is just like Members of Parliament — they wait until droughts come before they worry about them and then make long eloquent speeches about building dams when there is no water to store.

But the fundamental problem with all this dam construction idea is, who is going to pay for the construction of the dams? I suppose there are only two groups of people who can do this, either men who use the water or the taxpayer.

Although it is not always admitted, in most cases in Australia, the cost of actually storing the water is paid for by the taxpayer for the simple reason that if the irrigator had to pay for it it would cost him so much he wouldn't be able to afford to use the water.

So the taxpayer usually ends up paying for the construction of the dams and for the interest on the money, although the irrigator usually pays for the cost of delivering the water from the dam to the farm, although here again the taxpayer usually pays for the construction of the main canals.

Clarkson says that the argument for why the taxpayer should do this falls into two parts; one is, that no one else can afford to do it, and the second is that the Government gets increased taxation money back because of the profitable farming that is being carried on by the irrigation farmers.¹

This sounds pretty logical, too, I suppose, although we have got to admit that in a lot of cases the irrigation farmers claim that they are losing money steadily and so make no profit to pay taxes on. Whether this is so or not, I suppose the real problem is whether this is the right way to use the taxpayers' money.

Why one particular branch of the farming community should be singled out for assistance in this way is something I have never been able to understand. And I have had to tell Clarkson this quite sharply.

It would probably be different, of course, if I was an irrigation farmer. But as I'm a dryland farmer, with the banker yapping at my heels, I just never can see why I, as a taxpayer, should, out of the kindness of my heart, be obliged to deliver water to my fellow irrigation farmers for much less than cost.