



FARM Cheque – A Farm Business Management System for Graziers

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by Dirk Godyn* and Anne Muir***

INTRODUCTION:

FARM Cheque is the farm monitoring and management consultancy service operated by NSW Agriculture & Fisheries. Started in 1987 it is rapidly gaining acceptance among farmers as the business back-up they need. It currently has 200 members and the system is expected to expand to 400 by 1991. Potential membership in New South Wales is currently estimated between 1,500 to 2,000 members.

HOW DOES IT WORK:

At the heart of FARM Cheque are laptop computers, custom designed farm business management software and farm secretaries who assist with storing key information on computer. The laptop computers mean that the technologies can be taken on-farm. Software was developed jointly by AgData, Toowoomba and NSW Agriculture & Fisheries. Farmer and advisory comments on improvements to the program were incorporated in the new 1990 FARM Cheque computer program.

The farm secretary can make record keeping easy. A feature of FARM Cheque is that farmers are encouraged to do as little or as much of the record keeping as they desire. Some farmers may want to leave all record keeping to the farm secretary, who operates at competitive rates. Others may want to be trained in due time to do their own record keeping on computer. Many take a half-way position and keep a cashbook themselves, which is entered by the secretary on computer. Training in cashbook procedures is provided to all farmers as soon as they become members of FARM Cheque. This ensures that farmers understand the way the information is entered on computers and the subsequent reports.

The information put on computer is the same information kept by farmers for taxation purposes plus relevant physical information such as crop yields, wool production, lambing percentages etc. Once information is stored on the microcomputer, the same information is used to print taxation/financial management reports, farm management reports and comparative analysis reports. Each of the FARM Cheque groups is operated on a district basis, making the comparative analysis relevant because it will compare farmers in a similar climatic regime'. Confidentiality is assured because electronic records are only kept by the private farm secretary and her employing farmer. When FARM Cheque members want technical advice or banking or taxation advice, they can bring their computer disks or FARM Cheque reports with them to the advisory officer, banker or accountant as appropriate. The program has also good forward planning features.

WHAT'S THE COST?

FARM Cheque is non-profit making and fees are nominal. Registration, \$275, covers membership, all computerised stationery, and up to four hours free time for the FARM Cheque secretary to visit your property and set up a computer cashbook system. In year two – and subsequent years – the subscription reduces to \$175. Further farm secretary costs are at the current rate charged by your farm secretary.

For further information, write or 'phone the State FARM Cheque Co-ordinator, P.O. Box 389, Goulburn NSW 2580, 'phone (048) 230 616.

**Special Economist (FARM Cheque), ** State FARM Cheque Co-ordinator, NSW Agriculture & Fisheries.*