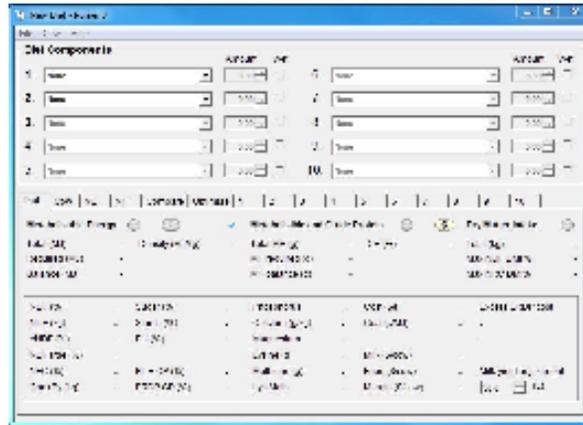




Rumen8 – a user-friendly computer program for formulating diets for dairy cows

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Feeding dairy cows is a major cost to WA dairy farmers. Management decisions are often made based on farmer experience or intuition or are based on advice from nutritionists or veterinarians. Over the years, WA dairy farmers have been offered a variety of dairy cow nutrition courses by various service providers to better understand the technical concepts around feeding of dairy cows. What these courses lack, however, is an easy to use tool to apply this knowledge on a day to day basis. This is where Rumen8 comes in, a computer program for formulating diets for dairy cows.

Rumen8 was developed by the DAFWA dairy team for their use at Vasse Research Center and after interest by others it was made available to the industry. It is a tool for dairy farmers and nutritionists to explore diets and make adjustments according to production and estimates of pasture intake. The program has been developed specifically to be user-friendly. In an evaluation of dairy nutrition models by Dairy Australia in 2009, Rumen8 received the highest rating of all 11 models for its ease of use, and also scored well for technical ability. What's more, it is available for free to all WA dairy farmers.

Rumen8 is technically sound as it is based on published 'feed standards' (AFRC 1993). It estimates requirements for feed intake and metabolisable energy and protein (ME and MP) at any level of dairy cow production. The model uses very visual 'traffic lights' to indicate when feed requirements are (or are not) met. It shows the composition of any particular diet, including starch and fibre content. It also calculates a 'margin of milk income over feed cost' for formulated diets, expressed as \$/cow/day.

A small number of WA dairy farmers with a special interest in dairy cow nutrition have been trialling Rumen8 this year. While the program is easy to use, proper use of Rumen8 does require some training. The DAFWA dairy team will therefore deliver courses for interested farmers in the use of Rumen8 between now and the end of 2014. This activity forms part of phase 2 of the Flexible Feeding Systems project.

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