

Introducing Gilles Clarisse



Gilles can be contacted via our Yendon Office on 03 5341 6100.

Meridian Agriculture is delighted to introduce Gilles Clarisse to our clients and industry as a Recruitment Advisor. Based at our Yendon office, Gilles has been with Meridian since September 2018 and has been working with clients on their staffing needs. Into the future, Gilles will be focused on the operations and development of our recruiting services, working both independent and with the support of Ben Reeve who has operated the recruitment service for the last 15 years. Gilles has brought a fresh approach to the company and together with Ben are looking to develop new approaches to ensuring we attract the best candidates for our clients.

Gilles brings significant experience working in recruitment and people management to Meridian Ag and has spent a few months understanding both the Meridian business and recruiting for the agricultural industry. If you are looking for an employee, Gilles can be contacted on 03 5341 6100 or via gclarisse@meridan-ag.com.au

Gilles, welcome to Meridian. Tell us about what you've been doing before joining the company.

I spent a little over 14 years working with a Ballarat based family business Wilsons Fruit & Vegetables, where I was a Store Manager for my last four years in the company. My primary focus in the business included recruitment and training as well as business, people and performance management.

Why did you choose to join Meridian Ag?

I have always wanted to work in the Recruitment and HR space and when the opportunity presented itself I felt that Meridian was the right career move. Although my agricultural knowledge was minimal prior to starting, Meridian has allowed me to build on my knowledge and to further develop my transferable skills attained from my previous work experience.

You've been involved with recruiting staff for a long time now, what do you see as the important factors when recruiting?

For me it would be:

Building and maintaining relationships; keeping an open mind; with all things considered act fast or miss an opportunity.

In your short time working in agriculture, what do you like about the industry?

There is quite a lot to learn about the industry and people are all too happy to support and facilitate that.

Tell us about your family and three values that are important in your family life?

My wife Kara and I have two beautiful but naughty children (Giselle, 6 going on 16; Bastian, 4 going on 14). Spend lots of time together, always be encouraging and be honest with each other as much as possible.

What is the most important lesson you've learnt in life?

Life has me taught that that you can reach the lowest point in your life and still always come out the other side, with unwavering resilience and patience.

What is your favourite holiday destination?

My favourite holiday destination is Mauritius, I have only been back once since moving from there in the early 80's. My wife and I went on a holiday there in 2011, had a great time and would definitely go back (but not until the kids are older).

How do you spend your time outside of work?

I try to spend it to the fullest with a balance of family time, gym, running, basketball, renovating the house and a healthy dose of social gatherings.

Addressing Australia's Hardest to fill Job Roles



Seek.com recently released a report outlining "Australia's top 20 hardest to fill roles". The findings are based on the number of applications received per role, where roles that received the least amount of applications were deemed harder to fill. The reduced amount of applications increases the difficulty for recruiters and hiring managers. The report suggests that 19 of those 20 hardest to fill roles are within the legal (internal staff rather than outsourcing expertise) and healthcare/medical sectors.

The roles mentioned could be deemed as specialised, with positions such as "Taxation Law" and "Nursing – Paediatric and PICU", and an average salary of \$101,000 across all roles. Many of these roles also require specific qualifications. Yet when seeing the report heading, my thoughts immediately

went to agriculture and whether roles within the sector would, or should, make the list. Agriculture has been facing a severe shortage of staff for many years now, even with short term visa options available to businesses.

Consideration must be placed on the quality of candidates rather than numbers received. Seek.com is but one of a number of tools used to attract candidates for agricultural roles, and the report potentially doesn't represent every industry sector best. However, the report provides insight as to how the legal and healthcare industries are addressing the issues faced in attracting staff, which provides universal guidance for all industries, including agriculture.

Firstly, businesses are placing high value on understanding the motivations of candidates and addressing these through changes to working conditions. Law, traditionally considered highly inflexible in nature, has understood the need to offer flexibility and has moved to providing independent short term contract type arrangements enabling the workforce to work, when required, filling immediate needs. This new model, referred to as the 'Gig Economy' model offers greater opportunity for businesses to get the right staff at the right moment, yet requires businesses to plan and manage resources well, offering clear tasks, guidelines and timelines.

Agricultural production roles also face similar challenges with livestock interaction and management decisions required daily. While traditional roles offer some flexibility, there could be a need to explore employment structures and human resources differently, with specialised contractors servicing production systems as required into the future.

Secondly, both the legal and healthcare industries are placing considerable time and resources into career development for employees, consistently providing value through educational programs, training resources and development opportunities. These activities motivate staff, assist in creating loyalty and define meaning in the work undertaken. Encouraging and including all staff in group activities, formal education opportunities and specialised training courses that increase skill sets are all vital components for driving motivation, job satisfaction and loyalty. This is the same for agriculture. We've previously heard employers question the value of spending time and money training others just for them to leave. We believe it's better to have them leave more skilled, than to have them stay, and not be properly equipped for the role.

As a company, we talk with hundreds of job seekers every year and can confirm that money is rarely the reason people leave jobs. It may be a factor (and is often over emphasised), but is never the top reason. Offering people the right money is important, but more emphasis needs to be placed on understanding the motivation and satisfaction levels of the employees as well as valuing them enough to invest in their skills and qualifications.

Meridian Ag work with employers to create performance plans, review performance management systems and act as an external HR Manager for businesses. To discuss how this service could be integrated into your business and to understand your employees motivation and satisfaction levels call 03 5341 6100.

Article by Ben Reeve

Quick Winter Feed

With the dry and hot months still upon us, some of us are considering the fastest way to grow winter feed to displace high supplementary feeding regimes, when the break finally arrives. There are many options for re-sowing quick winter feed which all have their advantages depending on the timing of the break (i.e. oats, forage ryecorn, barley, short term ryegrasses (annual and/or Italian), brassica's such as rape or leafy-turnips etc. Although given the many variables – this is a discussion for another day!

If you already sow or are considering sowing annual ryegrass for quick winter feed, initial time and rate of sowing experiments using annual ryegrass showed that timing is critical. A general trend found that for every two week delay (following the autumn break) it can cost an operation around 2,000 kg dry matter (DM). Furthermore, an extra 10 kg of seed can produce up to an extra 500 or 1,000 kg DM. Subsequent analysis by Harmer et al. (2012) placed some economics around these field experiments and used a marginal cost analysis to determine optimal annual ryegrass sowing rates.

Replicated field trials in western Victoria demonstrated that annual ryegrass early season growth rates are dependent on sowing rate, facing a decreasing marginal return (kg DM yield/kg seed) as sowing rates increase. Due to the diminishing marginal return (just like fertiliser inputs), marginal cost analysis is an economically rational tool to make sowing rate decisions. The authors demonstrated that depending on substitute feed cost (i.e. displacing oats, barley, hay etc.), further profits can be captured by increasing sowing rates of annual ryegrass. Given the current situation with the high cost of feed supplements (grain, hay etc.), the gains that can be captured here may have significant results in regards to profit, or savings on feed inputs.

For further information – please download the ***Marginal cost analysis to determine optimal annual ryegrass sowing rates*** paper.

For help in deciding which quick winter feed best suits your farming system call Meridian on 03 5341 6100 to discuss options or arrange an advisor visit.



Article by James Sewell

Seasonal Issues

Pasture Management

Depending on where you are farming the spring was very different, which has affected how well newly sown pastures have established. That said, any new perennial pastures which were sown in 2018 are now best spelled once the perennial

grass component is down to a height of 3-5cm, retaining some length should help these grasses persist. Once the autumn break arrives, allow these pastures to achieve 2-3 new leaves before grazing and take them into winter with at least 1200-1400kg of cover.

For perennial ryegrass pastures and cocksfoot pastures in particular, monitor cricket populations and control prior to them doing damage to the crowns of these plants. Being proactive on the cricket front will help ensure a dense second year pasture versus a fairly thin one. Ensuring good strong tiller development in the second year of a pastures life as this is critical to long term success.

Protecting the Investment of a New Pasture

To safeguard a strong legume component in new pastures it will be beneficial to monitor for Red Legged Earthmites post the autumn break ensuring they don't affect seedling germination. When introducing a new sub clover we often sow 10kg of seed/ha but over a couple of years we need reserves in the ground to build to 300-600kg/ha of seed over time. Ensuring the second year pasture has every opportunity to get as many sub-cover plants to survive is critical.

If you are unsure about how to manage your significant investment in new pastures please give one of our agronomic consultants a call.

Water Conservation

In many areas water supply is a critical issue. As we're waiting for the autumn break, WaterGuard™ by Aquatain is a cost effective solution to reducing evaporation loss from dams. WaterGuard™ provides a thin silicone layer across the top of the dam's surface to reduce evaporation rate and is safe for stock and marine life. This product can be found at most rural stores and costs approximately \$420/ 20L – which may look like a hefty price tag. However, only 50-70 mL/ 100m2 of water surface is required for the initial treatment and 10 mL/ 100m2 top up is required every fortnight during the hot season.

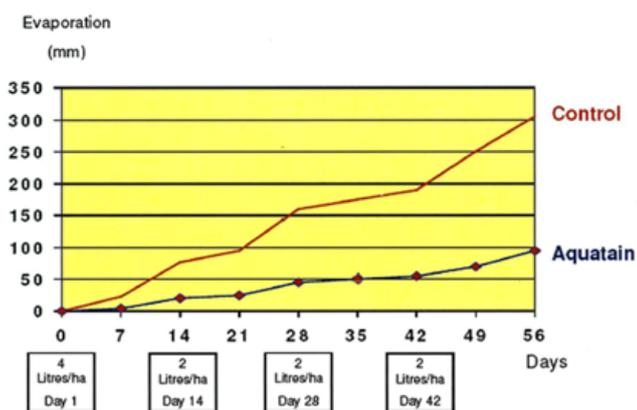


Figure 1 – Evaporation over time

Management of Growing Stock

The most vulnerable classes of livestock are young and growing sheep and cattle. Pastures as a whole (apart from the odd Lucerne paddock) are now below 60% digestibility. This, along with highly variable protein content (according to recently conducted Feedtests), result in cases where these animal classes will need some level of supplementary feeding. Depending on the weight gain required, they will need significantly different supplementation. Weaner lambs under 25kg live weight are at most risk, having a huge requirement for protein (12- 14%) and energy (10MJ/kg) as they are young growing animals. Our livestock consultants can assist with making supplement choices working through Grazfeed.

Pink Eye

In some regions, this summer has seen huge out breaks of pinkeye, in both lambs and young weaner cattle. Having these stock in paddocks with good ground cover to reduce dust exposure as well as watering down yards prior to handling stock in the yards will help.

Pilligard™ by Coopers for cattle has provided some help, as has treating these animals with a fly repellent, helping to reduce the spread of bacterial infection. In some areas the spread of pink eye has been very swift even when treated and after investigation by Coopers Animal Health, it has been discovered these are new strains unfortunately not covered by the vaccine. Early intervention by controlling the first few cases will also help reduce the spread.

Article by Andrew Speirs

Meridian Ag Team

The Meridian Ag team met together in March to view some pasture trial sites, understand potential long term weather forecasts and update each other on projects and work happening across the company.



The Meridian Ag team: (left to right) Ben Reeve, Kris Povey, James Whale, James Sewell, Paul Blackshaw, Andrew Speirs, Angela Inkester, Mike Stephens, Jim Shovelton, Alistair Cameron, Jennifer McKay, Gilles Clarisse, Jade Chan. (Missing: Candice Thompson).

Yendon

a 96 Harbours Road,
Yendon, VIC 3352
p 03 5341 6100 | f 03 5341 7630
e info@meridian-ag.com.au

Casterton

a PO Box 226, 32 Henty Street,
Casterton, VIC 3311
p 03 5581 2826 | f 03 5581 2746
e info@meridian-ag.com.au