

Untangling the web

By SALLY WHITE

WHEN Tim Gentle hoses down the dairy post-milking, his mind is buzzing with plans.

In between milking twice a day, the Lancaster farmer has put his multi-media skills to use, developing websites for businesses in rural and regional areas.

So successful has it been that today will see the launch of The Web Experts – a new business run by him and wife Kylie that will cater primarily to small-to-medium businesses in country areas.

It's a specialist market – “people like someone who can speak their language and know the difference between a Holstein and a Jersey” – but one he said few had tapped into.

The Gentles have set the sights on finishing 50 websites by June and are well on their way, with 37 already to their name including that for Mulbryn Poll Hereford stud – the stud market being one they believe has a lot of potential for further website development.

“People now want to see before they buy – and before they make the trip to a stud or sale,” Mr Gentle said.

“Through the internet breeders can now appeal to a mass market – it opens them up to a national and international audience in real time.”

He said farming and community groups were yet to realise the full potential of the internet in terms of being able to host online meetings and overcoming their biggest challenge – distance.

It's a concept the Young Agribusiness Professionals group – of which he's a member – is now seriously exploring.

For Mr Gentle, it's been a whirlwind two years since he received a call from his father asking if he wanted to return to the family's Lancaster-based dairy farm.

At the time he was working a corporate job in London, following an 18-month stint jackarooing on Todmorden Station on the Oodnadatta Track in north-west South Australia.

He's now done two seasons on the farm (one on the family farm and one at nearby Petabern Dairy) and is now working on adding a diploma in agriculture through Dookie to his Masters in Multi-Media. On top of this he's running a series of seminars across regional Victoria helping small businesses develop a website plan. He said the \$35 seminars, co-ordinated by local councils, were designed to help small businesses develop a website plan that they could then take to a website developer or use to build their own site.

Long-term, he hopes to continue combining his website design business with farming although the intensive nature of dairying may mean a switch in enterprise.

■ Visit www.thewebexperts.net.au



YAPs leaping forward

FOR Tim Gentle, the Young Agribusiness Professionals (YAPs) group has not only allowed him to tap into a group of people just as excited about agriculture as him but one that's encouraged him to put his non-farming skills to use.

He's designed the group's logo and letterhead and developed its website which will be launched at YAPs first conference to be held at the All Seasons Hotel at Bendigo on February 22 and 23.

“Now I'm surrounded by this group of very dynamic and inspiring young farmers from all industries – and I've been able to use my own marketing and IT skills to help get our message across.”

Fellow YAPs committee member Andrew Broad said the Bendigo conference was designed to alert young people to the opportunities that existed in agriculture and of the resources available to assist with a career in the farming sector.

Speakers will include WA-based communications expert Esther Price and Neale Daniher, the former coach of Melbourne in the AFL.

The forum starts on Friday night with a casual BBQ at the resort's pool, before a series of speakers, workshops and panel sessions on agriculture-related themes on the Saturday.

The event will culminate with a black-tie ball on the Saturday night where ex-North Melbourne football star and master lamb salesman Sam Kekovich will serve as MC.

“It's going to be a mix of the professional and social – we're hoping to encourage young farmers and people in agribusiness along to do a bit of networking,” Mr Broad said.

“Along with that, we're hoping to promote the VFF – it plays a crucial role, but if there is not some generational change in the next 20 years it will cease to exist.”

“We want to expose people to the organisation.”

The cost is \$50 for VFF members and \$70 for non-VFF members.

Lancaster farmer and YAPs member Tim Gentle, Lancaster, is pictured with Friesian steer Fischer.