

## LAMENESS - PREVENTION AND CONTROL

The first step is to confirm with your vet what the conditions actually are. Control measures must be effectively targeted and cannot be general.

### ENVIRONMENT

Laminitis related- Sole ulcer, white line disease, under run sole, slurry heel

The primary factor is the housing environment. Cows should spend about 12-14 hours daily lying down. The incidence of lameness increases when cows spend excessive periods standing.

Excessive standing influences the incidence of lameness by exposing the weight bearing surfaces to excessive erosion. It may also increase joint problems, resulting in compensatory gaits that alter the normal hoof wear pattern.

Poor cubicles are a major cause. Are there 10% more cubicles than cows? Passageways should be wide and have no blind ends. What about the beds? Could you drop to your knees from a standing position without pain? Are they wide and long enough? Cows should be lying in the cubicles, not standing with their back feet in the passageway. No vertical partitions and use a brisket bar, not head rails. Concrete should have no holes, cracks or worn surfaces. Inadequate exercise, which can occur from overcrowding, may result in poor blood flow to the foot and reduce tissue health.

Soft feet can mean problems, so keep slurry clear. The normal hoof contains approximately 15% moisture, but this may double if the feet are in continually wet conditions.

How the animal is reared has an impact on future foot problems. A lot of starchy feeds, such as barley, fed with poor quality forage can be risky. Minimise fluctuations in the rumen, so start feeding concentrates at least 2 weeks prior to calving and do not feed large single meals of high starch compounds at milking time.

Although cereals are a cheap feed, be careful what is fed with them. Some potential troublemakers are: wet acid grass silage; short chop grass silage; high levels of maize silage, particularly if it is green and high starch; waste bread; potatoes; fodder beet and high starch compounds.

Try introducing more fibrous feeds to counteract the fast fermenting products. Yeast and rumen buffers help raise the rumen pH, as do High Digestible Fibre compounds and should be considered.

Footbath the cows through a mixture of 1% formalin at 4 consecutive milkings per week. The footbath must be after the exit of the parlour. Formalin remains active if the liquid still smells and should be disposed of into the slurry lagoon where it is biodegraded. It is not carcinogenic.

### DIGITAL DERMATITIS

Individually treat with antibiotic violet sprays and also to packing with copper sulphate crystals and bandaging.

Footbath with soluble antibiotics - but feet must be clean. The herd must go through a footbath of plain water for a few days, and then use the antibiotic. Three passages through the footbath can clear the herd forever. Lincospectin at 150g in 200 litres of water is commonly used but inactivated by muck. Milk contamination is zero but the footbath still needs to be after the parlour exit. The residue goes into the slurry lagoon for biodegradation. Cows must not drink from the footbath.

The reservoir of infection is the animal; so don't forget dry cows, bulls and any young stock that have been in the same buildings. Footbath all purchased animals before entry into the herd - including bulls on loan.

What about use of copper sulphate? It is not biodegradable, it is toxic and it will end up on the land.

### FOUL IN THE FOOT

This tends to occur in mini-epidemics. In the summer it is associated with wet weather. The bacterial infection, normally present in the environment, gets in when the skin between the toes is damaged and causes the typical, swollen, smelly lesion. Treated promptly, the response to injectable anti-bacterials is good. Passing the herd through 1% formalin for four consecutive milkings per week should stop any epidemic.

If you have lameness concerns, your first plan of action is to confirm with your vet what the main conditions actually are. Only then can you treat the problem. It is no use guessing and throwing money away. Once you have diagnosed the condition, look at your housing and management, including where the cows walk, even at grazing.

Lameness predisposes to other diseases and causes loss of production and fertility efficiency. It also causes great pain and discomfort and is therefore a major welfare concern. Control and prevention are very important.



