

Dairy Cow Lameness

Lameness of the foot - part of the triad of troubles that contribute most to dairy cattle disease, along with mastitis and infertility.

LAMENESS DISEASE COSTS

- The bulk of lameness costs are reduced fertility, loss of potential milk yield and increased risk of culling.
- Lameness can reduce conception rate by greater than 25% and increase the risk of ovarian follicular cysts by 2.5 times.
- Initial costs of lameness are estimated at £323 per case (Willshire and Bell 2009) - ranging from approx £75 for a simple case of DD to £2000, losing a cow with an infected ulcer as an involuntary cull.



With some herds having lameness rates of 40-50%, this is a massive drain on resources. A lame cow increases her chances of being culled six-fold. Since chronically lame cows cannot reliably be transported, many farmer clients of XLVets are now reviewing their strategy for tackling the lameness issue and we are seeing a dramatic rise in the number of individual milking and cull cows being treated.

TREATING LAME COWS

Treating lame cows is one of the most demanding health issues to be approached on farm, as it is expensive on both time and physical effort. It is therefore very important that efforts are maximised to best effect, i.e. the cost-to-benefit ratio is as low as possible.

Vets often find the best way to investigate lameness is via a holistic approach that includes a herd locomotion score to gauge the severity and extent of the problem.

Lameness Scoring

A simple system of scoring cows is to grade them from 0 through to 3, where 0 is normal and good mobility and 3 is very lame.

Once each cow has been graded, a plan of attack for treating lame cows can be implemented.

Grade 3 cows that are very lame, are often treated time and again, by farmer and vet. These cows are broken and will often never become sound. They should still be treated as effectively as possible to maximise their comfort and improve their welfare, but a realistic cap should be put on their treatment costs.

If all that is required is a quick corrective trim every 1-2 months then this can be very economical. It has been demonstrated that this can dramatically increase the cow's longevity, although she may never be eligible for live off-farm transport.

A far more effective use of resources is to tackle the **grade 2 or grade 1 cows**, to get them back down to grade 1 or 0, as they can often be cured.

Score 2 cows are not always immediately obvious so regular mobility scoring is often the most practical way of identifying them and treating them early.

One way we have approached this in the past is for the vet to tackle the 3's, and the farmer or qualified lay foot-trimmer to tackle the 2's or 1's.

FOOT TRIMMING

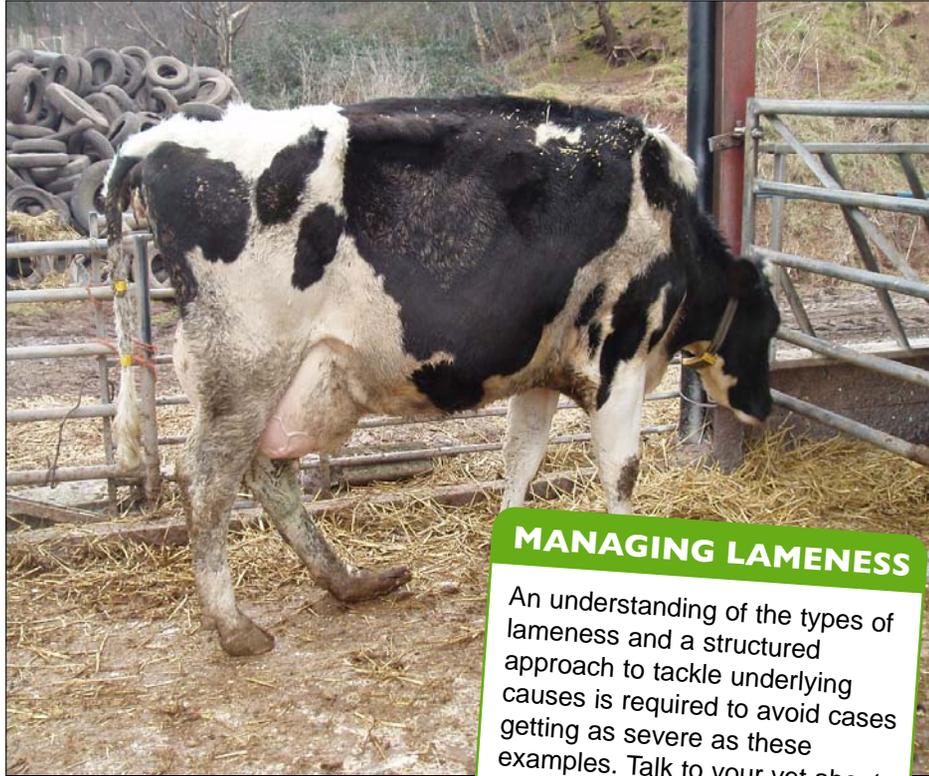
It is preferable if the foot trimmer is registered with the National Association of Cattle Foot-Trimmers (www.nacft.co.uk).

It is also important that the reasons for lameness, or any lesions found, are recorded so that progress, deterioration and control points can be identified.

Mobility Scoring Quiz

Test your knowledge at the DairyCo cow mobility quiz page. Go to www.dairyco.net (see over page).





MANAGING LAMENESS

An understanding of the types of lameness and a structured approach to tackle underlying causes is required to avoid cases getting as severe as these examples. Talk to your vet about lameness management.

Regular foot trimming

All cows should be hoof-trimmed at least once or ideally twice in lactation, even if they are sound. This way, cows are prevented as much as is possible from advancing up the lameness ladder.

Handling equipment and tools must also be of the best affordable quality as this makes a hard job more rewarding. Look at www.wopa.nl for some decent equipment ideas.



Technology

Technology has a very valuable place in the management of lameness.

Computer programs such as InterHerd which can manage information on lameness diagnoses, generate lists of cows due for trimming, and monitor effects on performance and analyse trends in lameness.

Mobile phone technology now allows us to easily transfer photos of lesions on cow feet from farmer to vet, where this would not normally justify a special visit. This could well be extended to longer video clips in the near future, possibly leading to an easy to use library of images to assess progress.

Lameness and the environment

The remainder of a holistic approach to lameness does require a thorough review of the whole of the cows' environment, with a major emphasis on housing design and cow flow management. This can be reviewed with a good cattle vet, especially through the CowSignals® approach or with a Mobility Mentor trained in the DairyCo Healthy Feet Programme.

www.dairyco.net

Find out more...

The DairyCo website is hosting **The Healthy Feet Programme**. Their website www.dairyco.net has a wide range of practical information to help dairy farmers reduce the number of lame cows on their farms.



For further information contact your local XLVets practice:

