
DAIRY NEWSLETTER

Lameness

The prevalence of lameness on different farms can vary by a wide range, anywhere from 2 to 54%. This suggests that different factors such as housing, nutrition and management all play an important role in the occurrence of lameness in dairy cattle and therefore, all must be assessed to help improve the issues.

The losses owing to lameness accounts for 27% of the total animal health cost in a dairy herd (vs. 38% for the mastitis). In New York State the annual cost of lameness was estimated to be \$90 per average cow. The majority of this loss (45%) came from discarded milk due to antibiotic treatment, followed by the cost of early culling (39.4%).

Rest is a very important aspect of a cow's day-to-day activities. The requirement for lying may be as high as 14 hours per day. **Proper stall lengths, width, lunge space, and bedding/cushion are vital for cow comfort and will result in fewer lameness cases.**

Regular hoof trimming, by a properly trained hoof trimmer, within the herd is important to compensate for hoof overgrowth and correct the weight bearing forces on a cow's foot preventing lameness by minimizing the amount of problems that are secondary to abnormal forces / poor feet. **Recording foot lesions by hoof trimmers is one of the most valuable advances in hoof health care** and can be used to demonstrate the seriousness of the problem. In many cases, the data indicate the risk factors to be investigated.

Locomotion scoring is a useful tool as part of a routine herd health evaluation or in a detailed herd lameness investigation. Cows in the early stages of sole ulcer, white line disease, and toe necrosis syndrome show only slight signs of lameness; **if these lesions can be identified in their early stages, they can be treated and preventive measures instituted.**

Footbaths have an overall role in maintaining hoof health and can be used in combination with other measures to, more specifically, control digital/interdigital dermatitis. Running a cow through a medicated footbath will improve treatment response rates.

The genetic inherited predisposition for foot disorders is not more than 15-20%, thus, **the health and condition of the cows' foot depends on the proper keeping, feeding and preventive care in over 80%.**

Lameness is a significant welfare concern when it happens on farm. If you have not had your Animal Care assessment completed by Holstein Canada yet, or if you have and your results are less than ideal, ask your herd health veterinarian to complete an assessment and seek advice on ways to improve. The payback will be worth it.