



Vet Jon Reader, from Synergy Farm Health in Dorset, reflects on the implications of lameness on cow health, welfare and productivity. And at this time of year, as cows go out to grass, cases can typically increase as their hooves are exposed to outdoor conditions.

Time to turnout and to tackle lameness

Lameness – a call for action

I am writing this in early April as we experience unusually warm weather. The grass is growing and 'turnout' has arrived. It's a chance for the cows to get the sun on their backs and they look great – until their hooves start experiencing outdoor conditions.

Cow flow can contribute to lameness problems, particularly where cows are walking on tracks and moving to and from pastures. Rough tracks and uneven ground spell problems. It is worth checking these and avoiding driving tractors along the tracks, particularly if conditions are wet.

White line disease is heavily related to cow flow in the collecting yard. Cramped conditions will lead to adverse pressure on the white line as cows have to move backwards and sideways to manoeuvre around. If more than 5% of cows have their heads up then you can be fairly sure they are short of space. About two metres per cow is recommended in the yard.

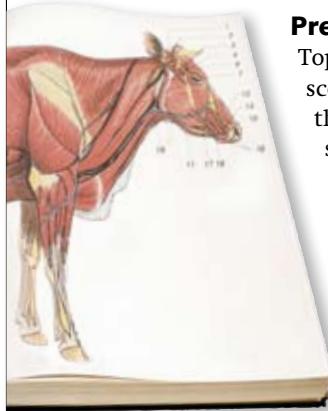
And we are just starting to appreciate the amount of re-arranging that goes on in the collecting yards. Cows will leave the fields in a very different order to that in which they enter the parlour. They need room to do carry out this behavioural pattern.

Research has shown that mobility scoring and prompt action can reduce lameness by up to 80%. And cows with mild lameness – with a mobility score of 2 and that would benefit from treatment – are estimated to have a reduction in yield of 4.5 litres a day moving to six litres a day for those with a mobility score of 3 – or severely lame.

Producers who are not monitoring mobility are likely to miss the subtle changes in mobility and the milk losses cited above can be incurred for up to four months before the cow becomes clinically lame. Lameness can creep up very slowly leaving a trail of production losses, to say nothing of fertility and other health related problems. And the longer a cow is lame the less likely she is to return to being sound footed.



The encyclopaedia Lameness



Prevention

Top of the list has to be mobility scoring and swift action to minimise the time between identification of symptoms and treatment. During summer, maintain good tracks by brushing off stones, minimise tractor traffic and avoid poaching gateways. It is worth looking carefully at cow flow and making sure that cows have plenty of room to move freely.

Cow comfort is particularly important and it is worth considering rubber matting. Preventative foot trimming should be carried out routinely.

categories of lameness	possible causes
sole lesions	poor cow comfort and extended standing times on concrete
white line disease	poor cow flow, lack of collecting yard space, uneven tracks
infectious eg. digital dermatitis	poor slurry management, inadequate foot bathing