

FIVE WAYS TO KEEP ON TOP OF LAMENESS

There are numerous factors influencing foot health in your herd. *Aly Balsom* runs through just five areas to help control lameness



7% of culls are due to lameness

4. Pick up problems early

- Lameness should be approached in a similar way to mastitis – use mobility scores in a similar way to somatic cell count readings to flag up potential problems before they become a big issue.
- Aim to mobility score every two weeks – sticking to a set mobility scoring system is crucial. Often farmers who don't have a set strategy are picking up lame cows too late – they often need to lower their threshold of detection.
- Picking up mobility score two cows before they become score three will dramatically reduce lameness incidence.
- For example, sole ulcers all start as a bruise, so the key is to pick them up at this early stage.
- » Read how Somerset producers the Alvis Brothers have benefitted from regular mobility scoring at www.fwi.co.uk/alvisbrothers

JONATHAN PAGE

1. Parlour flow

- Good flow in and out of the parlour will reduce foot damage.
- Cows will enter the parlour in a different order to when they come into the collecting yard – it is important to factor in this reshuffle when considering space availability in the collecting yard.
- Look at cow behaviour as they wait to be milked.
- The first sign of pressure is when cows are touching each other sideways. The second is when you see cows reversing and the third is when cows stand with their heads up.
- To allow movement in the collecting yard, the average UK black and white cow needs to be provided with 1.8m²/animal. Without this, both cow flow and foot health could be compromised.
- Don't overuse the backing gate – using the backing gate before cows have had a chance to naturally re-arrange themselves into their preferred order will disrupt cow flow.

Comments from vets **Owen Atkinson**, Lambert Leonard and May, **Nick Bell**, the Royal Veterinary College and **Neil Chesterton** from New Zealand.

2. Foot-bathing

- Regular foot-bathing can help reduce infection pressure.
- Make sure feet are clean prior to bathing and make the bath deep and long enough.
- Replace the bath after every 100 cows. Consider splitting the herd to achieve this – they don't all have to be bathed on the same day.

3. Floor surfaces – scabble or groove

- Slippery concrete can create widespread lameness problems and reduce bulling activity.
- There are a number of ways of improving concrete surfaces, including scabbling, which uses a specialist machine to create a roughened surface, or grooving, which adds grooves to the surface of concrete.
- Nick Bell of the Royal Veterinary College is encouraging farmers to use scabbling as a standard approach to concrete management on UK dairy farms to improve cow mobility.
- » Cardiganshire farmer John David has seen big benefits from scabbling – read more at www.fwi.co.uk/scabbling

5. Cow tracks

- Good tracks can actually help in the fight against lameness.
- Tracks should be smooth and hard-wearing with no sharp stones to reduce lameness and get cows walking faster.
- AstroTurf is a novel material for lining cow tracks to improve cow flow. Some sports centres are happy to get rid of old AstroTurf free of charge.
- » Farmer Focus writer Ian Ratcliffe has put AstroTurf on top of 500m of concrete sleeper tracks and straight on to soil. He says: "It's very hard-wearing, allows stones to go into the turf and not the foot, and cows are happy to run on it."