

## VETERINARY ADVICE

# Visual checks only pick up around a quarter of cases

**L**AMENESS in dairy cattle is a welfare problem and a costly one, too. Every farm has lame cows – it is what we do with them that counts. Lameness is a multi-factorial disease needing a multi-pronged approach to its control. Mobility scoring is an integral tool.

## What causes lameness in dairy cows?

Both infectious and non-infectious diseases cause lameness. Common infections being digital dermatitis, foul in the foot and slurry heel. Common non-infectious causes are solar ulcer, white line disease, solar haemorrhage and solar foreign bodies (stones!).

## Where does lameness occur?

Some 95 per cent of lameness occurs owing to problems in the foot and 90 per cent of lameness occurs in the hind foot. Some 90 per cent of cases

## LAMENESS

**Bruce Richards** BVSc DBR MRCVS, of Paragon Veterinary Group, looks at how to deal with lameness

occur in the outer claw.

## Why worry about lameness?

It's painful for the cow and it is painful for your pocket!

The average cost of a case of lameness is £180 and the estimated cost for an average UK herd is £15,000 per year – equivalent to 1ppl.

Lame cows eat less, produce less milk, have poorer fertility and reduced longevity.

Lame cows have approximately 25 per cent lower conception rates, lactation yields are reduced by an average of 360kgs and in some cases, milk yields are reduced up to four months prior to being visibly detected lame.

## How common is

## lameness in dairy cows?

Mobility scoring suggests 36 per cent of UK dairy cows are lame on any given day.

## How do you estimate lameness levels in your herd?

Simply watching cows during the normal working day will only detect about 25 per cent of cases.

You can record all visible lameness conditions and estimate lameness levels, but you will miss subclinical/subtle/early cases.

A better way is to combine this visible lameness recording with regular herd mobility scoring. Fortnightly to monthly mobility scoring will dra-



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matically reduce overall herd lameness levels as well as the severity of cases seen.

## How do you mobility score?

Take a look at the AHDB website for a how-to guide at [dairy.ahdb.org.uk/resources-library/technical-infor-](http://dairy.ahdb.org.uk/resources-library/technical-infor-)

mation/ahdb-dairy-feet-programme

It's best done regularly by an independent person so that a true reflection of herd lameness levels can be made. A clean, flat and even, non-slip surface is required.

## What is the scoring

## system used?

A simple scoring system of 0-3 is used. A score 0 is a cow with "good mobility" (no detectable lameness). A score 1 is a cow with "imperfect mobility" (the lame leg is not easily obvious). A score 2 is a cow with "impaired mobility" (the lame leg is obvious). A score 3 is a cow with "severely impaired mobility," that is she cannot keep up with her herd mates.

## Why mobility score cows?

Prompt treatment within two weeks of a cow becoming lame significantly improves her chance of being cured. Mobility scoring massively encourages early detection.

## What are the benefits of mobility scoring?

By far, it is the early treatment of cases. Also, prioritisation and monitoring of cases, monitoring of herd trends, benchmarking between herds and identification of underlying herd causes. Overall, it raises awareness of herd foot health.

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