

Texas Dairy Matters

Higher Education Supporting the Industry

LAMENESS PREVENTION PROVIDES RETURNS

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Over 28% of dairy cows on dairies larger than 500 cows experience lameness based on a survey conducted by the USDA National Animal Health Monitoring System. Lameness can have a significant impact on health, milk production and reproduction of the dairy cow.

Hoof ailments leading to lameness result from infectious agents (foot rot), laminitis, conformational or other lesions (corkscrew claw, injury), and issues concerning the claw. These include white line disease, thin sole-induced toe ulcers, sole ulcers, heel ulcers, toe ulcers, sole punctures and thin soles. Additional risk factors associated with lameness include: diet, high milk production, under-conditioning and environmental effects such as housing type, stall surface and season.

Estimates of the costs associated with lameness on a dairy depend upon what is included, but range from \$90 to \$300 per incident. A basic estimate for a 2,000 cow dairy with 28% lameness means 560 of the animals experience lameness each year. This is a total cost between \$50,000 (low end) and \$168,000 (high end). Regularly trimming hooves, at an estimated cost of \$12/cow or a total cost of \$24,000 for the herd, helps prevent the losses caused by lameness.

The productivity losses result from decreased milk production, increased days open and greater potential culling; as lame cows prefer to rest instead of eat. The resultant decreased feed intake increases the chance of illness and injury as the cow is not maintaining body weight and her immune system is weakened. Travel to and from the parlor, as well as travel within the pen, poses an increased chance of injury due to slipping; since she is already on an unstable base.



Measures to reduce lameness include:

- Trim hooves at least once during each lactation (early dry period or at dry off). A second trimming may be scheduled at 150 days-in-milk.
- Keep lock-up and standing time as short as possible (limit to 1 hr for early fresh cows).
- Manage rations to avoid incidences of acidosis.
- Maintain return alleys and pens free of rocks to prevent sole punctures and bruising.
- Provide clean, dry areas to reduce the risk of foot rot.
- Use footbaths properly to control some hoof diseases.



Train all employees working with cows to monitor herd lameness to increase the chance of catching lame animals; since cows will be seen in multiple areas of the dairy by multiple employees. Having an employee trained in hoof care provides the advantage of treating lame cows and trimming hooves between visits from the professional trimmer who regularly trims the herd.

Be sure thorough employee hoof trimming training is conducted by a veterinarian or experienced hoof trimmer, or a lameness issue may be magnified instead of corrected. Hoof trimming is an investment in the future hoof health of the herd. Not only does it improve foot health, but costs associated with lameness are reduced.

<http://texasdairymatters.org>

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