

## CATTLE LAMENESS CONTROL

Some things never seem to change. One of them is that cows do often go lame. I reckon that 40% of dairy cows at any one time have mobility issues.

### Why?

Cows are designed to live outside on grass and eat long fibre. With domestication, they have been brought inside and bred to produce vast quantities of milk in the case of dairy cows and to eat an energy dense diet.

We have altered cows so much that it is our responsibility to ensure the best possible conditions for their welfare. I have no problems with cows inside- all year if they have to be- so long as they are kept in good conditions and well looked after.

I have come up with 12 'C's for lameness Control.

- 1) **Concrete**- standing on concrete is not natural. Outside, cows spend most of their time lying down. Rubber matting in heavily used areas can help e.g. at the feed trough and collecting yard and in and out of the parlour.
- 2) **Comfort**- to encourage lying we need to use comfortable cubicles with comfortable deep bedding with or without mattresses, or straw yards. Reduce standing times as much as possible especially at milking.
- 3) **Crowding**- we need at least one cubicle per cow and sufficient floor space for movement and social behaviour. Feed space is important too- or cows fight for position.
- 4) **C\*\*p** or slurry- but that doesn't start with a 'C'! Your toe nails are so much easier to trim after a bath- moisture softens feet and makes them vulnerable to damage. Floor space helps to reduce the depth of slurry and removing slurry/ moisture from contact with cow feet is essential. Cows tied in old fashioned byres rarely went lame- mainly because their feet remained dry. Ventilation in cow sheds is often overlooked- to remove moisture from the building.
- 5) **Contagion**- or infectious agents. These are spread in slurry from cow to cow- digital dermatitis and foul. The above points apply here. Regular (daily) antiseptic foot bathing helps.
- 6) **Corners**- avoid sharp corners e.g. out of the parlour. Also avoid dead ends in sheds by using cross overs.
- 7) **Cake**- suckler cows kept in the same conditions as dairy cows are less prone to lameness and diet is one of the reasons. They also produce drier faeces so the environment is drier. Avoiding acidosis with adequate long fibre helps maintain cow health. Adding biotin to the ration can help improve horn quality
- 8) **Condition**- recent research has shown that *thin cows tend to go lame*. We used to assume that lameness made the cow thin. This is because there is a fat pad in the foot which protects the bone from concussion on the concrete. Thinner cows have less padding. So, avoiding excessive weight loss after calving helps reduce lameness.
- 9) **Calving**- the hormone changes at calving relax the bone and horn junction in the foot increasing pressure on the bone which causes bruising then ulcers. This happens in the same way that the pelvic ligaments relax to allow the cow to deliver the calf. Calving can't be avoided but having new calved cows in the best cubicles or a straw yard can be a big help.

- 10) **Consideration**- it might sound obvious, and it is, but prompt treatment of lame cows works wonders to reduce the incidence. You wouldn't leave a case of mastitis for a few weeks before treating it. Think of lameness in the same way! Lame cows with digital dermatitis are a source of infection to the other cows- like mastitis. Using a painkiller jab at the time of treatment has a benefit which persists beyond the activity of the drug- like mastitis.
- 11) **Corrective trimming**- having all cows checked at least once a year (ideally twice) can work wonders to reduce the incidence of lameness.
- 12) **Conformation**- or 'breeding' but it starts with a 'b'. Some cows never go lame....

Sorry that is a lot of points- I initially wrote '5 Cs'.

Wouldn't it be great if we can all get our act together- vets included to improve the lot of our beloved cows which ultimately provide us all with a living!

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