

# Dairy Cow Lameness

Lameness of the foot - part of the triad of troubles that contribute most to dairy cattle disease, along with mastitis and infertility.

## DISEASE COSTS

- The bulk of lameness costs are from reduced fertility, loss of potential milk yield and increased risk of culling.
- Lameness can reduce conception rate by more than 25% and increase the risk of ovarian follicular cysts by 2.5 times.
- Lameness cost dairy farmers in time and money with estimates ranging from \$200-\$1300 per lame cow depending on the



With lameness affecting up to 25% of dairy herds, it is a massive drain on resources. Lame cows take time, energy and skill to treat and are a financial cost that impacts on farm profits. Lame cows produce less milk, lose weight and take longer to cycle. Early treatment is the key to rapid and complete recovery with minimal disturbance to the cow and her productivity.

## TREATING LAME COWS

Treating lame cows is one of the most demanding health issues to be approached on farm, as it is expensive in both time and physical effort. It is therefore very important that efforts are maximised to best effect, i.e. the cost-to-benefit ratio is as low as possible. Vets often find the best way to investigate lameness is via a holistic approach that includes a herd locomotion score to gauge the severity and extent of the problem.

### Lameness scoring

A simple system of scoring cows is to grade them from 0 through to 3, where 0 is normal with good mobility, and 3 is severely lame. Once each cow has been graded, a plan of attack for treating lame cows can be implemented.

**Grade 3** cows are severely lame. These cows must be drafted, examined and treated immediately – within 24 hours. They may require a vet. Lame cows should not be made to walk far and should be kept on pasture.

**Grade 2** cows are moderately lame, and should be drafted, examined and treated as soon as practical. Score 2 cows are not always immediately obvious so regular mobility scoring is often the most practical way of identifying them and treating them early.

**Grade 1** cows are slightly lame, but close and repeated observation is required to detect the lame leg. These cows need careful monitoring

to ensure lameness does not develop further, and may benefit from having the feet lifted and checked.

**Grade 0** cows are not lame. One way to approach this is for the vet to treat the grade 2 and 3 cows, and the farmer or foot-trimmer to treat the grade 1 cows.

Once identification of the affected foot or feet has been made the foot needs to be lifted for examination. Good facilities are needed for the safe lifting of feet. Using hoof testers, a hoof knife and cutters, the problem is identified and the hoof cut back to follow any dark lines, removing any under running and releasing any pus.

It is also important that the reasons for lameness, or any lesions found, are recorded so that progress, deterioration and control points can be identified, both for the individual cow and on a herd basis.

### Locomotion scoring quiz

Test your knowledge at the DairyNZ Healthy Hoof - Chapter 3: Lameness scoring self-test. Go to [http://www.dairynz.co.nz/page/pageid/2145876673/Lameness\\_Scoring](http://www.dairynz.co.nz/page/pageid/2145876673/Lameness_Scoring)





### WHAT IS AN ACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF LAMENESS?

In smaller herds it is now common to have incidences of 7% or lower over a 12 month period.

In larger herds, 10% or less is achievable and should be the target.

### LAMENESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The remainder of a holistic approach to lameness requires a thorough review of the whole of the cows' environment, with a major emphasis on race design and cow flow management. Ninety per cent or more of lameness involves only the foot. The possible causes of foot lameness in New Zealand include physical damage, dietary problems, infection and poor conformation. Physical damage is the most common and presents as sole injuries or white line disease. Therefore, emphasis on reducing physical damage will have the most dramatic results. This can be reviewed with your vet, ideally one accredited through the DairyNZ Healthy Hoof programme.

### MANAGING LAMENESS

An understanding of the types of lameness and a structured approach to tackle underlying causes is required to avoid cases getting as severe as these examples. Talk to your vet about lameness management.



### REGULAR FOOT TRIMMING

Ideally, all cows should have regular hoof-trimming, even if they are sound. This way, cows are prevented as much as is possible from advancing up the lameness ladder if hoof growth or conformation is contributing to lameness, and any disease is identified early.

Handling equipment and tools must also be of the best affordable quality as this makes a hard job easier and more rewarding.

Healthy Hoof

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### FIND OUT MORE...

To find out more information about lameness consult your local veterinary practice, or Healthy Hoof provider.



For more information contact your local XLVets practice:



[www.lhvc.co.nz](http://www.lhvc.co.nz)  
[contact@lhvc.co.nz](mailto:contact@lhvc.co.nz)