Rochester Veterinary Practice, 72 Lowry Street Rochester 3561, Phone (03) 54842255 admin@rochyvet.com.au

Management of Lameness in Cows (Dairy)

Lame cow facts

- A cow takes 60% of her weight on her front feet
- In front foot lameness the inside claw is more likely affected
- Hind legs are involved in propulsion
- Propulsion causes more foot stress than weight-bearing
- The outside claws of the hind feet bear the burden of continuously changing weight load
- Hind feet have a smaller weight bearing surface than front feet
- 85-90% of all lameness in dairy cows occurs in the feet
- 85% of foot lameness occurs in the hind feet
- Two-thirds of hind foot lameness occurs in the outside claw
- Heifers are much more likely to have front feet lameness than older cows. We think that this is due to heifers having to go backwards more often because older cows boss them around. When cows go backwards the front feet are the main source of propulsion

Lameness in cattle occurs all year round. However, when it rains our practice sees a lot of lame cows.

What can we do to reduce the number of lame cows?

Do not force cows

Put the most relaxed and patient person on the farm in charge of getting cows. Disable the horn on the motorbike and tie up the dog.

As soon as cows are forced, they bunch together and lift their heads and are not able to choose where to place their feet. Slow and steady is better.

Do not force cows on the concrete yard either. If cows are scrabbling on concrete, they will wear out their feet even quicker.

Create a lame herd that does not have to walk far

Keep lame cows in a close paddock and think about milking them only once per day.

Minimize the time the lame cows spend standing on concrete by brining them into be milked after the main herd has been milked.

Get some rubber mats at critical points in the dairy

This is usually where cows enter the dairy. They often scrabble and fight to get in. Rubber mats will help prevent wear and tear. Cows exit from rotary platforms backwards and then pivot around. A rubber mat will help here as well.

Use Zinc sulphate to help toughen feet

Zinc sulphate can be used as a 5% solution in a footbath or can be used neat on carpet (or even concrete).

Put straw on the tracks

Straw on the tracks will soften the track and reduce the amount of bruising. In many dairies it is only necessary to put straw on the first 100 metres or so. Other tracks, with more cow traffic require straw on the first 200 to 300 metres. The improvement in cow comfort is rapid.

On some tracks it is necessary to replace the straw every week or 10 days.

Other options include rice hulls and old carpet.

When to treat lame cows?

Recent research has shown early treatment of lame cows improves the likelihood of recovery, reduced duration of lameness and reduce culling rates.

If a cow is lame for 2 weeks or more before treatment, only 15% are likely to recovery fully from the lameness event. These cows are also more likely to become lame in the opposite foot and are more likely to be culled from the herd.

Treating lame cows

Some recent studies have shown treating a lame cow by lifting the affected foot, trimming the foot and paring out the lesion, applying a block or shoe to the unaffected claw and giving a NSAID course improves the clinical outcome greatly when compared to trimming alone, trimming and block, trimming and NSAID treatment. Cows treated in the manner are twice as likely to recover from the lameness event by day 35 post treatment.

Wooden blocks or plastic cowslips can be applied to the unaffected claw to lift the sore claw off the ground as well as protect the healthy claw from further wear and tear.

Penicillin (NOT Excenel) is the most appropriate antibiotic to use when there is an infection in soft tissues of the foot. A good rule of thumb is if there is any swelling above the hoof then antibiotics may be useful.

Penicillin is cheaper and more effective than Excenel (or Ceftiosan). The only advantage of Excenel is that there is no milk withhold.

Treating cows with an anti-inflammatory such as Ketoprofen or Metacam will improve cow welfare and may reduce duration of lameness