



Healthy hooves

Early diagnosis and prompt treatment of foot ailments helps cows reach potential

Keeping close tabs on your dairy cows' hooves—and acting quickly when you detect a lame animal—helps your cows produce to their potential. By avoiding lameness, you can also avoid decreased dry matter intake, lower milk production, impaired reproduction and early culling.

Unfortunately, many lame cows are treated too late and eventually culled. Shipped to market or slaughter, they can end up as downer animals—a serious welfare problem and a black eye for the dairy industry's image.

Lameness is one of the most costly, painful health problems affecting Canadian dairy cows. Recent British Columbia and Ontario surveys show lameness incidence prevalence now averages 20 to 30 per cent, with more than seven per cent of cows severely lame.

There's a good chance your herd has far more lame cows than you might think. Research shows the true prevalence of lameness averages three to four times more than most producers estimate.

The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle now requires early diagnosis of lame cows, and treating, culling or euthanizing as needed. Early diagnosis is essential to treat lameness successfully and minimize pain to the animal. If treatment is not feasible or successful, the cow should be euthanized as soon as possible.

The Code of Practice also encourages as a best management practice recording all lameness cases and




An adequate number of comfortable stalls reduces sole ulcer risk since cows spend less time standing on concrete.

keeping severe lameness prevalence below 10 per cent. About 75 per cent of Canadian dairy farms probably meet this criterion already.

Most lameness in Canada results from infectious causes, such as dermatitis, or from what is sometimes known as laminitis, a disruption of the horn growth in the claw that can result in sole ulcers and sole hemorrhages. Both ailments are most common when cows spend a lot of time standing in wet, manure-covered areas.

The main risk factors for sole ulcers are housing or management routines—such as uncomfortable stalls or overstocking—that result in cows standing on concrete for a prolonged time. Future articles will dis-

cuss ways you can make lying stalls more comfortable.

We would like to hear your views on *The Code of Practice* requirements for lameness. You can participate in the University of British Columbia's online discussion of this issue by visiting the website: www.yourviews.ubc.ca/node/1091. 

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