

Hoof Health in Dairy Cows

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At times, hoof health can take a back seat to the numerous other tasks going on during the average day on the dairy. However, hoof health should always be a top priority day to day. Hoof problems cause a domino effect, ultimately leading to lower production and profitability. Lame cows struggle to walk to the feed bunk to eat, to the waterers to drink, and to the parlor at milking times. Cows with hoof and leg issues also typically don't show heats well as they will not display the typical signs of standing or riding because of the pain. Cows that are open, not eating or drinking, and cannot get to the parlor are not pulling their financial weight for your operation. Ensuring your herd has properly cared for hooves will improve the overall profitability of the enterprise.

Hoof Health Tips

1. **Hoof Trimming:** Routine hoof trimming should be done for the whole herd. A quality hoof trimmer will keep the hooves even, flat, and well-manicured. The hoof trimmer will also be able to help you monitor the overall hoof health of the herd and bring your attention to heal warts, abscesses, and the like.
2. **Locomotion Scoring:** Regularly monitor how your cows are moving on a scale of 1 – 5 (one being normal, 5 being severely lame). Keep track of those to determine who may be developing feet issues. Have employees monitor cow lying and eating behavior as well, which can both be affected by hoof problems.
3. **Stall Comfort:** Stalls should be well bedded and comfortable for cows. Uncomfortable stalls will deter lying behavior and increase the length of time cows are on their feet which can lead to laminitis.
4. **Nutrition:** A well-balanced diet is the cornerstone to any healthy dairy animal. A diet that causes rumen acidosis can lead to laminitis. Preventing acidosis can be done by ensuring provision of adequate fiber, long-stem forage, and supplemental buffers like sodium bicarbonate. Supplemental biotin has also shown to improve hoof integrity. Zinpro® mineral products are often recommended because of their high bioavailability and research supported impacts on hoof health.
5. **Foot Baths:** Utilization of foot baths multiple times per week can help support hoof health. However, poor hoof bath management can also make the problem worse. When using a footbath, keep these guidelines in mind:
 - a. Foot bath should be 8 – 10 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 5 inches deep to ensure all 4 hooves are covered when walking through the bath.
 - b. Bath solution should be changed every 200 cows or when it becomes excessively contaminated with manure. Dirty bath water will not help with hoof integrity.
 - c. Make sure bath solution is mixed correctly or it will not be effective.
 - d. Once through the foot bath make sure cows are entering a clean, dry area.



Feel like hoof health is an issue at your facility? Work with your veterinarian and nutritionist to develop a strategy to address hoof care at your operation. Not every hoof issue will respond to the same method of treatment. Use your support team to determine the exact problem and then develop a strategy from there.



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