

Lameness and Hoof Trimming

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Hoof trimming is a key step to preventing lameness and decreased milk production. Lameness is estimated to cost \$346 per episode and involve 30 percent of all cows. The purpose of hoof trimming is to re-establish appropriate weight bearing on the claws of all four feet. By doing so, lameness and other foot diseases can be minimized.

Losses Associated with Lameness

Economic losses associated with lameness arise primarily from the consequences of the disease and not the cost of treatment. Of the cows that become lame, approximately 2% die and 20% are culled. With each case of lameness, the number of days open is estimated to increase by 28 and 750 pounds of milk are lost. This totals close to \$346 per episode. A maintenance hoof trim costs around \$12 per cow. Every case of lameness prevented will pay to have the hooves of 29 cows trimmed.

Weight Bearing

When a cow moves, the distribution of weight within and between the claws changes, especially on the rear feet and legs. Outside claws continuously correct changing weight loads. The change in weight distribution is believed to be the cause of rapid hoof growth and high incidence of outside claw disorders. The outer back hoof carries 60% of the weight in a mature cow. As the toes become longer, a cow will place even more weight on her heels and on the outside claw. The outside claw compensates by putting down more hoof growth, and this causes an animal to become sickle hocked. Confinement housing on concrete or other hard surfaces enhances the physical effects of load bearing on feet.

When to Trim Feet

Periodic trimming ensures the cow's weight is properly distributed over all four feet. Most cows benefit from hoof trimming 1 to 2 times per year. Many dairy operations choose to trim feet once a year at dry off. Some cows will require hoof trimming more than twice a year. Between 100 and 150 days into lactation, cows have had enough hoof growth that some sub-clinical laminitis will be present. Trimming at this time allows one to correct the problem and minimize its effects. The condition of the foot and cow management determines the correct time in which they need to be trimmed. When a cow's feet have not been trimmed, several trimmings may be necessary in order to get the feet in shape and prevent them from becoming tender.

Regular foot-care and hoof trimming is not a luxury provided to cows, it is essential to achieve maximum cow productivity and longevity. It is an investment to insure ability to walk.