

Newsletter 2022, Q4

Nov 2022

Agriscot 2022

In a return to normality, the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies will have a stand at Agriscot on Wednesday 16th November. Please pop in for a chat if you are coming along to the show.

Why is claw trimming so important in housed dairy cows?

Due to the unforgiving nature of concrete, claw trimming technique is extremely important for the health and welfare of the dairy cow.



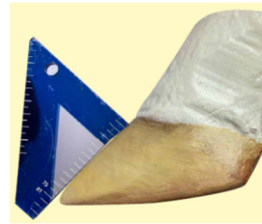
A right hind foot from a dairy cow on concrete. The concussive forces increase wear on the outside claw heel, while stimulating horn growth on sole and wall. This is illustrated in this image, where weight bearing is taking place over the typical site where sole bruising and sole ulceration occurs.

One of the most important things to remember is to trim to the cow and to the conditions (for example climate, season and environment). Trimming should be functional and NOT cosmetic, and cows being presented should be managed by trim lists.

Avoid the common foot trimming mistakes!

When foot trimming is not done to a high standard, or even when trained foot trimmers slip into bad practice, foot trimming can become part of the lameness problem on the farm, rather than part of the solution. Small differences in trimming method can have a major impact on claw health, and keeping up-to-date with best practice is strongly recommended. **There is no substitute for learning the practical skills with an appropriately qualified foot trimming instructor.**

X i) Cutting the toe length too short - toe length is used to predict sole thickness. When toes are trimmed too short, it usually means that the soles will be trimmed too thin as well. The depth of the sole can be assessed by hoof testers and thumb pressure. If the sole gives to thumb pressure in the toe region, the sole is too thin.



ACTION: The toe length must be measured on the axial wall of the stabilising claw from where the claw horn goes palpably hard below the coronary band. **This is 80 mm for a standard Holstein, but MUST be adjusted for heifers and other breeds/types.**

X ii) Over trimming of the sole



If the toe length is correct and there are no painful lesions in the toe region, the "toe triangle" (outlined in blue in the photograph) **should remain untouched** so as to avoid over trimming the sole.

X iii) Using the grinder on the hoof wall

Remember that the **wall horn is the strongest horn** and is what gives the hoof its strength. Do not undertake cosmetic "shaping" of the foot.

X iv) Not using hoof testers when deciding whether to cut into black marks in the sole

It is important to remember that "search" cuts should **not** be carried out on sound cows. Before any black marks in the foot are followed, it needs to be established if they are causing a problem.

Routine trimming/inspection is essential to reducing lameness. This should be done, for example: around dry off, at 70-100 days in milk, when mobility scoring identifies cows as lame, 6 weeks after blocking and routinely after treatment.



Postal strikes

Unfortunately we continue to have issues with delays in samples getting to the DHHPS due to strikes. Please check the latest on the Royal Mail website before sending samples. If necessary, consider using a courier for next day delivery

Winter forage stocks

It has been a few years since we have had to talk about winter forage stocks. Unfortunately, the drought in parts of the country this summer has left a significant number of farms short of winter forage. Whilst some have been lucky to have had wonderful foraging weather, forward prices of global commodities remain scarily high, and so if forage stocks are a concern on your farm, it is difficult to know what best to do.

The key is to forward plan now. Analyse the forages you have on farm, calculate how much Dry Matter you have, and how long you can feed your herd or flock for this winter. If this does not take you comfortably into the grass growing season in spring 2023, then **take action now**:

1) Reduce stock numbers – this is the obvious way to reduce forage requirements over the winter. For dairy herds, now is the time to look through your cull lists and remove those empty cows with high cell counts or chronic lameness problems. Suckler herds should be scanning and removing empty cows prior to housing, whilst culling hard for teeth, feet and udders prior to tupping will ensure only the most productive ewes are retained.

2) Use forage replacers – if you have access to by-products, arrange regular deliveries through the winter. Taking a load of brewer's grains every fortnight through the winter will preserve forage stocks and make it easier to guarantee deliveries in February/March, when everybody is chasing supply. Likewise, citrus pulp and straw can be used. Dry dairy and suckler cows in good body condition can be predominantly fed straw until the last three weeks of pregnancy, provided an appropriate source of protein is provided. A kilo of straw in the milking cow ration now could buy

an extra week of forage supply at the end of the winter housing period.

3) Look after the precious stocks you have – we have all had times where we have struggled to manage the clamp face (see our clamp from 2021 below). When forage stocks are tight, it is even more important to ensure that waste is kept to a minimum. Always use a shear grab (or similar), work across the face as quickly as possible, keep the shoulders tidy and only roll the plastic back as much as absolutely necessary.



4) Maximise use of Dry Matter in the field – think carefully about the Dry Matter you have outside. At the time of publication, most cattle will already be housed, but if ground conditions allow, regular body condition scoring can facilitate keeping cattle out longer **provided that they never drop below BCS 2.5 out of 5**. Keeping sheep on tack is a great source of Dry Matter for ewes, and can make a huge difference to forage stocks on a sheep farm. That said, if you have cattle and are short of conserved forages, then this would not be a good year to have sheep on tack, as it will take time to build Dry Matter cover back up on the pasture in the spring.

Attention all sheep farmers!

One of our Farm Animal Residents at Edinburgh Alberto Luque is undertaking a research project on mastitis in sheep, by carrying out a survey to identify key areas for research. Please click here to participate: <https://edin.ac/3S9fYX8>