

THE HEALTHY HOOF PROGRAMME IN PRACTISE

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What causes lame cows?

- In pasture based systems – mainly physical factors
- People working with cows have a large impact
- Shed, yard and track design.
 - Observe cow behaviour particularly at milking time.

Basic rules to prevent lameness

- Allow cows to drift to the shed
- Have enough yard space (1.3m² J, 1.4m² X, 1.5m² HF)
- Use backing gate to take up space, not to push
- Move backing gate for no longer than 5 seconds
- Ensure no cow heads are up
- Make consistent use of the top gate
- Record lame cow details
- Use the Healthy Hoof Programme.

Healthy Hoof Programme

Ten Canterbury farms are currently trialling a new programme to rid their farms of lameness. After struggling with ongoing lameness issues, this group of Canterbury farms have been keen to be involved in trialling Dexcel's 'Healthy Hoof Programme'.

The Healthy Hoof Programme is designed to provide farmers and their advisers with a systematic process to help minimise and manage the risk of lameness on pasture-based dairy farms.

Notes:

Prevention of lameness from physical factors is a key focus of the programme, in conjunction with tips and training guides, to help farmers manage and treat lame cows.

Research findings and industry experts in New Zealand agree that physical factors are the predominant final cause of lameness in this country. Many people theorise that animal nutrition and transition feeding also play a role in predisposing cows to becoming lame. The mechanisms for any nutritional interaction in pasture-based situations are not yet well defined. Once research has developed a clearer understanding of the role of nutrition in lameness it can be included within the Programme.

Lameness is no easy fix and no one thing will solve the whole problem on every farm, so the Healthy Hoof Programme has focused on reducing the amount of lameness using a systematic approach. The programme itself has four key steps:

1. An initial evaluation to assess the current status on farm
2. This evaluation helps identify and prioritise the risks that potentially cause lameness on a property and includes observation of animal management at milking time
3. Output is a report of recommended actions to be taken by the farmer (recommendations are feasible and discussed with the farmer (and farm vet where appropriate))
4. Staff training is an integral part of this programme. All farm staff must be trained in prevention of lameness – the resources that augment the programme are designed for this purpose. Each staff member must have a training plan created to track their progress in lame cow management.
5. Farmers must record each lameness incident on template sheets and identify the type of lameness
6. Actions and results are evaluated
7. Programme farmers send in a progress report to the Healthy Hoof Programme centre relating to the number of lame cows, type of lameness, and actions taken on a three monthly basis and receive a benchmark report in return
8. At the end of each season farmers are encouraged to feed back results and progress.

A comprehensive set of learning resources is provided to each case study. These provide information, templates and training options for each stage of the Programme.

Whilst many things cause lameness, Neil Chesterton, a Taranaki veterinarian, lameness specialist and Healthy Hoof Programme team member, says, “Physical factors are the predominant cause of lameness for most New Zealand farms, how herds-people interact with the cows, especially while they are walking, yarded and awaiting milking is especially important”. With Neil Chesterton’s input and guidance, training for farm teams in how to prevent and treat lameness is a priority for the Programme.

Farms involved in the Programme have received ongoing support and discussions about their lameness issues. For most farmers, lameness management will be an on-going issue and require a consistent effort to ensure lameness is minimised from season to season.

The Healthy Hoof Programme is being extended throughout the country to a total of 40 farms in the 2007/08 season, and will be available to all farmers at the conclusion of the season.

The Dexcel Healthy Hoof Programme has been funded by Dairy InSight and the Sustainable Farming Fund.

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