

LAMENESS – THE COMMON CAUSES

Two long months of wet weather has resulted in a large number of lame cows this season. A lame cow does not eat enough because she spends extra time lying down, or standing in one place, resulting in weight loss and production drop. Lameness may be due to trauma and/or infection in one or more legs. The most common problems found in the feet of cows are:

SOLE BRUISING

Occurs when the sole is worn flat and it becomes thin. Wet conditions and long walks to the shed with time on concrete yards are main causes in NZ. The sole is easily depressed with a thumb, and dark clots of blood may be seen under the sole. Affected animals are tender when walking, with usually more than one foot affected. Treatment is rest in a paddock close to shed, and once daily milking until recovered. Feet should be checked within 7 days to ensure that the bruise has not turned into a sole puncture or abscess.

WHITELINE DISEASE

A common cause of lameness, particularly in cows that have to turn sharp corners on concrete yards, or that are walking long distances. Treatment involves opening adequate drainage for the infection and removing any underrun sole. If the infection has tracked upwards, you need to remove the under-run wall. A cowslip may be required in severe cases along with antibiotics. If there is no improvement after a few days, always recheck the foot.



SOLE ABSCESS/PUNCTURE

Results when a sharp object penetrates the sole. Sudden onset of lameness, with the cow tending to slide the foot along the ground when bearing weight. Pus tends to accumulate in the toe area. In advanced cases the pus will escape at the junction of the skin and horn near the bulb of the heel. Treatment involves draining infection and removing all the underrun sole horn. A cowslip is required to relieve the affected claw from weight bearing. Some cases may require antibiotics.

FOOTROT

Results from damage to the skin of the interdigital area, or when claws are kept moist for long periods. Caused by bacteria, it is commonly seen as swelling of the foot, with severe pain and lameness. A foul smelling core of dead tissue is often present. Treatment involves high doses of appropriate antibiotics and cleaning out dead tissue. Control involves minimising wet areas around troughs and



gateways, and maintenance of races to prevent injury. Footbaths may help reduce the incidence on some farms.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR VET

Any lameness that continues for more than two days without improvement. Any joint swelling, or swelling of leg above hoof. Anything you are unsure about

CARE OF LAME COWS

Foot lesions are very painful. The lame cow needs rest from standing, walking and jostling by other cows. Milk once a day. Keep in a paddock next to the shed. Take supplement feed to them in paddock (leave PKE trough in there). If you put a cow back into the herd too early, she will damage the soft healing tissue and become lame again. The least time spent on concrete, the better! Lame cows are less likely to show bulling activity, so either run a bull with the lame cow mob or consider synchronising them so they have a fixed time insemination.