Maximising Mobility

Mobility has to some extent replaced lameness as the term used when describing how well cattle are moving. By measuring mobility we shift the focus away from how many lame animals there are to how well we are maintaining good mobility. Instead of accepting and counting the lameness in a herd we aim to maximize herd mobility.

There are several good reasons for investing in good herd mobility in both suckler and dairy herds, these include improved cow welfare, improved yield, improved fertility, reduced culling and higher cull value. In addition there are some supermarket dairy supply contracts which require a minimum standard of mobility as part of their compliance criteria. The presence of lame cattle and sheep on farms are very visible to the general public and form a negative impression of the industry.

Mobility in cattle is typically measured by scoring animals from 0 to 3 based on the AHDB Dairy (formerly DairyCo) scoring system as described below:

- **score 0** cow, will have good mobility and will walk with even weight-bearing rhythm on all four feet, with a flat back
- **score 1** cow, steps uneven (rhythm or weight bearing) or strides shortened; affected limb or limbs not immediately identifiable
- **score 2** cow, uneven weight bearing on a limb that is immediately identifiable and/or obviously shortened strides (usually with an arch to the centre of the back)
- **score 3** cow will be unable to keep up with the healthy herd and will either show uneven weight-bearing on a limb that is immediately identifiable, or will walk with shortened strides and an arched back

AHDB figures suggest that 25% of dairy cows have impaired mobility (score 2 or 3) at any given time based on mobility scoring many herds across the UK. Throughout the practice we have examples of herds where mobility is over 95% consistently and those where it is much worse than the national average. There is no doubt that a significant part of the future of the dairy industry will be a drive towards better mobility which means that whatever your current herd standard you will be encouraged to work towards improving that figure. Beef and sheep enterprises too will come under pressure to minimize lameness although mobility scoring may not play a role directly.

The vast majority of animals that enter our adult production systems have very good or even perfect mobility. The mobility of the individual animal then gets compromised typically by environmental and nutritional pressures integral to the management system which eventually lead to lameness. To maximize mobility we must correctly identify what the risk factors for lameness are and how we can reduce the risk posed.

Practical tips for maximizing herd mobility obviously vary depending on the farm specific challenges but there are a few recommendations that are universally beneficial.

- Routine hoof trimming to ensure correct hoof shape and balance. This is normally done in late lactation or at drying off and also gives an opportunity to unload the solar ulcer site.
- Routine inspection and trim of fresh calved animals. Typically at 70-90 days in milk cows are checked for any signs of hoof horn lesions. The majority of hoof horn lesions originate in the fresh cow period.
- Regular, effective foot bathing to reduce the bacterial challenge. Walking through a bath of slurry does not count as effective foot bathing! We are happy to help you develop a practical and effective foot bathing protocol for your herd.
- Regular mobility scoring so that animals which are developing lesions are identified earlier in the process.

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Although this doesn’t necessarily reduce the risk of lameness per se it does reduce the impact of the lameness on cow health and welfare and maintain good mobility.

• Avoid over trimming which leaves soles too thin and toes too short. This is now a significant and often catastrophic cause of lameness on some farms. Current research on this area suggests that most cows should have a toe length of at least 83mm rather than the 75mm recommended for the last 30 years. The latest recommendation is to go for 90mm to avoid over trimming.

Speak to your regular vet about implementing these control measures in your herd. We also have several vets in the practice who have a particular interest in mobility if you require a more in depth review. Jonny and Darrell are trained to deliver the Healthy Feet program which covers all aspects of mobility.

In addition we also have expanded our hoof trimming team. We are delighted to have Lee Fletcher join Steve Austin in the Willows Hoofcare team. Having the foot trimmer and vet work hand in hand has delivered great results and proved so popular we have increased our capacity. Working with the vet means we can quickly react to changes in herd mobility and work more effectively to prevent lameness. Speak to Darrell or Steve if you want to know more about our Hoofcare packages and how we can help maximize mobility in your herd!

We would like to extend our best wishes to you all and thank you for your continued custom through a challenging 2015. Happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

. . . to Caroline and Dave on the birth of their baby son Douglas David Williams. Baby Douglas arrived slightly ahead of schedule by Caesarean Section at 18.25 on 22nd November. Now you know what it’s like to be on the receiving end of surgery Caroline!!

Congratulations . . .