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Mobility Scoring Service

A method of monitoring herd lameness has been developed that is both consistent and easy to implement. The demand to survey and manage herd lameness has increased since the use of Herd Health Planning schemes and since standard requirements have been set by some milk buyers.

We offer a lameness service that is based on the research work carried out under 'The Healthy Feet Project' at Bristol University. The scoring system is 'The Cattle Lameness and Mobility Score' and should be carried out at least biannually. Preferably all cows in the herd (or at least the milking herd) are given a score (see below) which characterises the degree of lameness severity observed. Any animal with a score of 2 or 3 will be individually identified so their feet can be examined. These high scoring animals will benefit from prompt treatment and regular checks to ensure treatment is working. A tally will be kept of cows that score 0 or 1.

Score	Description	Suggested Action
0	Good Mobility.	No action, routine trimming beneficial.
1	Imperfect mobility.	Further observation recommended, routine trimming beneficial.
2	Impaired mobility.	Attend as soon as possible, lift foot, establish cause and treat.
3	Severely impaired mobility.	Urgent attention and treatment required, possible cull.

(In accordance with guidelines set under the Dairy Co Mobility Score)

Little requirements are needed to carry out the mobility score and it can usually be incorporated into the milking routine thus causing least possible disruption to both the cow and farmer. The cows are observed from behind and to the side as they individually walk on a non-slip, hard surface. Space should be allowed for the cows to take between 6-10 uninterrupted strides and if possible they should be watched turning a corner.

Once mobility scoring is in place it can be used to monitor individual cows but also alongside trimming records we can ascertain which are the common lesions affecting the herd. Using this information we can look at general management aspects and compose an action list identifying key areas on farm contributing to the problem. The four most common lesions are listed in a table below alongside the influential management areas contributing to such lesions.

Top Four Lesions	Contributory Factors
Solar Ulcers	Long standing times, diet and heifer management.
White Line Disease	Underfoot surfaces, twists and sharp turns.
Digital Dermatitis	Slurry build up, reduced scraping, poor biosecurity.
Foul of the Foot	Environment eg. Slurry & interdigital skin damage.

Whilst the incidence of lameness in the national herd remains high the **economic losses** associated with lameness are huge. It is estimated that 25% of the national dairy herd receive treatment annually for lameness. The disease is thought to cost the UK dairy industry about £90 million each year, averaging just under £30 for each cow. The main costs are not treatment costs, but the effect of lameness in terms of compromising production and fertility and the higher risk of culling.

Tackling lameness may seem challenging and time consuming, however there are many **major benefits** associated with the management changes implemented. Actions put in place to specifically reduce lameness will also generate **economic gain** in many other areas. Leading to

- **Improved Productivity;** Altering milking routine, increasing cubicle comfort or extending trough space will help reduce standing times and the risk of solar ulcers. With extended lying times more time can be spent ruminating, leading to better rumen health and increased productivity, for example; higher yields.
- **Improved Heifer Performance;** Managing heifers and freshly calved cows separately to reduce stress around calving and the risk of solar ulcers means often a higher dry matter intake is achievable, reducing the negative energy balance and decreasing the risk of metabolic disease.
- **Improved Fertility;** Increased bulling activity is observed due to favoured underfoot surfaces.
- **Time Saving;** Changes to underfoot surfaces and cow flow should not only lower the risk of white line disease but save time waiting for slow moving cows.
- **Savings on Treatment Costs;** Earlier treatment and prevention of severe cases will save both money and time.
- **Cleaner Cows;** By avoiding slurry build up the risk of digital dermatitis and Foul is reduced but there are also less dirty beds reducing the risk of mastitis.
- **Increased Farmer Comfort;** Underfoot surface change and a reduction of slurry at milking should help the farmer too.

The benefits are substantial. Identifying cases earlier promotes prompt treatment and quicker recoveries, as well as picking up on cases that may have otherwise gone undiscovered. Importantly sound cows will also benefit from management changes. Management factors contributing to lameness also relate to cow comfort, nutrition and routine husbandry. Through implementation of these changes not only do we see a reduction in herd lameness but there are also remarkable benefits affecting many areas of cattle health and production.