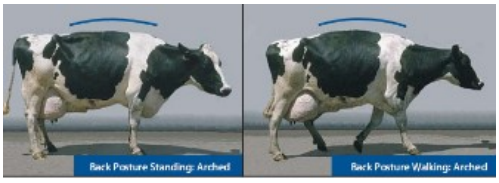
Managing Lameness

Lameness can be a major concern for many farming enterprises. Lame cows, for instance, results in substantial economic loss and poor performance. Causes of lameness can be multi factorial- poor track maintenance and design, prolong periods spent on concrete yards, stockman ship, nutrition, genetic influences and infectious agents.

Lameness scoring

Regular scoring can allow fast detection and treatment of lame cows. Sprecher et al. (1997) developed a locomotion scoring system that observes a cow's gait and stance with a focus on the cow's back posture. This relatively easy scoring system can be implemented by any producer as cows move into the dairy or around the feedlot with beef cattle.

Locomotion Score	Description	
1	Normal Stands and walks normally, all feet placed with purpose	
2	Mildly Lame Stands with a flat back, but arches when walks; gait is slightly abnormal	
3	Moderately Lame Stand and walks with an arched back; short strides with one or more legs	
4	Lame Arched back standing and walking; one or more limbs favoured but at least partially weight bearing	
5	Severely Lame Arched back; refuses to bear weight on one limb may refuse or have great difficulty moving from lying position	

(Source:Zinpro)

Preventing lameness

Poor track maintenance and yard design

Laneways

Well designed and regularly maintained laneways means faster and stress-free stock movement. Cows prefer to walk on straight, wide laneways with dry and soft surfaces with a less than 5 degree slope (to guarantee water run off).

Yards and Milking Shed

Cows have a pecking order

A shed that is poorly designed maybe the cause of normal flow of cows. Clear entrance and exists from the milking shed. Tight areas such as backing off a rotary are high stress areas for wearing feet.

Prolong periods spent on concrete yards

Even on a feed pad, ensure that the surface type doesn't cause discomfort. This will ensure cows have a comfortable lying area. If you notice area becoming excessively muddy- regularly remove slurry from alleyways. Wet hooves are likely to become soft and prone to wear (the skin between the claws macerates leaving the skin more prone to infections such as foot rot) and lameness.

Woodchip and sand are the most preferred material by many.

Stockman ship

Understanding cow behaviour and practicing good stock handling plays a big role in reducing lameness. Use positive behaviour with cows whenever possible- avoid sudden movements, yelling and banging gates. It is important to allow cows to take their time walking up lanes and not rush them .

Genetic influences

Select bulls that are structurally sound. Don't breed from cows which are lame every year

Infectious agents

Best way to control infectious diseases such as digital dermatitis and heel horn erosion is through good hygiene practices of the floors, transition areas and footbaths.

Nutrition

Supplementation of biotin and Zinc (Zn) is seen to be beneficial in prevention and correction of claw lesions as well as improve milk quality and quantity in clinically lame dairy cows (Singh et al, 2020). Supplements need to be in diet for at least 3-4 months to have an effect.

Contact us to discuss about products available to improve hoof health and reduce prevalence of lame issues on your farm.

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