Don’t just aim to prevent lameness; seek to cure it

Koos Vis for Progressive Dairyman

**AT A GLANCE**

Lameness control can be split between preventative and curative care methods. Setting up a daily protocol with a specific weekly “focus session” during milking is a way to combine both methods.

I’m sure you’ve run into lameness challenges in the past – or perhaps you’re currently facing some challenges? Or maybe they’re looming around the corner but you’re not aware of them yet. Let’s take a closer look at the different approaches and checks we need to have in place to control our lameness challenges.

We can split our approaches to lameness into two categories: preventative care and curative care. In this overview, I’ve taken a look at these two approaches and made some comments about them both. Let’s start with the one that seems to be the easiest and gives us the best return:

**Preventative hoof care**

Preventative hoof care is defined as “methods to avoid occurrence of disease (lameness).” This means there are no problems present. This scenario occurs in a perfect world, but it’s not what you usually find in your dairy herd. Even in this perfect world, factors can still be present that could, over time, develop into a lameness challenge.

Let’s consider this to milking and mastitis prevention. For example, you provide dry, bedding and pre- and post-dipping to prevent mastitis from occurring. Still, the factors that lead to mastitis are often present: possible genetic predisposition, bacteria in the barn and on the udder, etc. With these factors present, you use all the means available to minimize the chances of problems developing.

In our dairy industry today, we’ve come to a practical definition of the word “prevention”: methods to treat an existent problem in its early stages before it causes significant morbidity. Morbidity refers to the lameness state of the cow or the incidence of lameness in the herd setting. This practical definition tends to become a standard, although on a slippery slope.

If we want to get the best results and return on our investment, it’s very important we have a proper definition. Let’s draw the comparison again between mastitis treatment and lameness: Once a cow gets mastitis, it receives treatment to cure the problem and get milk back in the tank as soon as possible. Lameness is really no different, is it?

As herd manager, it is important you know your herd’s challenges and weak links and manage your operation accordingly. Examples for areas of preventative care are:

- Proper hoof trimming
- Prevention foot bathing
- Timely cleaning of barn floors

**Curative hoof care**

Curative hoof care, the second category to our approach to lameness, is defined as “seeking a cure for an existent disease or condition.” Here, our cow shows signs of a hoof defect; it is either slightly uncomfortable in gait or moderately lame, or even has a severe limp. All these animals fall into our curative care category. Is it not fair to say – when we notice other-than-normal walking behaviour – that our preventive care plan has failed or is lacking? At this stage, it’s important to understand and confirm the cause and nature of the improper gait. First, the affected animal should be examined and treated as soon as possible (just like we do for mastitis) to get the best rate of successful healing. Depending on the hoof problem, of course, a few examples of curative care are:

- A simple hoof trim to balance the claws and apply some trimming techniques to shift weight from the sore claw to the healthy claw
• Placing a wrap for an infectious problem

• Gluing a block

**Bridging prevention and cure**

As a second step, the prevention methods should be examined and improved or fine-tuned to avoid or limit new lameness cases from occurring. The question is always: Is this individual animal just prone to lameness or is the problem a potential herd issue?

I often hear the statement that footbaths are especially needed to prevent lameness, and they’re definitely a great tool to be used. But still, I would suggest the footbath method is only to be used as part of the preventative care category. And I would also encourage looking at the preventative category across a wider spectrum. A footbath on its own is never going to correct a poor stall or an improper trim.

A great weapon in the hoof care prevention arsenal is the parlour spraying method (Photo 1). The milkers set a regular time for spraying the hind hooves of all cows during milking or in the stanchion lockups. This once-weekly “focus session” maintains preventative care, concentrating at the same time on identifying potential problem animals.

Over the past few years, researchers at the University of Calgary’s faculty of veterinary medicine have been working to develop a practical way to routinely identify and treat painful digital dermatitis lesions in the milking parlour. The next challenge was to determine whether treating lesions in the parlour could be practical and effective. Their research produced very encouraging results and showed the spraying method successful in optimizing hoof health.

“But why bother to spray during milking, and what are the real benefits?” you may ask. And that would be an excellent question. Here are a few benefits:

1. **Clean and consistent** solution for all hooves in contrast with the footbath method, where the last cow gets the dirtiest solution (and that is usually your lame cow).

2. A weekly focus allows finding and detecting new lameness cases promptly, whereas a footbath protocol often lacks this focused approach.

3. Lower volume of product usage delivers a better return on investment.

Some herds use a 5-litre compressed air sprayer applicator or utilize their old teat dip system for hoof care spraying. We recently met some producers who are testing a new do-it-yourself tool to bridge the gap between preventative and curative care. They put the tool together by using a regular diaphragm pump and an air compressor. During the spraying sessions, they compile a list of animals to work on in the hoof trimming chute.

Why should we spray only the rear hooves? Concentrating on them will often suffice because hoof problems are more common in the hind legs.

So what does a protocol look like? It may run as follows:

- Monday and Tuesday – Foot-bathing method
- Wednesday – Spraying session and making a list of cows to work on
- Thursday and Friday – Treatment and trimming days (trimming, blocking, gel wrapping, re-checks, etc.)
- Monday morning – Removal of all wraps
- Start over again

As a final note, thank you to the dairy farmer who suggested this topic. I would like to say it’s rather difficult to find the right words and overall coverage for this topic. I apologize if I missed anything – perhaps your operation has different challenges.

---

**SIX REASONS WHY OUR SQUARE-CUT AUGER RESISTS SORTING:**

**REASON 3:** Our Alexander Knives, when paired with our patented Vertical Knives, create an unparalleled cutting action. The curved carbide coated cutting edge and angle of the Alexander Knives increases the aggressiveness of cut to improve the processing rate of round baled forages, especially coarser forages. Our Vertical Knives, which are mounded on our slide plate, improve processing and feedout of high-forage rations. Together with our four other exclusive auger features, we produce a faster and more uniform mix than sluggish conventional augers, which typically take too long to process forage, resulting in too many fine particles in the shaker box. Nutritionalists say if you want to resist sorting you'll need a TMR with optimum shaker box results, and with a Jaylor you can deliver that ration every time.

Learn more at www.jaylor.com/5000 or call 1.800.809.8224

**JAY-LOR** because nutrition matters.