



# Heifers' feet deserve more attention

A new Stride survey shows that ensuring heifers calve down with sound feet is rarely actively managed on most farms, despite their importance to all herds.

**H**eifers should be able to move seamlessly into the herd without compromised health and this includes having good mobility. Yet the latest Stride survey of producers that were, on average, calving more than 100 heifers a year and mainly had a replacement rate of between 25% and 30%, showed that:

- 38% of respondents never footbath their heifers before they enter the herd
- 38% never mobility score heifers
- 57% do not routinely check hooves and foot trim replacements
- Where preventative hoof health measures are employed, they only start when heifers are close to calving and enter the transition group
- Around 20% of respondents footbath heifers when housed

Analysis showed that while a proportion of producers employ a range of preventive hoof health measures, the majority of those surveyed did not manage replacements for better mobility.

## What can be done?

Given the importance of heifers to the future of the herd, it will pay producers to take all possible steps to allow them to enter the herd with the best foot health. No heifer should calf down with compromised mobility.

Research shows that for the first seven to 14 days after they enter the herd, heifers will spend more time on their feet than mature cows, partly because of the daily routine of milking and also because they are establishing their place in the pecking order and overcoming the stress of entering the herd. So they need good feet, particularly while they acclimatise to milking-herd life.

With this in mind, producers should:

- Acclimatise heifers to the milking-herd environment – cubicles and concrete. Research shows that heifers who are reared in the same environment as they will be housed in when they enter the herd perform better and are less affected by mobility issues. If cows are housed in cubicles then heifers must spend time in cubicles before they calve.
- Check feet regularly. Make it part of on-going management to lift feet every time heifers are handled, for example when vaccinated or wormed. This will allow producers to monitor foot condition and reshape feet, if required. It also gets heifers used to having their feet lifted.
- Check and foot trim all heifers when they enter the transition group
- Heifers may not have been exposed to infectious foot pathogens and are more prone to digital dermatitis and foul/foot rot (interdigital necrobacillosis). Footbathing heifers regularly when housed will reduce the risk of new infections.



Stride is the major industry-wide initiative committed to helping reduce the consequences of compromised mobility, improve productivity and reduce losses. Representing a broad range of companies involved in helping improve foot health and mobility, the partners in Stride are: Ceva, HerdVision, Hoofcount, IVC Farm Vets, Neogen, NoBacZ, Teemore Engineering and Zinpro. Stride is supported by CowManagement.

