

## INVEST TO IMPROVE

**Improving mobility is a complex challenge with numerous interactions. However there are a great many proven solutions available for investing in improving mobility on farm.**

The 2024 Stride survey showed that farmers are open to the principal of investing to improve mobility with respondents reporting investment in technologies including mobility cameras, powered crushes, automated footbaths and improvements to cubicles and passageways.

45% of respondents say they are likely to continue to invest in ways to help prevent mobility issues and to more effectively treat foot health issues, with interest in a wide range of technologies.

With funds tight on many farms, and with many demands on the farm budget, how should you determine investment priorities and plan for the best return on that investment?

Many farms approach poor cow mobility as an un-budgeted cost, only addressing problems reactively. However, reducing lameness can only be addressed by making the right long term decisions and investing in the right technology, management and building improvements to address the specific problems. Once the extent of the problem has been recorded and key causes of lameness identified, setting a budget will ensure the problem is addressed to deliver the best return on investment.

Complete this checklist to help understand the opportunities for investment in mobility management on your farm.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF	YES	NO
Do you have data on the incidence, causes and cost of compromised mobility and foot health in your herd?		
Have you set a budget for capital investment in mobility management, including staff training?		
Have you identified the priorities for investment in mobility management to deliver the best return?		
Do you regularly check the available of grants for investment in mobility management?		
Are the cubicles optimal for the cows in the herd, promoting adequate lying times?		
Is cow flow suitable to allow cows to move freely – to milking, to pasture and around the building.		
Are surfaces suitable to minimise cows slipping and keep them comfortable while standing and walking?		
Do you have the facilities to allow mobility scoring to be carried out effectively and regularly?		
Do foot trimming facilities allow cows to be handled with minimal stress and for trimming to be carried out safely?		
Do footbathing arrangements allow for regular footbathing to be carried out consistently?		
Are methods in place to record and communicate mobility issues to all involved?		

**Every question answered no represents an opportunity to improve the management of mobility, in part through investment.**

# PLANNING INVESTMENT

**Improving mobility is not a short-term fix. A sustained improvement in herd mobility requires a financial investment and time for the changes to yield results.**

The best investments offer ways to better monitor mobility to identify problems sooner before they become too serious.

And the right investments can improve the effectiveness of treatments, potentially reducing treatment cost, the use of antibiotics and the time spent in treating animals, reducing stress on both the animal and the operator.

Investment in improving mobility will take time to deliver the full benefit, so set realistic 1, 3 and 5+ year targets.

## WHERE TO INVEST

Probably the biggest question as on many farms there will be several options which means you must be methodical. It might be investing in something new or an upgrade to existing facilities.

Take guidance from your team, your vet and foot trimmer... and your cows to identify the pinchpoints and key issues. Investment opportunities can fall into three main areas.

### PREVENTION

Prevention will typically be cheaper than treatment and can help reduce chronic issues and losses. Investing in technology that makes undertaking tasks easier will ensure they become part of the routine, such as automating foot bathing or mobility scoring.

Prevention starts with the cow's environment. Do the buildings allow cows to spend less time of their feet and move around easily and freely? Are there bottlenecks which increase the risk of foot damage? Watching the cows will tell you a lot about the buildings?

If bruising and ulcers are a problem then it may pay to invest in cow comfort and the cubicles, or changing the routine to increase lying. The correct rubber flooring will help with these problems and will prevent cows from slipping.

Are infectious causes of lameness a problem? If so, then consider investing in building hygiene such as scraping including automated scrapers, wider passageways

And take a close look at tracks if cows are grazing? Will investment here bring benefits?

Footbathing is another important part of prevention and investment here can improve effectiveness and consistency of dipping.

### TREATMENT

Problems will occur and when they do they must be treated effectively. The starting point for effective treatment is investing in the team, making sure they are trained to identify and treat problems. Then consider the facilities you have to treat cows, for example the foot crush. Can cows be treated safely and effectively?

### MONITORING

Having a better understanding of the problems and ensuring early identification of issues will be vital to improving effectiveness of mobility management. How do you monitor mobility and foot health? This is an area where automation can have a big impact, for example using cameras to mobility score your cows or assessing feet as they enter the footbath, giving more frequent results and earlier identification.

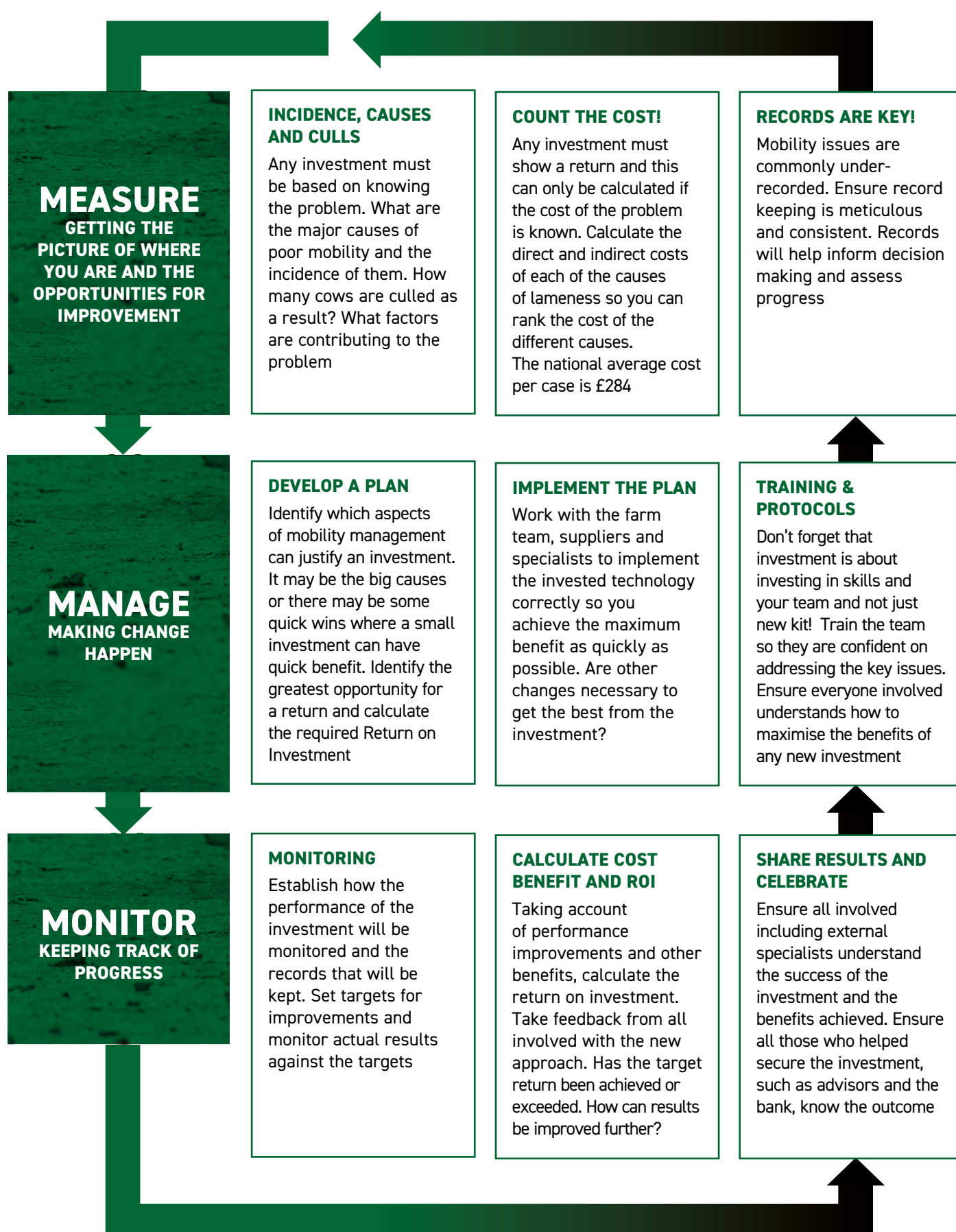
Take the time to review performance and this will help determine where investments are likely to deliver the best return and the biggest improvements.





# THE MODEL TO IMPROVE MOBILITY

Adopting a structured approach to Measure: Manage: Monitor can provide a robust framework for investment planning to achieve a sustained improvement in mobility and foot health. The diagram shows some of the factors to consider.



## MAKING IT PAY

Before committing to any investment make sure to assess the necessary improvements needed to deliver the Return on Investment (ROI) and use ROI as a criterion when deciding between investments.

Factors to consider when calculating the return include

### COSTS

- **The capital cost**  
What will the investment cost?  
Include an allowance for any costs that will be incurred during installation – changes to building layout, metalwork etc.
- **The proposed life of the investment**  
How many years will the capital cost be written off over? What is the annual capital cost? What is the lifespan of the product? Should you look for a better quality option to lengthen the life?
- **Estimated annual running costs**  
Will there be additional running costs – energy, consumables etc? Is annual or periodic maintenance required?  
Who can do this and what will it cost?

The annual capital cost plus annual running costs gives the total annual cost.

### RETURNS

The biggest returns are often “hidden”. What is the increase in production from reducing disease and keeping cows healthier on their feet? Is there a return in increased milk production, improved fertility, reductions in other diseases such as mastitis, from investments that were initially aimed at improving mobility? How much labour will be saved as a result of the investment?

The largest cost of lameness is associated with early and unplanned culls. Reducing culling for lameness may allow for increase culling for planned reasons such as to improve yields or to improve fertility performance.

Dividing the total annual returns by the annual cost will give the return on investment. One factor to consider that is hard to quantify is the impact of the investment on team morale. Will it make doing the task easier? Will it make it safer? Will it help include job satisfaction.

Returns can be calculated on an annual basis and be identified in the farm accounts, but investments can be amortised over a longer period, providing an opportunity to offset capital investments against profits. Some investments may be eligible for grants or support a R&D tax refund, so making the right investment decisions can have benefits beyond simply improving cow mobility.

Once the investment has been made use mobility records to determine the actual benefits achieved. Are reduction in cases and culling as expected? Are running costs as predicted? If performance is lower than expected, review how the investment is being used to identify any improvements.

## TOP TIPS

**1** Make sure you understand your problem! What is the level of lameness in your herd? Identify and cost the key causes of lameness in your cows?

**2** Invest in farm infrastructure that keeps cows comfortable and clean. Bedding, cubicles flooring, scraping, foot bathing cow flow and handling management are all key.

**3** Invest in technologies/ solutions that make addressing poor mobility easier. A good foot trimming crush that's convenient to operate, a reliable way of identifying immobile cows such as a camera system, and a convenient way to footbath cows. Routines become a habit if they are easy to undertake!

## CONTRIBUTORS

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