

FOCUS ON FEET TO EXPLOIT LATE-SEASON GRASS

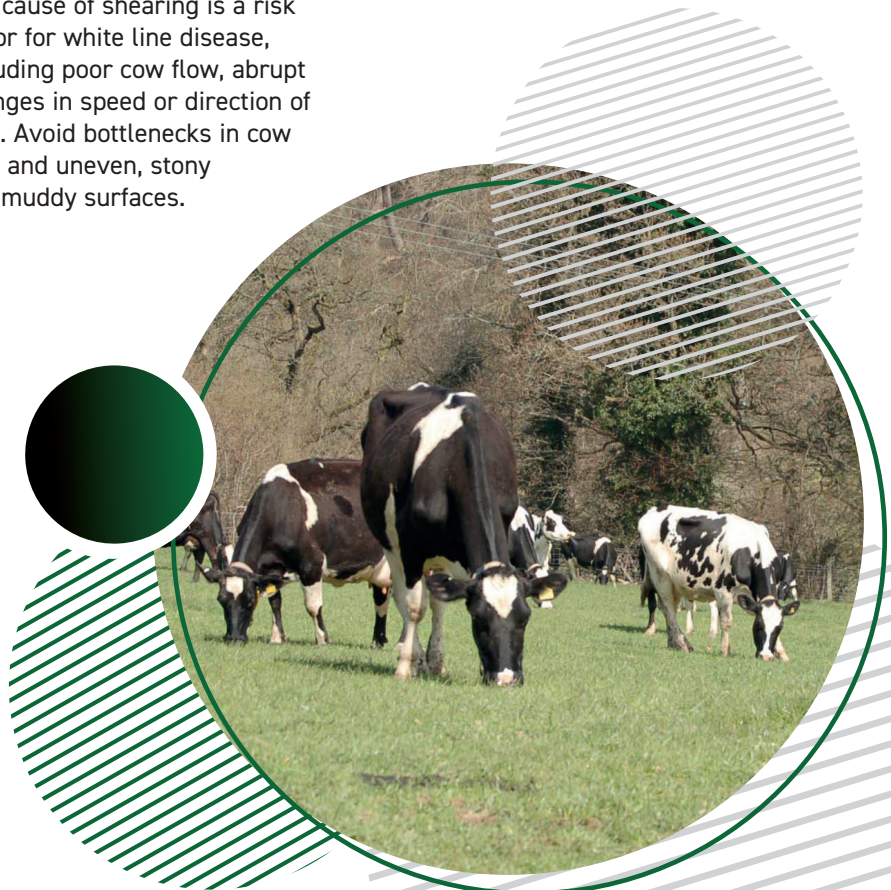
With pressure on winter forage stocks being reported in many parts of the UK, many producers are looking to keep at least some of their herd out for longer this year. Alternatively it may be possible to turn some animals out earlier in the spring to preserve stocks. It will be vital to keep a close eye on mobility if the value of extended grazing is to be fully exploited while ground conditions remain favourable.

Remember that cows will continue to face mobility challenges that need to be monitored and reacted to if they are to graze effectively and have sound feet when they are finally housed. Adopting best practice management, which will be familiar on most units, will be the foundation of making the most of late-season grass.

- Identification of cows with compromised mobility early will remain crucial because spotting problems sooner allows effective and timely treatment. Try to mobility score cows at least twice a week, and don't rely on just watching cows as they walk to and from pasture. Ideally, score cows walking on concrete for the most effective early identification. And don't just pay close attention to the cows who hang back – lame cows are not all at the back of the group.
- To help reduce sole bruising and white line disease problems, tracks need to be carefully maintained and should be as smooth and wide as possible. Minimise walking distances where possible.
- Preventative foot trimming is still essential and should prioritise freshly-calved cows and cows just before drying off.

- Continue regular foot bathing, particularly if cows are walking through poached autumn pastures. Heifers can be particularly susceptible to foul (Interdigital necrobacillosis) at this time. Ensure cows spend time on concrete after the footbath before going out to graze.
- Digital dermatitis thrives in wet, muddy conditions such as gateways, around water trough areas and on muddy tracks, particularly in high traffic areas. Consider investing in hardstanding at gateways and around water troughs, and avoid issues with water pooling by maintaining tracks.
- Any cause of shearing is a risk factor for white line disease, including poor cow flow, abrupt changes in speed or direction of flow. Avoid bottlenecks in cow flow and uneven, stony and muddy surfaces.

- Less wear on the claw compared to cows on concrete can lead to overgrown horn, long toes and increased pressure on the heel. Standing times during this period can also increase, particularly if cows are walking longer distances out to grazing, increasing bruising and sole ulcer risk. Stony tracks are another cause of sole bruising.
- Grass is not a balanced supply of the trace elements needed to support foot health, and late season grazing can be an even poorer source of minerals. Check the total diet is providing sufficient trace minerals.



FOOTBATHING CHECKLIST

The foundation of effective prevention is taking all steps to keep cows' feet clean. Make footbathing a central pillar of infectious lesion prevention.

Footbathing should be easy to do and part of the daily routine. Putting cows through a carefully formulated and balanced footbath solution can deliver three important benefits.

- ✓ It will help keep feet cleaner by removing soiling.
- ✓ It will disinfect the hooves and reduce pathogen load.
- ✓ Skin conditioners will help promote better condition of the soft tissues in the hoof.

Remember footbathing should be a routine preventative measure, keeping cows' feet clean and reducing pathogen load - it is not a treatment for existing lesions.

To ensure footbathing reduces new infection rates and the spread of bacteria, the most important thing to put in a footbath is all of the feet of all the cows in the herd, so the emphasis should be to make footbathing as time efficient and unobtrusive as possible.

- Install a correctly sized footbath to allow each foot to be immersed twice as cows pass through it.
- Make sure the footbath is well sited so that cow flow is not impeded.
- Make someone responsible for managing the footbath, replenishing the solution regularly etc.

- Have clear protocols for footbathing - which cows and when.
- Make sure the footbath solution is at the correct concentration, depth and replenished as required. If the solution is not at the correct concentration it will be less effective.
- The depth of the foot bath should be sufficient so that the soft tissue of the heels and coronary band are submerged as the cow passes.
- Clean the foot bath regularly to remove slurry and soiling. An automated footbath will ensure the solution is always clean and at the optimum concentration.



HEIFERS' FEET DESERVE MORE ATTENTION

Heifers are the future of the business, represent the best genetics and milk production potential, and cost around £2000 to rear to first calving. Yet a new Stride survey shows that ensuring heifers calve down with sound feet is not something that is managed on most farms.

The priority should be heifers able to move seamlessly into the herd and this includes having good mobility, yet the new survey, where farms were on average calving more than 100 heifers a year and mainly had a replacement rate of 25-30%, showed that:

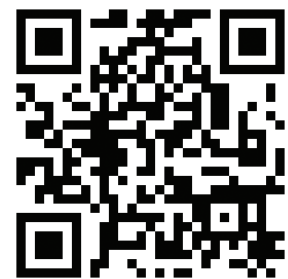
- 38% of respondents never footbath their heifers before they enter the herd
- 38% never mobility score heifers
- 57% do not routinely check hooves and foot trim replacements

- 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.

Given the investment in heifers and their importance to the future of the herd, it will pay to take all steps to allow them to enter the herd with the best possible foot health and mobility. The time taken and cost will be small compared to the value of the heifer.

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