



The UK Dairy  
Mobility Initiative



# THE 2026 STRIDE REPORT

## BARRIERS TO IMPROVING MOBILITY

# SUMMARY

## Welcome to the 2026 Stride Report: Barriers to improving mobility

Stride is the UK's only national mobility and foot health survey, designed to monitor and assess these conditions in the UK dairy herd. This is the second survey Stride has carried out for the industry and builds on the findings of the 2024 survey. The results will hopefully shape understanding of the issues and guide the industry in its efforts to improve dairy cow mobility.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Compromised mobility remains an issue affecting all UK dairy farms to varying degrees. It is known to impact on many areas influencing profitability including yield, fertility, feed efficiency and longevity. It has important implications for welfare and public perceptions. Levels of poor mobility have been largely unchanged for over 20 years despite advances in knowledge and technologies to help manage and reduce the problems.
- 30% of respondents say compromised mobility and foot health are a significant or very significant issue and 90% reported that profitability was affected - but the cost per case is under-estimated by a large proportion of survey respondents. Compromised mobility also remains a major contributor to cow culling.
- There is a good level of understanding of the key management actions that can help reduce the incidence of foot problems and then treat conditions including foot bathing, mobility scoring, foot trimming, pain relief, building design and environment and breeding. However, there is a variable uptake of these approaches with a tendency towards management being reactive and treatment driven as opposed to the preferable proactive and preventative approaches.
- Farmers continue to invest in technologies to help improve foot health management although this is being moderated by dairy farm profitability and government policies.
- While foot health in the milking herd is subject to a degree of routine management, heifers and youngstock continue to be largely overlooked
- Foot health and mobility management are seen as a top priority problem by 32% of respondents while 54% identified it as a significant priority. However, other areas of management such as reducing mastitis, improving fertility, nutrition and transition management are seen as equally or more important leading to pressures on time, resources and investment. For many other priority areas the impact and direct financial losses are more apparent and more easily quantified.
- Farmers who identify mobility issues as a top issue are more proactive in terms of the use of all core management approaches and have increased the incidence of preventative measures.
- The survey identified core barriers to improving mobility and availability of time was the overwhelmingly biggest barrier. Having other higher priorities can lead to time being diverted away from foot health.
- Skills development, training and refresher training were identified as another barrier.
- Farmers are continuing to invest to improve mobility and foot health, whether technologies and equipment or training and skills development
- Improving mobility is not and must not be seen as just a producer problem. Advisors, vets, communicators, milk processors, industry associations, product suppliers need to be more proactive in supporting dairy farmers.

To stay in touch with Stride and its development, or to get involved with the initiative, [click here](#) to visit the website.

# INTRODUCTION

The Stride Technical board are delighted to present the results and conclusions from our 2026 National Dairy Mobility Survey. Two years ago, we published the results from the first Stride survey, which showed the care dairy farmers have for their cows, but highlighted that poor mobility was not only a significant problem, but a challenge that was not reducing. Producers wanted to know more about the costs of the problem - and responsibility for addressing mobility lay with many on the team, rather than a focused responsibility for an individual.

Recognising these challenges, the results from the 2026 survey are vital to helping the whole industry understand how we can better work together to reduce the financial and health impacts of this debilitating disease. Producers, advisors and commercial companies all have a part to play. And while other issues, such as the weather or milk price are out of our control, with a sustained and collaborative approach, improving the mobility of the UK dairy cows is a goal we can achieve. Let's Stride together to improve herd mobility!

# THE RESULTS

The inaugural Stride national dairy mobility survey was run in 2024 with the goal of building a picture of mobility and how it is managed across the UK.

The aim was to better understand the situation on farm, to identify pinch-points and improvement opportunities. The results were published in the 2024 Stride Report and have been used to shape improved mobility on many farms and help bring a new focus to foot health management across the sector.

The 2026 survey which was commissioned to build on the findings of the first survey and extend understanding of mobility challenges was devised by veterinary and mobility advisors from the Stride Technical Board and ran from February - April. The Technical Board reviewed the conclusions and the key findings are presented in this report.

## SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The Stride survey remains the largest survey of dairy cow mobility and foot health carried out in the UK. The demographics show a good correlation between the two surveys, supporting comparisons between the two surveys and helping to identify where changes have occurred.



## WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS







| 2026 SURVEY                                         |        |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Number of businesses in the sample                  | 173    |
| Approximate total number of cows                    | 55,000 |
| Approximate average herd size                       | 318    |
| Herds with fewer than 100 cows                      | 13%    |
| Herds with greater than 1000 cows                   | 2%     |
| Average yield per cow (L)                           | 8530   |
| Proportion of sample that is all year-round calving | 57%    |
| Proportion of sample businesses that do not graze   | 19%    |

# COMPROMISED MOBILITY AND FOOT HEALTH IS STILL A PROBLEM

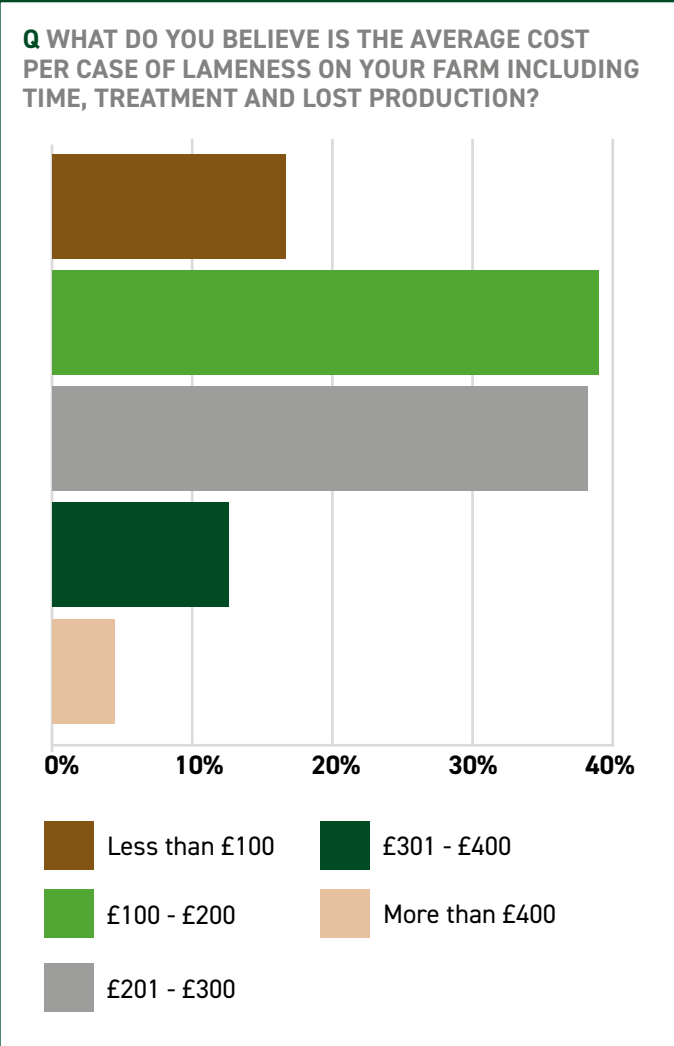
The survey results confirm that reduced mobility and foot health issues still blight the dairy industry, impacting productivity, financial returns and welfare of both animals and the farm team.

When asked how significant the issue was, 30% defined it as significant/very significant which is an increase on the 2024 survey. The majority of surveyed farmers believe that while foot health remains an issue, the significance varies between farms. This variability in the significance of the problem is also reflected in the responses to the question asking if profitability is affected. While 90% of respondents believe profitability is affected, 80% of the survey said the impact was small.

With the level of immobility changing little over the last 20 years, there may be an element of resignation to the problem, especially in older farmers. Younger respondents tended to see mobility as a more significant issue with a bigger impact on profitability.

The survey asked respondents to estimate the average cost of a case of lameness including time, treatment and lost production and the results suggested that the true cost is largely underestimated leading to an underestimation of the full cost and impact of the issue.

Around 50% of respondents believed that the cost was less than £200/case with 16% stating the cost was less than £100/case.



Around 34% of respondents put the cost at £200-300, meaning overall that respondents believe the cost per case in most instances is less than the AHDB calculated figure of £330/case. The tendency to under-estimate the cost was greatest in smaller herds and among younger respondents.

With average annual incidence of mobility issues around 30% of cows across the UK national herd and at an average of £330/case, the annual cost of compromised mobility to the 318-cow average herd in the survey would be in excess of £31,000. It is possible the underestimation of the cost per case in part explains how significant the problem of poor mobility is considered to be. Add in the unique environment of dairy farming in the UK (climate, variable infrastructure and production systems) which produces a challenging environment for consistently good mobility and it is clear that UK producers need to take a 'long view' for improved herd mobility.

Lameness is attached to fertility, health and milk yield, all the traits that make a farm profitable.

Lameness remains a major reason for culling cows with over 60% of respondents saying it's a top three cause of culling, while a further 28% identify it as important if there is another reason to cull. It is clear that lameness is contributing to involuntary culls and lost future potential, while potentially increasing replacement rearing costs.

When asked specifically about reducing the incidence of compromised mobility and foot issues, the results show an increase in the number of respondents who believe it would be easy to improve levels on mobility, 23% compared to 17% in 2024. The number who will say it will be difficult is unchanged at 23%.

Overall, there is a general confidence in the survey respondents that mobility issues can be addressed. But looking specifically at reducing lameness in the next two years, only 42% believe levels will reduce compared to 47.5% in 2024. This declining percentage of farmers who believe that they can bring about an improvement in levels of lameness in their herd presents a great opportunity for those who support herd mobility at farm level, vets, consultants and foot trimmer, to get more involved.

Respondents remain confident that they have the knowledge to implement actions to reduce mobility issues. Three quarters of respondents stated they were reasonably confident while 17.5% were fully confident. Larger herds tend to be more confident.

This demonstrates that survey respondents are caught between knowing how to reduce immobility and delivering this at herd level, indicating a conflict between perceived knowledge, intention and action. Underestimating the cost of the problem is compounding this inactivity! So what is causing this conundrum?

# WHAT ACTIONS ARE BEING TAKEN?

The survey demonstrates a wide appreciation of the key component parts of an effective mobility and foot health improvement programme – mobility scoring, foot bathing, foot trimming and pain relief, building design and breeding.

Mobility remains at the fore front of my mind. I hate seeing lame cows and work very hard to keep it to an absolute minimum

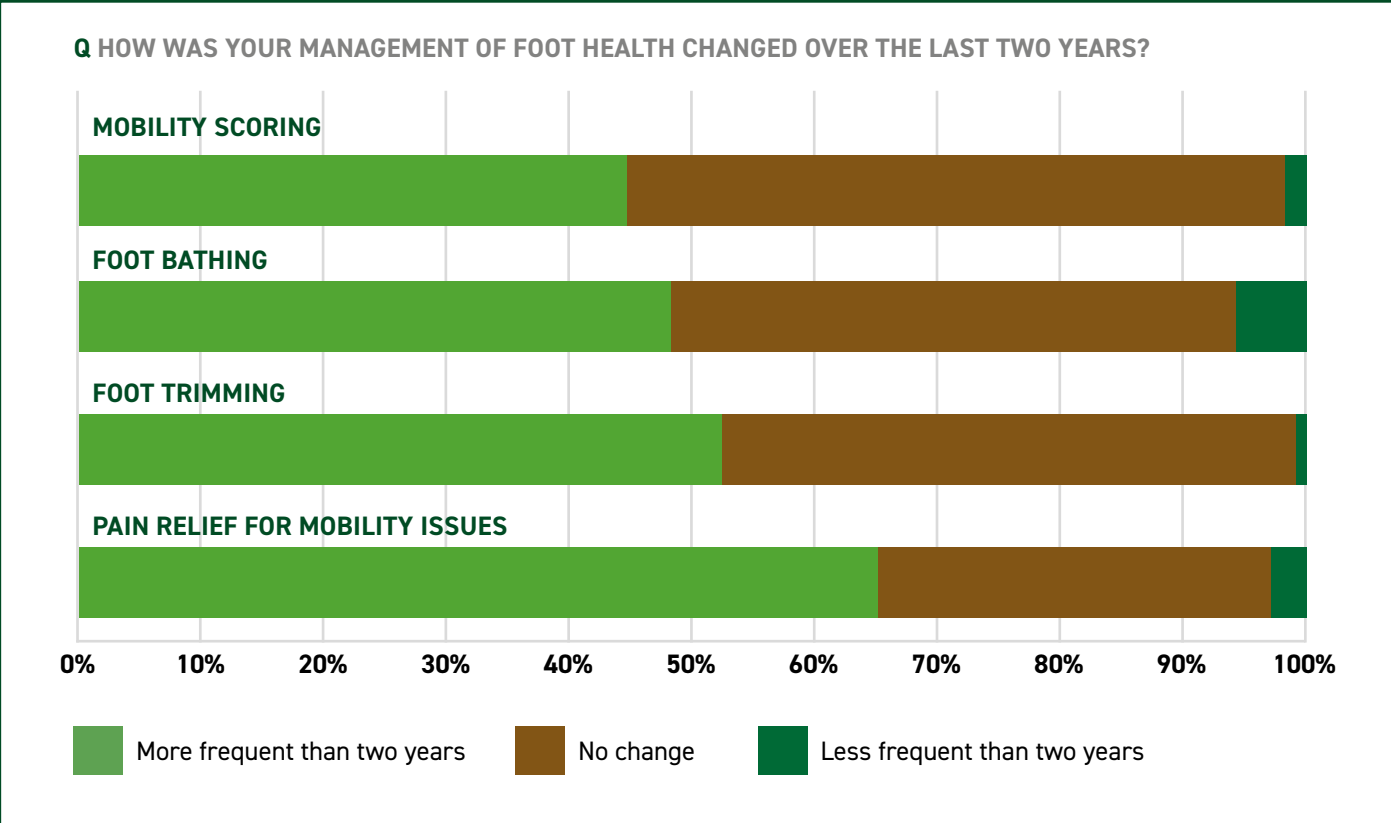
The survey showed that farmers are prepared to invest in mobility management:

- ✓ nearly 60% have a dedicated foot trimming crush and 40% have a powered foot trimming crush.
- ✓ 80% have a permanent or mobile footbath.
- ✓ 37% have an automated footbath.
- ✓ 11% have a mobility scoring camera system, up from 4% in 2024.

When asked how management of foot health has changed since the 2024 survey, there is generally an increased focus on improving management of mobility which is a positive development. The overwhelming picture from the responses is that cows are being mobility scored, foot bathed and foot trimmed at least as regularly as two years ago with the frequency increasing on many farms.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable increase in the use of pain relief including Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) in part possibly a response in the need to reduce antibiotic use, which are still being widely prescribed. 72% of respondents are using spray or topical antibiotics while 68% use injectable antibiotics suggesting that antibiotic use is still seen as an important method of treatment.

What these numbers do not show is the level of adequacy of prevention and treatment strategies being regularly used. It appears that despite the increasing adoption of strategies that help improve mobility, the potential impact of these interventions is not significantly impacting overall levels of mobility and as a result is not producing a significant reduction in lameness. A striking finding is the disparity between frequency of management interventions between milking cows, dry cows and youngstock.



# MOBILITY SCORING

Mobility scoring is not just a statutory audit tool. It must be seen as a method for identification of lame animals and allows the quantum of the problem to be assessed and monitored, allowing timely and appropriate herd level intervention.

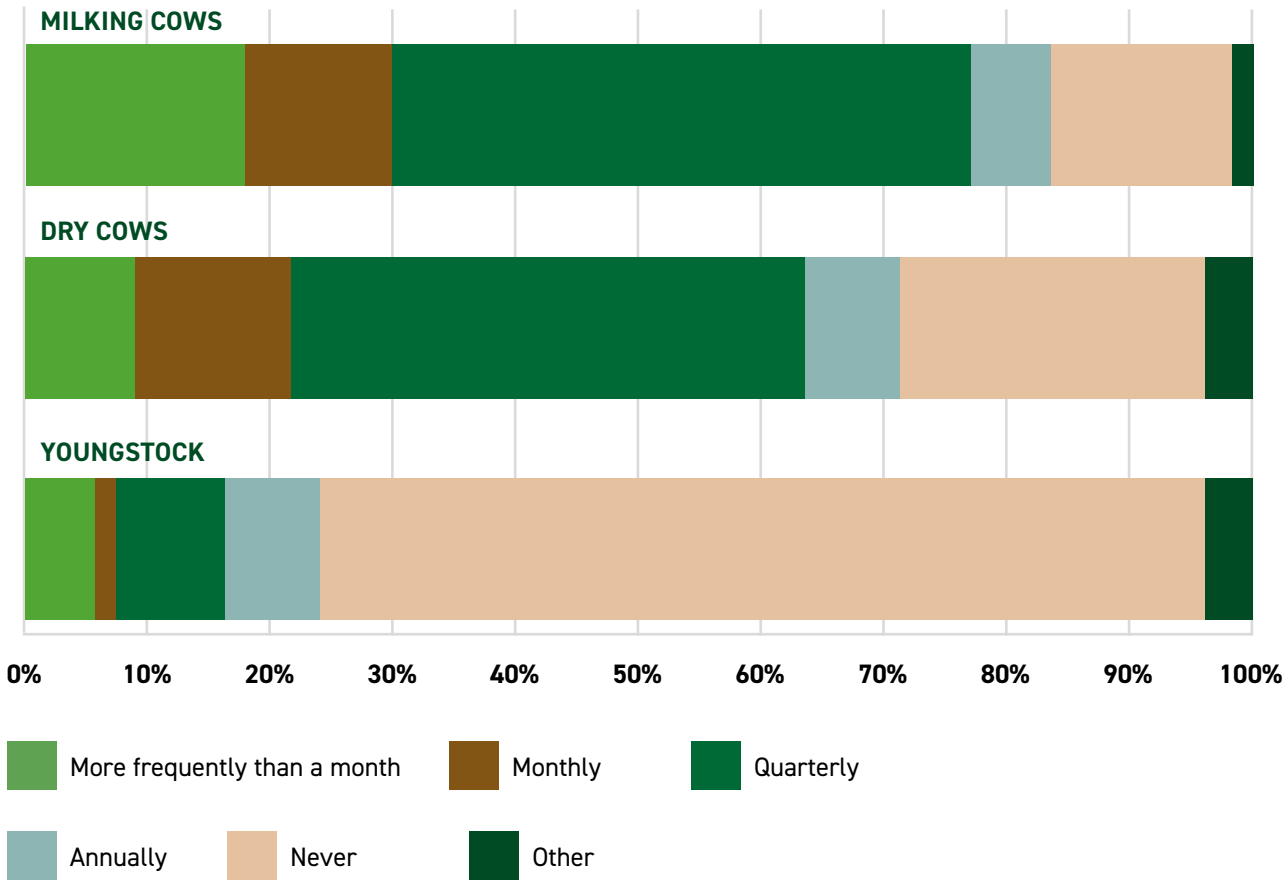
Milking cows are mobility scored more frequently than dry stock and youngstock with nearly 30% scored at least monthly and approaching 50% scored every quarter. Several respondents commented that cows are scored by the people milking the cows as they enter the parlour, but this is generally not considered as the most effective or best practice way to assess mobility, suggesting results obtained in this way may be misleading.

In 26% of cases cows are always scored by people on the farm, but the majority of farmers also use a third party including their vet, foot trimmer or a Register of Mobility Scorers (RoMS) scorer to support farm team mobility scoring. The data did not indicate whether these third parties were also providing advice or services to help reduce lameness or whether they were simply involved in the audit of mobility.

The survey did not ask the question as to 'why cows are being scored?'. Is it as a core part of planned preventative management allowing early intervention and the identification of trends and root causes? Or is it carried out solely to meet the requirements of milk buyers or farm assurance? To deliver the full and sustained benefits, mobility scoring must be used as a proactive tool to support early diagnosis and prioritise prevention measures. This will be addressed in the next survey.

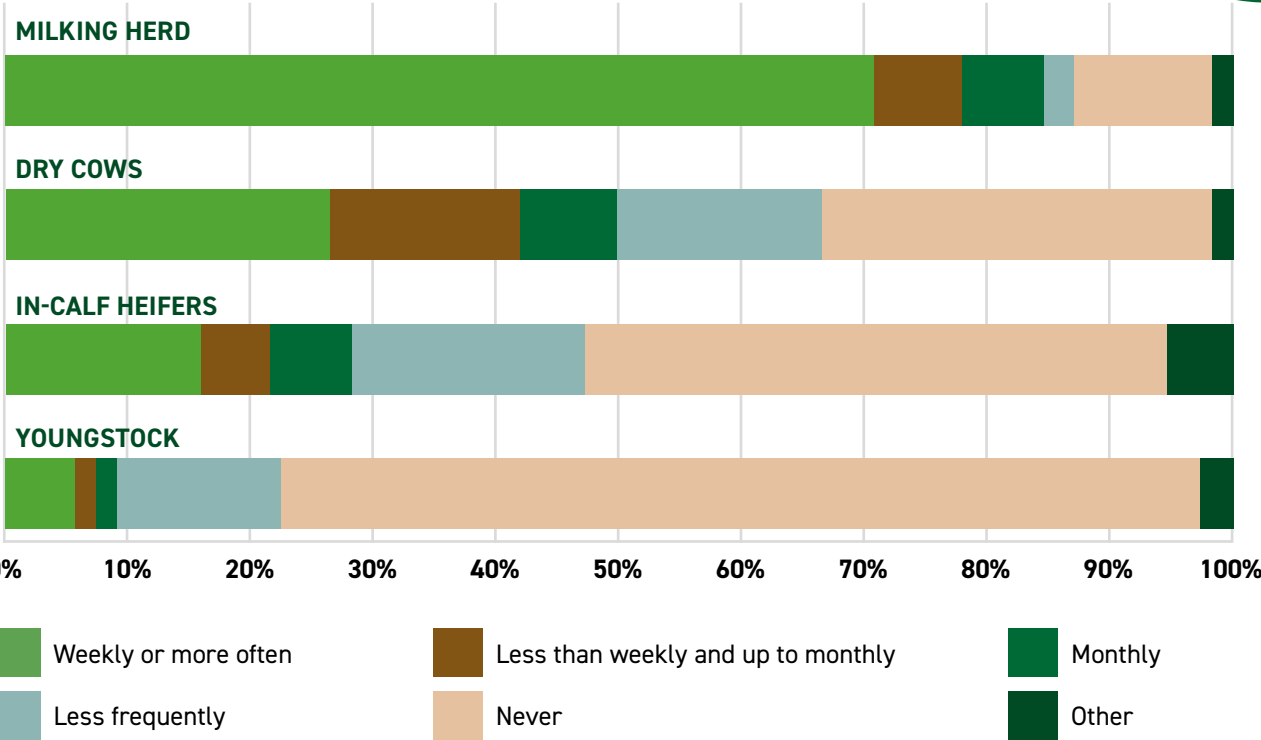
The frequency of scoring dry cows is lower with 62% scored quarterly or more frequently, while over 20% of dry cows are never scored. Furthermore 80% of youngstock are never mobility scored before entering the herd.

Q WHICH ANIMALS ON YOUR FARM ARE MOBILITY SCORED AND HOW FREQUENTLY?



# FOOTBATHING

Q TELL US ABOUT HOW OFTEN YOU FOOTBATH ANIMALS?



To deliver maximum benefit, footbathing should be a routine measure supporting foot hygiene and not carried out reactively to treat an outbreak of infectious foot disease.

The survey showed milking cows, in general, are footbathed regularly with nearly threequarters of respondents footbathing cows weekly or more often. However, around 10% of milking cows are never footbathed.

The frequency falls markedly when cows are dry with only around 25% being footbathed weekly and 30% never being footbathed.

With in-calf heifers the proportion never being footbathed increases to over 40% while over 70% of youngstock are not footbathed.

Footbathing has traditionally been seen as a treatment of infectious foot conditions. But there is strong evidence that foot hygiene and infectious foot problems are reduced where routine footbathing is employed as a preventative measure.

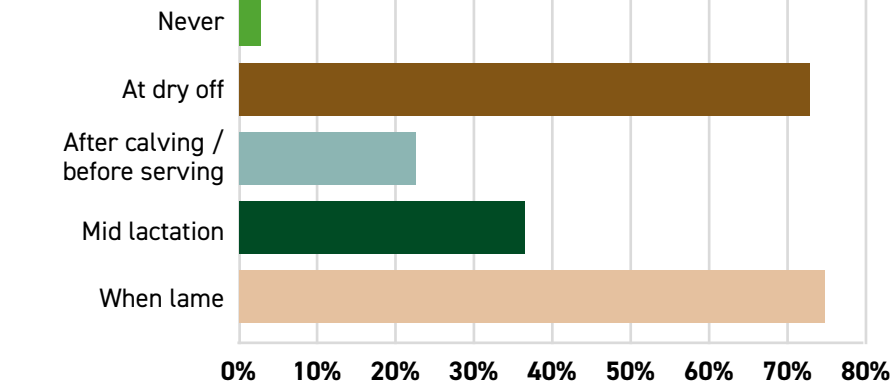
# FOOT TRIMMING

The survey showed a range in when cows are routinely trimmed with the key time for trimming identified as drying off, when over 75% of cows are trimmed.

Significantly, a similar number of cows will only be trimmed when actually identified as lame. This suggests that routine preventative trimming may not be widely practiced as a way to maintain and improve foot health

Looking at in-calf heifers, trimming appears to only be carried out to treat cases of lameness. 52% of in-calf heifers are trimmed when lame, while 43% are never trimmed.

Q WHEN DO YOU TRIM THE FEET OF YOUR MILKING HERD?



# PAIN RELIEF/NSAIDS

Foot conditions are painful, posing a welfare issue but can be mitigated by early diagnosis and prompt effective treatment (EDPET). A third of respondents say they use pain relief with all lame cows, but the survey did not identify how lame cows are defined or when and how pain relief intervention is used.

When asked about specific levels of lameness, 60% of farmers responded that some or all score 3 cows will receive NSAIDS, while the figure for score 2 cows was 33%. With good evidence of the benefits of pain relief in speeding up return to health and mitigating the effects of production losses, these results may suggest there is an opportunity to positively impact immobility through a greater use of pain relief in lame cows.

Lameness has a significant impact on the welfare of the cow and pain relief deserves greater attention by producers. A better understanding on how cows are selected for pain relief, the severity of cases before treatment is administered, the chronicity, yield or stage of lactation when treatments are focused would be beneficial.

There will always be cows going lame, but I believe the earlier you identify them and treat them the quicker they recover and have less financial impact on the business

# BARRIERS TO IMPROVEMENT

The data suggest that there is potential to increase the rigour of hoof and mobility management in the UK, with the focus shifting from treatment to prevention. Farmers are confident they know what to do, many have invested significantly in technologies to improve mobility management with a constant stream of new developments available. But what are the barriers to adopting products and strategies that improve mobility management?

Mobility and foot health is just one of the challenges facing dairy farmers. The survey sought to understand where mobility ranked against other priorities.

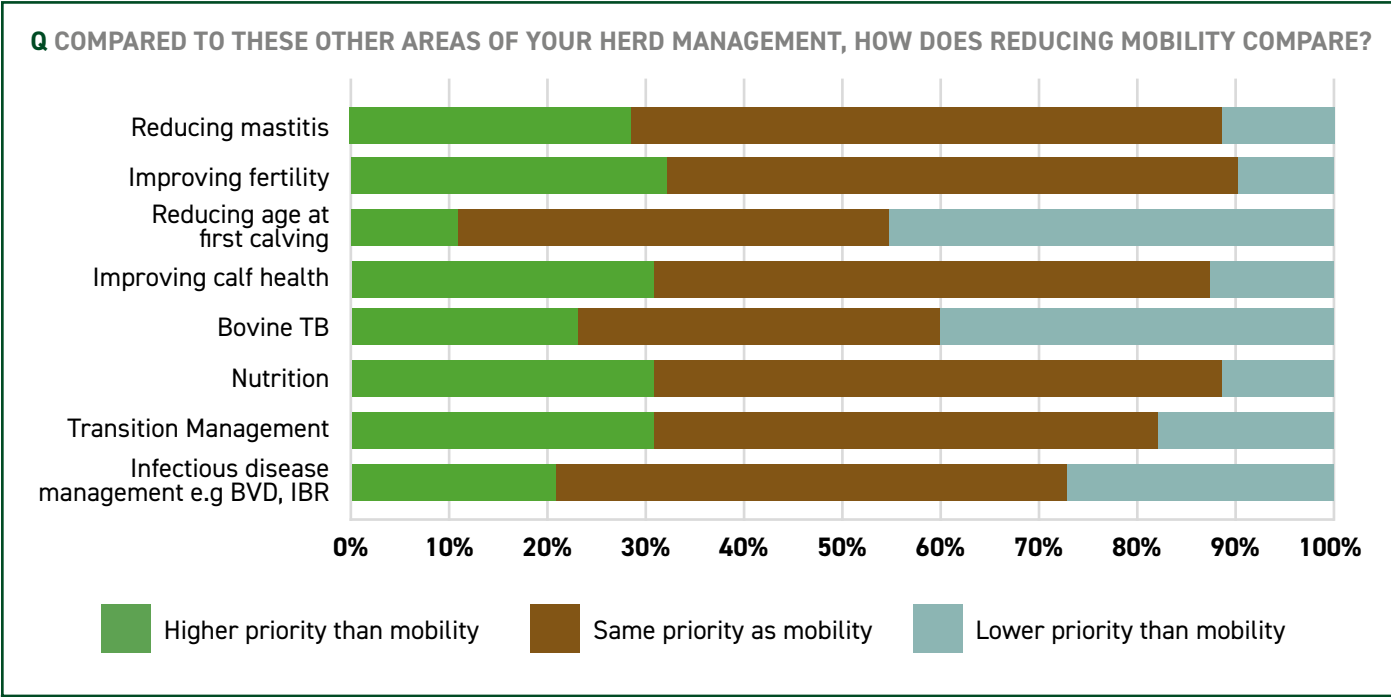
When asked to ascribe a priority to improving mobility, 32% of respondents said it was a top priority while 54% said it was a significant priority. These indicate that respondents want to improve mobility, seeing it as important to their business. But when asked to compare mobility to other management areas, a complex picture emerged.

Improving mobility was seen as a significant or top priority by the vast majority of respondents, particularly among larger herds and older respondents.

On all farms many other management areas were seen as higher priorities. These include reducing mastitis, improving fertility, nutrition and transition management.

Farmers are faced with many competing priorities for time and investment. And while the problem may be identified as significant, the relative priority may be lower than other areas perceived to yield a higher return on investment, have a bigger impact on overall farm profitability or easier to address in the short term.

This may, in part be related to the underestimation of the true cost of mobility issues. The impact of mastitis and reduced fertility on costs and productivity are perhaps more tangible than the often indirect losses associated with poor foot health. Similarly, the consequences of poor diet performance are very visible. The financial consequences of direct losses are easier to observe and calculate than unmet gains. With levels of lameness being consistent for two decades, the industry may have become accustomed to the losses and the chronicity of the problem making it hard for farms to benchmark and understand what could realistically be achieved.



# WHEN MOBILITY IS A TOP PRIORITY

Do attitudes and approaches differ when farmers identify mobility improvement as their top priority? Looking at the results for the 32% who said it was a top priority showed the following:

- ✓ They tend to be **bigger, higher yielding herds**
- ✓ They identify mobility as a **significant or very significant problem** which probably drives the priority rating
- ✓ They identify mobility issues as having an **impact on production and profitability**, although they are no less likely to underestimate the cost per case
- ✓ They have a **high degree of confidence** that they can address the issue
- ✓ They are more **proactive** in terms of management
- ✓ However, they **do not apply more preventative measures to heifers and youngstock** than the average respondent
- ✓ They are **optimistic** that they can **reduce lameness over the next two years**
- ✓ They see **skills development as a bigger incentive to improve** than a financial incentive from milk buyers
- ✓ Having **enough time and access to external skills and support** are seen as major barriers to improvement
- ✓ **Over the last two years they have increased the frequency of key preventative measures** more than the average respondent
- ✓ They have **invested more in technologies and cow comfort**, and more/better training and will continue to invest
- ✓ **Access to skills development, better data and grant funding** will all help increase the focus on mobility

- ✓ More of them **trim cows at drying off, after calving/before service and in mid-lactation** indicating a higher uptake of preventative trimming
- ✓ **80% footbath cows more often than weekly and footbath dry cows more often** than other respondents
- ✓ Mobility milking and dry cows **more frequently**
- ✓ Are slightly **more likely to use NSAIDs**
- ✓ Are more likely to **cull for lameness**



The survey then tried to understand what incentives would contribute to making mobility a higher priority. External influences were a key driver of change, with 46% of respondents stating that milk buyer and consumer pressure or unannounced audits would encourage them to make mobility a higher priority.

A financial incentive was seen as something that would encourage a greater focus on mobility, with over 40% of respondents identifying it as a factor. This was seen as more important by older respondents. It is debatable whether there is any interest among milk buyers to incentivise mobility improvement in a challenging milk market.

Against these external factors, there were also factors closer to 'the farm' that might change the priority given to mobility, including team satisfaction, increased investment in skills and making more time to address the problem.

Increasing industry pressure and priority fatigue can influence producers focus. However, the report showed that despite these challenges dairy farmers have a real care for cow health and concern about the impact of poor mobility on their welfare. Anecdotal comments supported the view that most farmers want more help from across the industry to improve levels of lameness on their farms.

Creating a culture within the team where they are allowed to time to trim cows. Training of the team is on-going. Creating a 'see it sort it' culture, where a lame cow is dealt with as soon as she is seen. It is bigger than just trimming feet - it's about the culture within the team.

## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

When respondents were asked to identify the specific reasons that limit the opportunities to further improve mobility. Lack of time was the overwhelming reason, cited by nearly 70% of farmers completing the survey, while 15% mentioned having higher priorities, effectively taking time and resource away from mobility management.

The priority of making more time to support mobility efforts reduces with herd size, probably a reflection of the size and skills of the team available. A clear allocation of responsibilities was less of a priority in smaller herds, supporting a key conclusion from the 2024 Stride survey which showed that 'making time for mobility management' was more important in larger herds.

Strikingly there were a range of reasons which can be categorised as skills availability. These included insufficient skills in the farm team, which implies a lack of training provision or access to training. Skills availability was a particular issue with the under 25 group in the survey.

The access to and availability of foot trimmers and other practical support were also highlighted, although whether this is actual access or knowing who, what and how to access support is unclear.

Asked to identify the biggest single barrier to accelerating improvements in mobility and foot health, time, skills availability and lack of incentives were significant responses. The younger age group were more likely to identify training and skills development as inhibiting mobility improvement in their herd.

Interestingly, over 10% of respondents challenged the Return on Investment (ROI) of improvement mobility – asking if the returns justify the costs? This could relate to the responses that the cost of mobility cases appears to be being under-estimated. At the same time, some respondents identified a lack of confidence that measures will really work. These indicate a potential industry failing to clearly communicate the costs of poor mobility and the impact that lameness has on profitability.

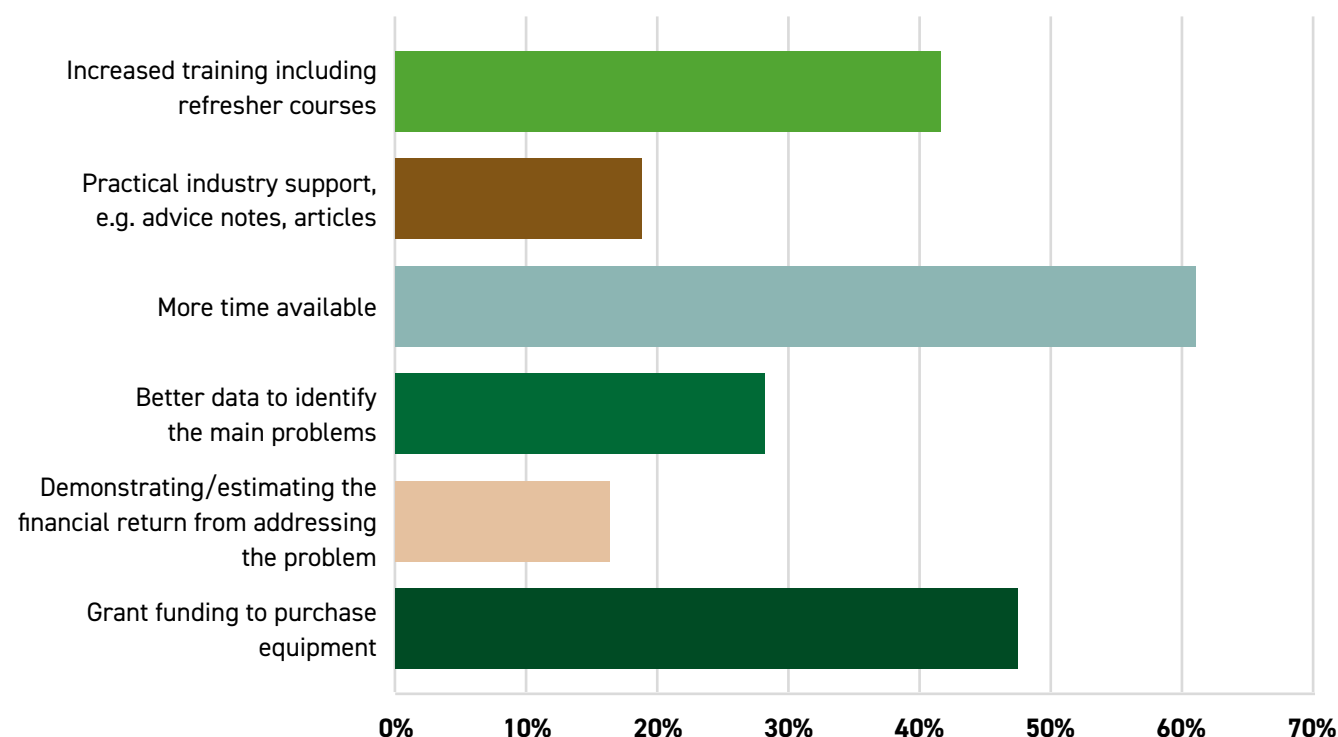
What is clear is that if many of the barriers identified can be reduced or negated then the rate of mobility improvement could be increased, which is a challenge to the whole industry. The emphasis must be on practical support at individual farm level to identify tangible barriers and develop workable, measurable approaches with clear benchmarks. The survey identified specific help that farmers would value.

### Investment

The survey highlights that farmers are continuing to invest in ways to improve mobility and foot health. This is not limited to buying new technologies and increasing equipment, but also includes increasing skills development in the farm team.

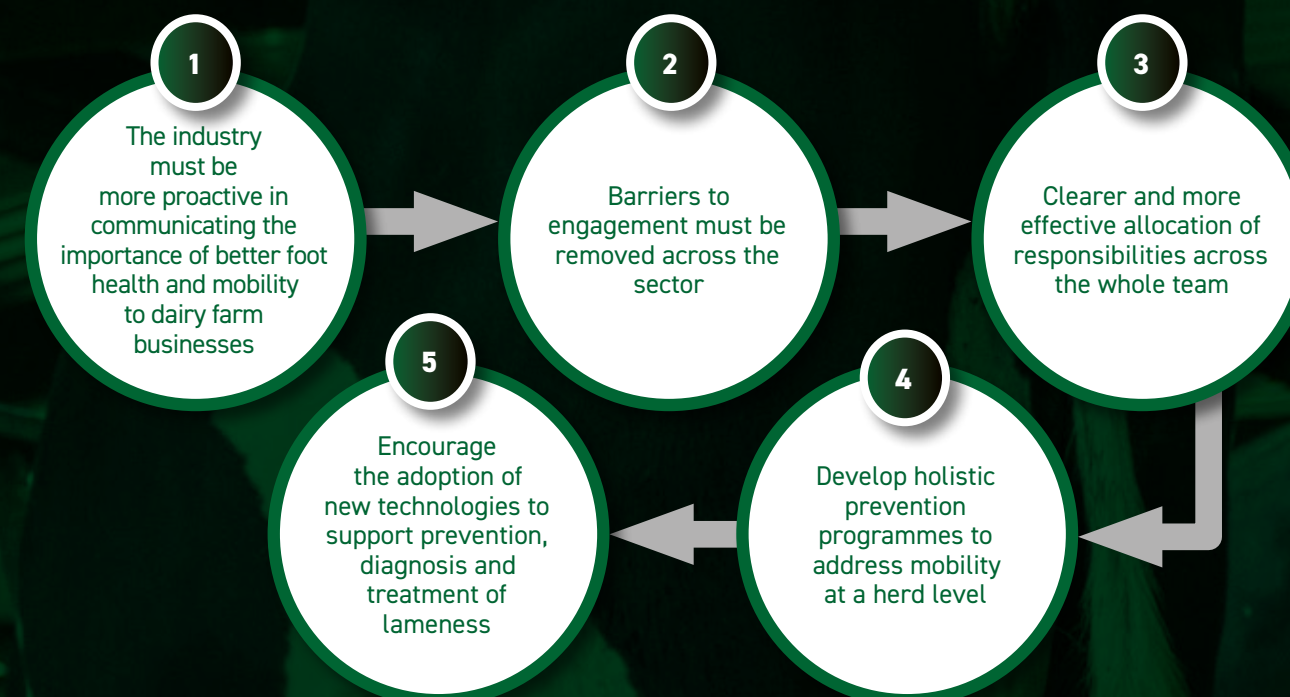
Around one third of respondents said they would be increasing investment, while only 13% said they would be reducing investment in mobility. The biggest reason given for reducing investment was the poor profitability levels in dairying farming, while Inheritance Tax changes are also causing respondents to rethink plans.

### Q WHAT WOULD HELP YOU PRACTICALLY TO IMPROVE MOBILITY?



## WHAT DOES THE SURVEY SUGGEST SHOULD BE THE FUTURE FOCUS?

Following the 2024 survey, Stride made a series of five recommendations to drive continued improvement in mobility in UK dairy herd:



The 2026 survey confirms that addressing mobility in dairy herds is still a challenge for almost all producers, with little change in levels of lameness reported. This suggests that different approaches will be needed to derive more from existing resources. For example, how can the emphasis be shifted to make routine mobility scoring more effective in reducing lameness? Do farmers have the right support?

The true cost of compromised mobility is still underestimated. The wider industry has a responsibility to support the farm with believable and genuine impacts. Benchmarking farms against peers can help...but farmers benchmarking against themselves is crucial. There needs to be a clear appreciation of the true cost of lameness and the ROI from investments in prevention measures.

Significant barriers to improvement still exist but can be overcome. However, it is important to appreciate that we can't eat the elephant at one sitting. Setting SMART targets-Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time limited – will help ensure that incremental progress is made.

This is not just a producer problem. They need help and support, and the industry needs to take the lead. Advisors, communicators, milk processors, industry associations and product suppliers need to be more proactive in supporting dairy farmers with the challenge of poor mobility.

There must be a concerted push to turn knowledge into action based on lifelong education, an increased focus in colleges, better support services and easier access to information with clear messaging. Should mobility education become mandatory for anyone working with dairy cows?

The wider consequences, not just financial impacts, of poor mobility are not well understood by producers and across the whole industry.

Understanding the non-financial cost of the disease is important but is often overlooked. There needs to be much clearer demonstration of the value of preventative schemes.

The focus must be on prevention over cure and avoiding a reactive approach. Proactive strategies such as foot bathing, trimming, automated detection, advisor support on herd management should all be adopted before the cow goes lame. Early diagnosis is fundamental and must be the mantra, allowing for prompt, effective treatment as soon as possible to minimise the consequential losses. Identifying problems quickly with the increased use of data and technologies will underpin progress in early detection and identifying the root causes of problems. Then, treating early with pain relief and any necessary trimming and blocking will help mitigate losses and hasten return to health.

Producers must have easy access to skills, training and resources. They must know where to turn for support and then be confident in the quality of the support services available.

Finally, there must be increased communication of benefits of good mobility in dairy herds and improved delivery of information and guidance to deliver best practice at farm level.

There is no silver bullet to improving dairy cow mobility, but by better understanding how existing and new management strategies can help - and then implementing them in a structured way backed by competent, trained support, producers have the opportunity to reduce all the consequences of compromised mobility.

Stride will continue to be at the forefront of encouraging the industry to pull together in delivering practical solutions to benefit cows and all those who work with them.



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