



Scheme takes first step to improve herd mobility

A new initiative is focused on improving dairy-cow mobility – and it needs producers’ help. Find out more about why you should get involved and how.

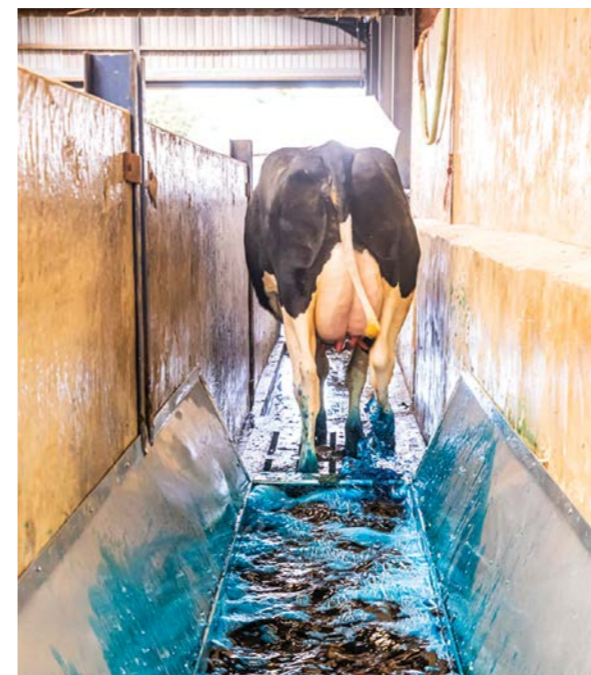
TEXT PHIL EADES

Lameness remains a major challenge facing producers, impacting cow fertility, productivity, welfare and sustainability. Improving mobility positively impacts herd health and welfare, as well as staff morale, and it’s key to maintaining and increasing productivity and sustainability. That’s why five industry organisations have joined forces to set up the Stride initiative. Its objectives are to identify producers’ views on mobility and its impact on their herds. Stride will use this information to inform the wider industry of the key issues affecting hoof health, identifying clear actions that will help producers take steps to mitigate lameness, and reducing the costs and consequences of poor mobility. The group says its top priority will be to signpost producers to practical actions that can be implemented on farm, highlighting new products and services that identify, treat and prevent lameness in cows. “Stride is committed long-term to supporting the industry, to help monitor and demonstrate the

progress in cow mobility, and will support all industry initiatives that target a sustainably low level of lameness in the national herd,” says Paul Horwood, from IVC Farm Vets, one of the partners in the project. Stride is being co-ordinated and directed by five commercial partners – Ceva, HerdVision, IVC Farm Vets, Neogen and Zinpro – in association with CowManagement magazine. Several other industry organisations are also supporting the initiative.

Endemic problem

Lameness is an endemic problem and levels remain stubbornly high, despite being identified as an issue in herds for many years. Mr Horwood believes a poor understanding and lack of agreement within the industry as to what defines a lame cow is holding the industry back. “There seems to be a lot of focus on mandatory scoring and recording of lameness but less on mentoring and rewarding producers to make progress. “We need a more joined-up approach to tackling the



Hoof health: regular footbathing is important

issue, with vets, producers and trimmers working together and all measuring the same outcomes to really deliver improvements on farm.” Ceva’s Katherine Timms says that because lameness is such a multifactorial issue, unless it is approached from all angles simultaneously, progress can be slow. This makes it unrewarding and that often results in producer and staff focus being channelled elsewhere. “Overall, the current level of lameness is fairly static in the UK, but herds that focus on the problem are seeing great results, which shows what can be achieved. These herds have often used the most current lameness research and effective treatments, working closely with all the relevant professionals, including the vet, mobility scorer, nutritionist, and foot trimmer.”

Strict programme

Mr Horwood agrees and says that lameness levels are decreasing where dairy teams engage in a strict improvement programme. He says that herds without a plan often only make small improvements. Neogen’s Jonathan Thomas-Nash adds that while incremental improvements are being made, subjective measurements mean there is a lack of reporting and this makes an assessment of national trends difficult. “Businesses that take a zero tolerance, proactive approach to lameness management are those that are making great strides in combatting the problem. They are also focusing on the right things,” he says. “Producers looking for a cure for digital dermatitis, for example, will fail. Those that are looking for ways to improve farm processes to reduce risk of the disease, will succeed. “As an industry we need to selectively breed for good mobility and then aggressively manage our dairy herds to reduce the risk of foot-health problems.” The start point for the Stride initiative is a major national producer survey, which will help to provide a benchmark and a clearer picture of current mobility

in UK herds. The data will be used to identify best practice and areas for improvement. A series of on-farm events will then be organised to offer producers the opportunity to learn more about how they can make improvements. “By gaining a better understanding of the barriers that producers face, we will be able to help them to tackle the lameness issues they have,” says Mr Horwood. “We want to encourage a zero-tolerance approach to foot-health problems, a preparedness to lift and treat feet for simple reasons, and to not ignoring any changes to mobility, however small,” adds Mr Thomas-Nash.

Producer survey

Key to the success of the initiative, says the group behind Stride, is producers, and all involved in managing cows, taking the time to complete the survey to provide the best possible picture of lameness on UK units. “The survey is a great opportunity for producers to share their views and experiences and this, in turn, will allow us to steer practical solutions that can be successfully deployed to improve herd mobility,” says Ms Timms. The survey will broaden the understanding of how the industry can collaboratively share the burden and support on-farm improvements. “The list of diseases that are caused or exacerbated by lameness is long, so the on-going drag on herd’s financial performance is much bigger than perhaps first seen with a lame cow,” says Mr Horwood. And, with milk prices under continuing pressure, improving mobility and health cows will be key to increasing herd efficiency. “You need to be your own foot hero, committed to achieving and maintaining high levels of mobility in your cows and heifers,” adds Mr Thomas-Nash. |

Complete survey to enter prize draw



Help to build the UK’s best-ever dairy-cow mobility picture by completing the first Stride survey. The more surveys that are completed the more activities can be shaped and tailored to producers’ needs to make a real difference to cow mobility. Just scan the QR code to go to the survey. All participant will automatically be entered into a draw to win one of more than 40 prizes, donated by the initiative’s partners.

