**CLIENT COMMUNICATION FOR HOOF TRIMMING**

* It is important to note, that while correctly trimmed claws, done at least once a year, have been shown to extend the longevity of a herd by up to a year,
* milk production will be hampered for up to two days; a result of upsetting the cow’s feeding routine.
* It is also important that trimming should not be done near milking areas and handlers should never perform the trimming of claws.
* The work should always be done by professionals in order to protect the claw health of the herd itself. A claw that is badly trimmed might be unstable on concrete, might have too little sole or wall to protect it, creating pain and discomfort for the cow, and increasing the risk of lameness in the future.
* **90% of lameness in dairy cows arises from conditions of the feet. Claw trimming can improve cow mobility (locomotion) if done correctly. Timely claw trimming can also prevent lameness. However, if performed incorrectly, then claw trimming may be a waste of time, or worse, still can exacerbate lameness.** Once a cow has chronic lameness, then the natural wear associated with normal mobility and locomotion are lost and imbalances between claw horn growth and wear become a recurring or permanent problem. Chronic lameness is in part due to irreversible scaring and disease of the bone.
* Concrete tends to be abrasive and concussive, increasing wear on the outside heel while stimulating horn growth on sole and wall. Overgrowth with loss of normal shape can contribute to altered load bearing during locomotion. This results in more concussion with further overgrowth and imbalance leading eventually to lameness in some animals - a vicious circle.
* Hoof trimming can be performed using manual or power tools. Manual tools take longer to get the task done while the use of power grinders allow a smoother and faster finish (saves a lot of time compared to using manual knives and rasps). However, power tools may be expensive to the farmer (if farmer, himself, performs hoof trimming on the farm) but is an investment as many animals can be done using a still blade before it becomes dull.

Some other great advice to clients:

Not all cows benefit from routine claw trimming. Many cows will maintain optimal toe length and balance without need for trimming. Wall horn grows at on average 0.5cm per month, although growth is slowest in the first 4 weeks after calving, at certain times of year and varies with other factors like breed and age. Adopting routine foot checks rather than trimming of every cow is highly advisable.

The optimal times for cows to be inspected and trimmed if necessary include:

* approximately 6-8 weeks before calving, but not on the same day as drying off (potential mastitis risk factor). This restores an optimal foot angle, balance and model as the cow approaches the risk period for sole ulcer and bruising at calving. If first calving heifers have long toes due to a lack of concrete exposure, then trimming at 6-8 weeks prior to calving will also apply. Otherwise avoid trimming heifers prior to calving, especially if heifers are coming in straight from pasture.
* when cows are showing the early visible signs of claw overgrowth or lameness.
* 4-8 weeks prior to turn-out (to remove diseased horn that could attract stones), provided adequate sole depth can be maintained.
* 60-120 days in milk, particularly for high yielding heifers housed on concrete.
* within 6-12 months of calving. This is particularly important to consider in herds with extended lactations, with cows going well over 365 days between calvings (and trimmings).

Routine claw trimming (excluding lameness treatments) should be avoided at certain times, especially:

* when cows are heavily pregnant (within 4 weeks of calving).
* when cows are freshly calved (first 4 weeks of lactation), as cows are under strain and horn growth is less than wear, raising the risk of thin sole after trimming.
* when cows are about to be housed (again, there is a risk of thinner soles and bruising due to horn wear being greater than growth for a few weeks).
* when cows are turned out on very long or abrasive tracks (e.g. tarmac or concrete).

For some herds, the smoothness of the concrete and the high energy/protein diets means claw overgrowth is notable within 3-6 months of trimming. Consequently, every herd is different. Similarly, every cow is different. Therefore, it is probably best to have a system tailored to the individual herds and cows, built up from good records. If this is too complicated, then a regime that means every cow goes through the crush every 3-6 months may be preferred. Inevitably this will mean some cows will be inspected and released without any more than a slight dishing out of the sole. None-the-less, this can be very beneficial for the cow, especially if sole and heel depth can be safeguarded. Alternatively, a system based on good observation of claws and mobility scoring will suit many modern units, especially when thin soles are the main problem.

However, it should be noted that over-trimming can contribute to bruising, lameness and increased risk of future claw overgrowth particularly on farms with sharp, eroded concrete or sand cubicles. Claw trimming can cause some animals distress. This means regimes always need to be tailored to the farm and individual cows, with some trial and error combined with a degree of caution and good monitoring.

Due to the unforgiving nature of concrete, claw trimming technique is extremely important for the health and welfare of the dairy cow. Whilst it is possible to learn the principles by studying written texts, there is no substitute for learning the practical skills with a qualified claw trimming instructor. Small differences in trimming method can have a major impact on claw health and so keeping up-to-date with the latest views on best practice is recommended and probably highly cost-effective. If in doubt about the best way to trim an individual animal, always seek further advice from your veterinary surgeon. Routine foot inspection protocols should be specified as part of your herd health plan.