Lameness control in dairy cows…

Michael Baldwin milks around 100 cows near the village of Kilmaccomas in Co. Waterford. He farms with the help of his wife Sonia and their 3 young children. The local landscape is dominated by the Comeragh Mountains.

Michael operates a split calving pattern, with the majority of the cows calving from September to November. The remainder calves from January to April. The milking cows are out from late February, weather permitting. The indoor feeding regime is a combination of grass silage and Tullow Mixed Ration (TMR) using a TMR feeder.

The local veterinary practice, Comeragh Veterinary, based in Kilmaccomas provides the veterinary support for the farm. While most of the service revolves around provision of an efficient calf rearing system, there is now a greater need for herd-based advice and herd-based solutions.

Michael, like many of the dairy farmers in the locality, sometimes needs to call in the vet to deal with lameness cases on the farm. He also uses the services of the local vet relief to carry out routine hoof care three times per year. At a recent visit to the farm by Ger Cusack from Comeragh Vet, five lame cows were presented. Their feet were lifted and examined and the findings recorded. Two of the cows had white line disease which required paring to remove horn and expose the affected area of the foot. Rubber shoes were tested to the sound draws of both these cows. Shooing gives immediate pain relief to cows such as these. Pain relief has the benefit of the cow becoming more active, grazing and feeding better, and getting back to normal levels of milk production.

Three of the cows examined had evidence of Mortellaro Infection (Digital Dermatitis) (See Figure 1). In consultation with Michael, a decision was made to put in place a control plan for Mortellaro. This plan incorporated footbathing, improving foot hygiene and the prompt treating of any cases of lameness as they arose (See Figure 2). Mortellaro spread is generally greater when cows are housed and early intervention at this time will reduce the amount of infection spread in the herd.

Figure 1:

What is Mortellaro (Digital Dermatitis)?

Mortellaro is a contagious infection affecting the skin near the hoof. It may affect the skin in the space between the hooves or on the skin just above the hoof. It causes severe lameness and spread within the herd can be rapid. While it mainly affects dairy cows, it can also infect younger stock like replacement heifers and other cattle.

Figure 2:

Reduce lameness by:

- Regular hoofcare of all stock.
- Promptly treating lame cows.
- Maintain good walking and standing surfaces whether or pasture or housed.
- Ensure feed changes, especially around calving are gradual and avoid any abrupt dietary changes.
- Footbath with formaldehyde/copper sulphate regularly.
- Avoid aggressive handling/driving of cows. Allow cows to pick their steps.
- Good cubicle comfort (enough cubicles, good access and well, bright and clean).
- Keep records of lameness cases and call chronic or repeat offenders.
- Breed for good feet.

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FOOTBATHING TO TREAT DIGITAL DERMATITIS

- 1.50 g ivermectin per 200 litres, or,
- 10 mg/1000 ml of benzyl benzoate per 200 litres.
- 5% formalin solution (5 litres per 100 litres water) or
- 5% copper sulphate (500g per 200 litres water)
- Footbathing to control lameness needs to be done daily for 3 days once per month (or a maximum).
- Formalin will help hold the claws and skin but is hazardous to humans.
- Hypochlorite (pouch washings @ 1% hypochlorite) disinfectants and organic acids will help clean and disinfect the feet.
- Footbath all milking and dry cows, stock bulls and heifers.
- Minimise the amount of dirty, muddy and dirty, water that cows walk through on the farm. Build up and drive muddy areas on roadways for washing water tanks and build up around them. White housed ensure cows are not standing in, or walking through dirty or dirty water in yards or passegeways.

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FIGURE 3: WHITE LINE DISEASE

FIGURE 4: FOOT SHOWING DIGITAL DERMATITIS