

I believe that lameness is one of the biggest welfare issues in dairying. Lameness is an outcome that should be minimised. However, the risk factors for injury lameness include other welfare issues such as poor stockmanship and poor cow comfort. A lack of understanding and managing lameness is a welfare problem. Lameness causes stress to people as well as animals, and can and should be addressed. Lameness costs a lot more than we realise – ongoing costs and losses not only of today's milk but of future earnings.

Despite the fact that lameness is quite a complex problem I have divided managing it into 5 basic categories.

To understand lameness you need to see that lameness is a symptom of a “disease” or a sign of a problem. And the problem is that you have not controlled the risk well enough. The number of lame cows you get on a farm is a result of a mix of risk factors, or how high a risk there is. Managing your lameness is a risk management exercise!

Whether you have a severe problem or not you should regularly do an audit or risk assessment on your farm and aim towards best practice in all the areas that affect lameness.

I have developed a 5 point plan that will cover all the bases to minimize lameness and give a genuine welfare “tick” to any dairying enterprise. Here are the 5 points.

1. Record keeping (not just lameness, of course!)
2. Early detection and effective treatment
3. Minimizing risk of injury (risk assessment, design and construction of facilities, and understanding of the dairy cow for good stockmanship and low stress handling)
4. Hygiene or minimizing risk of infection (foot baths and facilities)
5. Good health for the foot. (cow comfort, avoiding health issues)

This is a brief summary taken from the introduction to the Online Course “Stamping Out Lameness” – Understanding lameness.