



Vet Education Transfer Services Ltd

## Prevention of Lameness in Dairy Herds. A Troubleshooting Summary Neil Chesterton

### **First:** Look at your own and the cows' behaviour.

- Let the cows drift home.
- Don't let the dog touch the cows.
- Shout, whistle, talk or even sing to your cows if they slow down, but don't force them.
- Watch the rear group of cows and make sure their heads stay down (heads up – they are being pushed).
- Watch the rear group of cows and make sure they aren't pushing each other (cows don't like body contact).
- Don't come out of the milking shed to get cows into the bails.
- Use the backing gate only to take up space, not to push cows.
- **All staff** use backing gate and top gate the same way (cows are creatures of habit). For larger farms with many staff members and with staff turn-over, it is impossible to train everyone to do it right every day, so the only answer I see for large herds is to install switching to force everyone to do it the same way:
  1. The backing gate is regulated to move no more than five seconds in any one movement by a timer on the switch.
  2. The backing gate speed is regulated at no more than 12 metres per minute in round yards or 6 metres per minute in rectangular yards.
  3. The top-gate is regulated to move for no more than two seconds in each forward movement with a button switch control. The top gate moves forward at a maximum speed of 12 metres per minute in round yards or 6 metres per minute in rectangular yards.

### **Second:** Look at your milking shed area.

- Wide, straight, level, well drained track approaching shed.
- Nib wall to stop wash water flowing onto track.
- Entrance from race straight into yard or gentle curve.

- Wide entrance gate – at least as wide as the race.
- Plenty of space in the yard to congregate - a minimum of 1.3 square metres space for Jersey cows and 1.4 to 1.5 square metres space for Friesian cows (depending on their size and the design of the shed).
- Look for any other factors that would make cows fear the yard (slippery concrete, stray voltage, electrified backing gate).

### **Third:** Look at your track.

The ideal race is:

- Well designed
  - firm, compacted base material.
  - crowned to keep water off.
  - non-damaging surfaces.
  - well-drained edges.
- Width sufficient for herd size (min 5 m).
- Even width – or even better, getting wider as it reaches the shed.
- Level – steep areas should be reduced, particularly close to the shed.
- No congestion points – avoid right angle bends, narrowing of race, mud holes, excess crowning.
- Always spend money on the tracks closest to the shed first (unless you are a millionaire!).

### **Fourth:** “Fine Tuning”

- Use meal or licks etc to attract cows to the shed early in the season.
- Attend to any problem areas – eg. shaded areas of the track.
- Junction of concrete with metal (Ag lime, Nib wall).
- Footbath in exit race from shed – if infection between claws shows up (simple footrot), treat herd twice weekly, during problem times.
- Split the herd, particularly early in the season, if large herd.

(From “Lameness in Dairy Cattle Diagnosis, Treatment and Prevention in Pasture-fed Dairy Herds” (2009) by Neil Chesterton)

Disclaimer: All reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the material in this article, however, the use of this information is at one's own risk and VETSL disclaims all responsibility for losses, costs, damages etc incurred as a result of the use of the information contained in this article.

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