Claw health assessment in dairy cattle herds
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Lameness is the number one welfare issue in dairy cattle herds. In most of the dairy cattle herds, over 10% of the animals
are affected by some form of claw disorder so we must consider lameness as a herd health concern.
Herd level assessments of claw health status were performed in 8 Hungarian dairy cattle herds. Locomotion and body
condition were scored in 2663 animals. Data on claw trimmings, lameness treatments, preventive foot bathing and any
predisposing technology- or management related factors were also collected. The overall hygiene conditions and the
quality of walking and resting areas were assessed. The behaviour of animals during resting was also observed as a sign
of cow comfort.
29.7% of the animals were not lame (locomotion score 1, Sprecher et al.; 1997). The rest of the studied animals showed
some form of abnormal gait. 41.2% of the cows were considered as clinically lame (locomotion scores 3-5). There was
a negative correlation between body condition score and locomotion score. Digital dermatitis was the number one hoof
problem in the assessed herds.
The prevalence and severity of lameness varied among herds. The incidence of lameness was significantly lower in
freestall barns than in straw-bedded yards, possibly due to the cleanliness of the resting areas in freestalls. On farms
with regular hoofcare and/or preventive foot bathing - compared to only two occasions of claw trimming per year or a
not systematic foot bathing protocol – the rate of lameness was relatively low.
On the basis of our results, the most important factors associated with poor claw health are the lack of early detection
of lame animals, improper foot bathing protocol, delay in the treatment of lame animals, poor environmental hygiene
and poor cow comfort. A better focus on these areas is vital in improving the lameness situation.

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