

Claw health assessment in dairy cattle herds

Viktor Jurkovich, Endre Brydl, Péter Kovács, László Könyves

Department of Animal Hygiene, Herd Health and Veterinary Ethology, Faculty of Veterinary Science, Szent István University, Budapest, Hungary

jurkovich.viktor@aotk.szie.hu

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.

Acknowledgements

This article is based upon work from COST Action FA1308 DairyCare, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology, www.cost.eu). COST is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. COST Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation.