

Summer Decisions Lead to Fall Dairy Cattle Hoof Problems

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Your dairy cows have likely dealt with seasonal lameness at some point during the fall months. This has probably led to lower production levels, weaker reproductive performance and a pile of bills for additional hoof trims, wrappings and other treatments.

You may be wondering what happened to cause this seasonal outbreak of lameness in your herd, but the truth is the causes can be traced back to your management practices and the conditions your cows experienced during the summer months.

In this article, we'll address some of the common conditions of seasonal lameness and some steps you can take to assess your operation to start making the necessary improvements.

Common Conditions That Cause Seasonal Lameness

Let's start by exploring the common conditions that occur in the summer that may have caused seasonal lameness on your dairy.

Wet Conditions

When it gets hot outside, cows drink more water and urinate more frequently, which leads to them spending more time standing in wetter, soggy manure. Common heat abatement strategies, like foggers and sprinklers, while necessary for effective heat stress management, aren't making these conditions any dryer. The longer your cows spend standing in these conditions, the softer their hooves become, which leads to a higher susceptibility to lameness.

More Time Standing

Cows that are experiencing heat stress will spend less time laying down and more time standing to cool off. When a cow stands up, more surface area is exposed and, as a result, she will mitigate heat more easily. When she's laying down, however, 50% of her surface area is insulated. Additionally, if a cow is panting, it will be more comfortable for her to do it standing up, because laying down is more constrictive on the body. Increasing her time standing will lead to excessive stress on the pedal bone in the lateral claw of the rear foot, which leads to sole ulcers.

Inconsistent Feed Schedule

During the hot summer months, cows prefer to eat at night when the temperature is cooler. At night, your staff may not be pushing an adequate amount of feed up for the cows. Ideally, dairy cows should be eating multiple small meals every day. Eating fewer large meals will change her rumen pH, which affects blood delivery to the feet and can lead to poor hoof quality and hoof wear. So, it's important that your staff is pushing up feed at all hours of the day.

Poor Fly Control

If flies are not properly controlled, they will become irritants to your cows. In barns where there's a lot of fly pressure, the cows will be huddled together as they do whenever they feel stress. This means they are not laying down as much as they should, which causes wear on the hooves, and this can increase heat stress as they all radiate heat onto each other.

Poor Light Management

Cows are not particularly intuitive animals, so they may assume that if an area is really well lit on a hot day, that it's going to be the hottest part of the barn, even if it happens to be the most well-ventilated area. As a result, they are going to find shade in the interior areas of the barn, which will increase the amount of time they spend standing.

All these issues occur in varying degrees at every dairy each summer. Your Zinpro field representative can help you determine which are the most problematic for you and what changes can be made for next year.

Decide Now to Prevent Seasonal Lameness

Now is a good time to evaluate your facilities and your records to decide on improvements you can make to enhance conditions in the summer months and avoid issues with seasonal lameness next fall.

With the help of your Zinpro field representative, you can assess the following things:

Heat Abatement and Cow Comfort

By using the Zinpro® FirstStep® Dairy Hoof Health and Management Program, your Zinpro representative can help you by looking at your stall design, the number and placements of your fans, the volume of air that's moving through your barn and the conditions of your flooring to make sure you are maximizing cow comfort.

Improve Feed Availability

You need to make sure feed pushups are happening frequently and often. Make sure your staff is following through on these duties, even during the quiet hours after the sun has gone down.

Keep Your Maintenance Trim Schedule

Maintenance trims should be performed on your cows twice per year. You're not going to be able to eliminate all aspects of heat stress or eliminate wet conditions. One thing you can control is making sure their hooves are properly maintained so that they are bearing weight evenly across both claws of the rear feet. If a cow goes into the

summer with an out-of-balance claw, her chances of developing a serious problem in the fall is going to be much higher.

Get Started Today

No one enjoys staring at a bill for additional hoof trims, wrappings and additional treatments due to seasonal lameness during the fall and winter, especially when they could have been addressed in the summer. It's never too early or too late to start evaluating your dairy conditions and start making improvements to help prevent or reduce seasonal lameness next year.

Your Zinpro field representative can help you prioritize your needs this winter, so you're ready to hit the ground running in the spring and summer. Reach out today and get started.