

Hoof health considerations for the breeding season

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In a compact spring calving dairy system, close to 5% of the herd should be in heat each day in the weeks before mating start date, and for the first 3 weeks of the breeding season. In herds where 3 or more cows are in heat per day, these cows will receive up to 50 mounts each per day. If mounting activity is occurring on roadways or in the collecting yard, the risk of lameness is increased.

Your stock bull or bulls are also at risk of becoming lame during the breeding season, rendering them ineffective or even infertile depending on the severity. Finally, genetics plays an important role in breeding animals that will have a lower susceptibility to lameness into the future. Here are some tips to help reduce breeding-associated lameness.

- Avoid holding bulling cows in the collecting yard for too long. Keep them in a paddock adjacent to the yard and bring them back in for AI.
- Lameness can cause cows to lose body condition rapidly and experience considerable pain. They will be slow to come in heat and will take more serves to become pregnant. Prompt treatment and correct management will ensure any effect on production and fertility is minimised.
- Overworked stock bulls or vasectomised bulls, particularly those that walk a long distance on a daily basis, are at a considerable risk of becoming lame. Keep using AI until the ratio of potentially empty cows to stock bulls is correct – 1 mature bull to 20 to 25 empty females. Rotate bulls to ensure they get rest.
- Avoid breeding replacements from cows that have poor hoof conformation or that are more prone to becoming lame. They are likely to pass these traits on to their daughters leading them to experience more lameness and have shorter survival in the herd.
- Breed cows suitable for your system. Use the maintenance subindex to breed cows of suitable liveweight and use the PTA figure for milk kgs to breed cows that will produce suitable milk volume for your system.
- Pay attention to the genetics of the sire for health and lameness. Choose bulls that have a negative PTA for lameness to ensure you are breeding heifers that will experience fewer lameness events and will have good longevity in the herd.