

# Can careful cow handling reduce the number of lameness cases in a dairy herd?

**Ger Cusack**, acting Chair, Hoof HealthCheck Technical Working Group

Over the coming months, we will discuss how, and why, cases of lameness occur in grazing cows. We will provide you with suggestions on improvements you can do to reduce the number of lameness cases occurring in the herd.

This month we will consider how cows are handled in yards, including the collecting yard, in the milking parlour and on cow roadways.

The most common conditions that we see during the grazing season causing lameness are sole bruising and white line damage. Both conditions occur because of trauma to the sole of the cow's foot.

This trauma can be a single event such as a cow standing on a sharp stone on a concrete surface. The impact on the foot of this sharp stone can cause bruising or penetration of the white line leading to white line damage and the risk of a white line access.

Equally, small traumas to the sole of the foot can, over time, damage the white line. Small stones or grit can gradually penetrate through the white line, reach the quick and cause an inflammatory reaction resulting in lameness.

## White Line Disease

Reducing the traumas and keeping the impact of those traumas to a minimum will help reduce the number of lameness cases that occur on your farm.

Cow behaviour to consider to prevent lameness in the herd:

- Cows check the ground surface, place the front foot in a safe, even place and the hind foot in the same place when given the time and space to do so.
- Cows walk with their heads in a low position, checking the ground in front of them. If cows are packed in too tightly on a cow roadway, their heads are up on the back of the cows in front of them and therefore they are not able to check the ground and choose a safe spot to place their foot.
- Cows have a walking order on the roadway, and this differs from their milking order. When entering the collecting yard, cows need time and space to rearrange themselves before entering the milking parlour.

So, how can we minimize the traumas and impact forces that cows' feet experience?

Give cows:

- Time....allow cows to walk at their own pace.
- Space....room in the yards and on the roadways.

## The 'Do's and Don't's in lameness prevention

- Don't push or rush cows on roadways with a dog or quad bike.
- Do allow cows to exit the milking parlour at their own pace and walk directly to their next paddock.
- Don't hold cows in the collecting yard or yards any longer than is necessary.
- Do consider using a Batt Latch (a remote-controlled gap opening device), that allows the cows exit the paddock and walk to the milking parlour at their own pace.



**An example of White Line disease**