ANIMAL HEALTH IRELAND

To contribute to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable farming and agri-food sector through improved animal health and welfare

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Animal Health Ireland launches major new Hoof HealthCheck Programme

Up to €8,750 annual loss to farmer from lameness

€145m annual loss to the sector

A major new initiative to tackle lameness in Irish dairy herds, called Hoof HealthCheck, has been launched by Animal Health Ireland (AHI). A key part of the initiative is a farmer-led project, called the Sound Cow Innovation Programme (SCIP). This is designed to improve cow welfare, reduce economic losses, and enhance sustainability across the dairy sector.

Lameness is estimated to cost Irish dairy farmers up to €8,750 per 100 cows each year in high prevalence herds. At a national lameness prevalence of 10%, this equates to a national loss of approximately €145m annually. It is also a welfare issue, causing pain, reducing fertility, and lowering milk production.

The SCIP project will begin with 10 pilot dairy farms across the country, each receiving tailored veterinary, hoof trimmer and advisory support. This project is facilitated by AHI, with expert collaboration from Teagasc and University College Dublin (UCD). Various training and open days will take place over the course of the Programme.

Maintaining excellent hoof health is central to achieving high standards of animal welfare and sustainable production. As part of the project, farmers will gain access to practical tools and expert advice to prevent and manage lameness on their farms. By capturing data, sharing best practices, and empowering farmers to make the right decisions, the Hoof HealthCheck programme will deliver lasting improvements to cow health and farm performance. It can also help set a new global benchmark in responsible dairy farming.

Commenting on the launch of the Programme, Dr Michelle McGrath, AHI Programme Manager said: "Lameness has been seen as an operational hazard or as inevitable on many Irish dairy farms which is simply not the case. Lameness is a serious concern and should be treated as such. It impacts cow health, herd performance and, ultimately, profitability on farms."

"There is often not one single reason for lameness in herds and that is why we have developed this exciting new initiative with the support of Teagasc and UCD. The Hoof HealthCheck programme is about doing the right thing for the animal, for the farmer, and for the wider industry. With better hoof care, we can protect welfare, improve farm output, and boost profitability. Ireland is well-positioned to be a global leader in this space, and I thank the farmers and our partners for helping to pioneer this important Programme."

Senior Research Officer with Teagasc, Dr Muireann Conneely said: "Lameness is one of the most significant welfare challenges facing Irish dairy cows, yet it is also one of the most preventable. Through the Hoof HealthCheck Programme and the SCIP project, we are working directly with farmers to identify risks on their farms, put practical solutions in place, and measure progress over time. This collaborative approach gives farmers the confidence and tools to reduce lameness, improve cow comfort, and secure more sustainable production into the future."

Dr Eoin Ryan from UCD said: "Both the prevalence and cost of lameness in Irish dairy, as well as beef and suckler, herds is underestimated significantly. Tailored lameness control programmes centred around lameness detection using mobility scoring, allied to regular hoof trimming and the implementation of

infectious and non-infectious foot lameness control measures, can have a hugely positive impact on the performance, welfare and sustainability of our herds."

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