

Foot Health

One step forward

The Development Team of the 2016 Practical Training on Foot Health *

How we got here

It wasn't until the 1980s that dairy producers began to take an interest in the feet of their dairy cattle. Numerous factors contributed to this shift in attitude, one of which was the gradual increase in the proportion of cows permanently housed in stalls. This meant less time in pasture for cows to remedy the foot and leg problems that appeared during the previous winter.

Cow anatomy also changed, with genetic selection leading to heavier and larger cows. Unfortunately, the barn environment didn't keep up with the changes. Since then, veterinarians have been called upon regularly to treat foot problems.

Additionally, changes in feed production and dairy-herd feeding made it possible to maximize the production capacity of the cows, sometimes at the cost of metabolic problems associated with foot health.

For all these reasons, producers are now more concerned with managing foot health and the various conditions that can affect the feet of their dairy cows.

Hoof trimming is now required on a growing number of farms, and foot-care professionals have become more commonplace. Since the main goal of hoof trimming now exceeds the initial preoccupation of maintaining a normal hoof shape, foot-care professionals have been trained to tailor hoof trimming to the needs of modern dairy operations.

In fact, since 2014, a training and certification program has been available to hoof trimmers in Quebec.

Changes along the way

Other more recent changes have led the dairy industry to focus more on foot and leg problems.

Both the demands of the quota system and the expanding herd sizes have increased the number of new cows introduced into herds, with no corresponding adaptation of biosafety protocols. Under these circumstances, digital dermatitis, an infection unknown in Quebec prior to the 1990s, has often been "bought and paid for."

Likewise, consumers are increasingly concerned about the well-being of the animals that contribute to their daily diet and are now demanding products that are not only healthy and of good quality, but that also come from farms where

animals are comfortable and healthy and where drug use is limited.

Concerns about cow lameness, now the third most important reason for culling in Quebec, cannot be ignored by the dairy industry. After implementing the Canadian Quality Milk (CQM) program on their farms, producers are now engaged in the proAction Initiative, a program aimed at, among other goals, ensuring the health and welfare of dairy cows for consumers.

There is more to be done

Despite our accomplishments to date, there remains much to do about foot health. In 2008, a study of 204 Ontario dairy herds revealed that 46 per cent of cows housed in free-stall barns and 26 per cent of those kept in tie-stall barns had foot lesions, which were detected during hoof trimming. Digital dermatitis was by far the most frequently encountered problem. More recently, 5,637 cows from 141 herds housed in free-stall barns in Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta were assessed for lameness using a scoring grid. Overall, 21 per cent of those cows exhibited obvious signs of lameness. Moreover, it was found that the prob-

lems increased with age, with third- and fourth-lactation cows being three to four times more affected than first-lactation cows.

As is the case for reproduction and udder health, foot health depends on the herd management decisions and actions taken by dairy producers. Veterinarians, professional hoof trimmers, and dairy production advisors are key partners in helping you prevent and handle problems. It is certainly in your interest to tap into these resources and use them to your benefit by first getting a better understanding of the nature of lameness and the control measures that can be implemented to prevent such problems.

You also need to be able to correctly assess the situation in your herd. It is important to observe your cows and identify those with abnormal mobility or behaviour so you can convey that information to the hoof trimmer.

Finally, depending on your herd's situation, you will need to implement measures to control and prevent any risk factors associated with foot problems. Research studies on lameness have shown that, in all cases, improving cow comfort is paramount.

In the long run

Although foot-health problems are relatively common in most herds, some producers manage to establish conditions that minimize the incidence and negative impact of such problems and find that the benefits are certainly worth the effort. Every step in the right direction will improve productivity and cow longevity, leading to a more profitable dairy operation.

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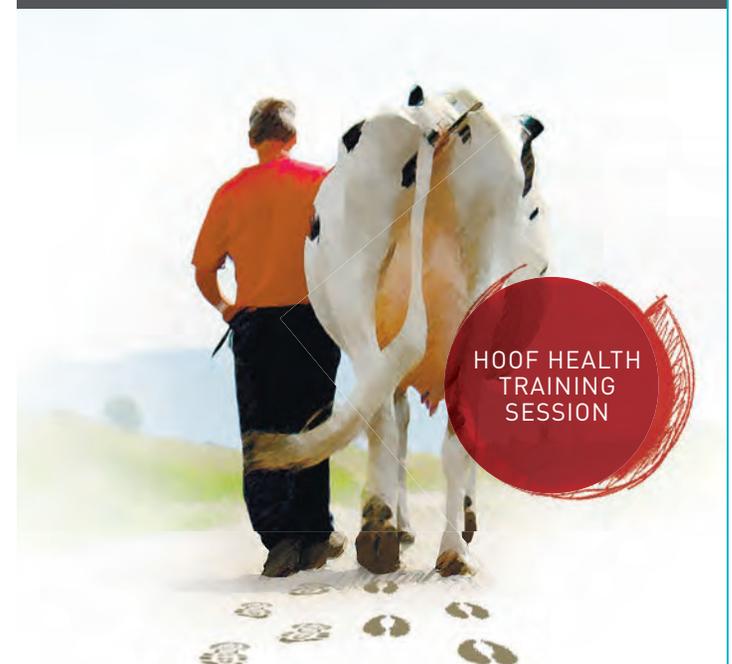
Let's take another step forward

To ensure even better foot health in our dairy cattle, Valacta and the Association des médecins vétérinaires praticiens du Québec are offering a training session tailored to the needs of Quebec's dairy herds.

This training course is designed to help you acquire the knowledge needed to play a key role in collaborating with your team of experts, managing foot health in your herd, and achieving cost-effective and lasting results.

This training session was developed by a team of experts in collaboration with various partners working in foot health. It will be presented throughout Quebec as of 2016. To register or learn more about the training, contact your Valacta representative or your veterinarian. Call 1-800-266-5248 or visit www.valacta.com.

A STEP AHEAD...



HOOF HEALTH
TRAINING
SESSION

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