

## A BC Perspective on Lameness

As in most areas of North America, lameness is a huge economic drain to dairymen. In BC's Fraser Valley, we have almost exclusively freestall housing, slurry manure systems, concrete floor surfaces and a moist environment, all contributing to increased lameness. The three most significant contributors to lameness in this area are infectious Digital Dermatitis; less than optimally designed facilities that precipitate injury; and sub-clinical laminitis from ruminal acidosis. Some BC dairymen have instituted control programs to reduce infectious lameness to negligible levels. Changes that are making a difference include:

- ✓ A slow move to sand bedding. Sand is generally promoted to significantly reduce environmental mastitis but it also has a huge benefit in improved hoof health. Sand will cut lameness in half, when compared to mattresses!
- ✓ Longer and wider free stalls with correctly designed dividers reduce the time that cows stand on concrete, and nearly eliminate self-inflicted injuries. Improved foot and leg health is an important contributor to the greater milk yield achieved with better cow comfort.

- ✓ Some new construction and even some retro-fits are installing rubber surfacing where cows stand and walk, reducing hoof wear and sole bruising. There is no doubt that cows like rubber.
- ✓ Some farmers are extremely diligent about reducing lameness from Digital Dermatitis. Their protocols for treating infection are very vigorous and ongoing, reducing it to very low levels.
- ✓ More farmers are seeing regular hoof trimming as an investment rather than an expense. Trimming of all animals (including replacement heifers) and at shorter intervals is paying dividends.
- ✓ Some farmers have made a loose-housing area for their old, clumsy or injured cows. This increases housing costs, but substantially lengthens the productive life of some older high producing cows, and generates profit.
- ✓ Many farms are installing some form of restraint chute to make it possible for them to examine immediately any cow noticed lame. This fits well with a move to identifying lameness causes at an earlier stage. The commercial hoof trimmer won't be replaced—in fact trimmers are encouraging this trend to owner treatment of lame cows.

source: Dick Clegg, DVM, DairySmart Consulting