

# BC Dairy Hoof Health Group

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Who doesn't need a good leg to stand on? In the case of the dairy industry, it needs four good legs (and feet) to stand and get around on! World-wide, challenges of maintaining healthy feet and legs in dairies are considerable. As UBC's Dan Weary explains, "Lameness rates in BC now average about 30%, but vary widely among farms, showing great opportunities for improvements. Changes to the cow's housing and management can help, reducing the impact of this painful condition." UBC researchers have focused on these and other factors in a series of studies that have helped to identify critical factors affecting lameness. "The next frontier" says Prof. Weary, "is to work directly with farmers to better understand what combination of factors result in some farms struggling with high rates, and others finding success."

### Enter The BC Dairy Hoof Health Group

Founded in 2009 with six members from industry, university and government, the Group has evolved quickly to encompass reps from every possible niche – producers, hoof trimmers, veterinarians, BCMPA, university researchers (UBC), AAFC researchers, CAHA (Canadian Animal Health Association), DHI, government extension staff and external expert advisors. Recent expansion will bring the total to 18 enthusiastic, motivated and knowledgeable members, focused on improving the state of hoof health on BC dairies.

### The Mission:

To facilitate technology transfer in the areas of research and education, to improve the overall level of hoof health in BC dairy herds.

### The Objectives:

- 1) To secure funding to support hoof health research and education initiatives.
- 2) To obtain an accurate assessment of the range and frequency of hoof health problems in BC dairy herds.
- 3) To collect data that allows in-depth relationship analysis of hoof health problems with on-farm management factors.
- 4) To identify information gaps which require additional hoof health research.
- 5) To identify technology transfer initiatives that will educate all facets of the dairy industry in achieving and maintaining a high level of hoof health in its dairy herds.

Keeping in mind the five objectives, the Group has laid out three phases of programs, under the title: **BC Dairy Hoof Health Initiative.**

## Phase 1:

### BC Dairy Hoof Health Pilot Project

Already underway since January 2011, this project requires the collection of at least 25,000 cow data records over an 18 month period. Hoof trimmers, using the Hoof Supervisor data recording technology, are supplying the hoof health and on-farm management data from about 70 BC farms to a provincial master data base which is being analyzed alongside the data in the Alberta Hoof Health Project. All information is strictly confidential, but the lessons learned from the analysis will be shared with all industry stakeholders. One immediate benefit from this data collection is the customizable report which the hoof trimmer can print off for each herd owner, detailing the specifics of hoof issues and frequencies. Understanding the problem and severity is the first step in developing a comprehensive treatment/prevention plan involving herd advisors like the vet and nutritionist.

Phase 1 will produce two more primary outcomes: 1) the data will identify more precisely what specific areas of hoof health research are needed, and 2) the

**Preliminary results to the end of August 2011 on 8,137 animals from 70 dairies by the BC Dairy Hoof Health Pilot Project using Hoof Supervisor data recorders revealed 57.5% of cows trimmed had one or more lesions. Digital dermatitis is the most common villain with a rate of 40.3%, followed by sole ulcers at 12.8% and White Line Disease at 13.2%. While these rates are concerning, they are consistent with levels in other provinces.**



Cow with block on feet

correlation of hoof problems with their causes (i.e. which specific problems are caused by which specific management or barn factors).

The overall results will be communicated to the entire industry to raise producer and industry awareness of the magnitude of the problem and the types of hoof health problems afflicting cow longevity, productivity, reproductive performance, and overall herd profitability of BC dairy farms.

Funding for Phase I came from the IAF (Investment Agriculture Foundation), WEF (Westgen Endowment Fund), and DIREC (BCMPA's Dairy Industry Research & Education Committee Fund).

### Phase II: BC Dairy Hoof Health Industry Education Program

The clear objective of Phase 2 is to take the vast amount of existing knowledge coupled with the new analysis outcomes and get the information into the hands of producers and dairy advisors, so that meaningful strategies can be developed and implemented specifically for individual farms. Everyone, including vets, nutritionists, genetics suppliers, hoof trimmers, building contractors

**Doug Johnstone of AR-PE Hooftrimming has some very relevant observations. "There's no question that digital dermatitis is the single biggest culprit causing lameness in dairy herds currently. When cow comfort and lying time is reduced by things like overcrowding, poor designed/small stalls, insufficient bedding, bad concrete floors (or other factors), I definitely can see more lameness in those herds."**

and DHI have a part to play and will be targeted with the information and training initiatives.

The BC Dairy Hoof Health Group has played a pivotal role in establishing the need for delivery of a strong, audience-targeted industry education program,



Sole lesion



Trimmed hooves



Sole hemorrhage



Horn erosion

accessible in all key BC dairy regions. Funding applications have been made to facilitate the organization and delivery of these programs with a projected timeframe of January-April 2012. The varied programs will be tailored to benefit the specific group – hoof trimmers, vets, contractors and producers. In January, expect to see promotional material outlining all the programs with greater detail.

***“You can’t win many races on a flat set of tires!”***

Tom Droppo, Dairy Specialist

### Phase III:

#### Hoof Health Team Pilot Project

Taking all the lessons learned in Phases 1 and 2, the goal is to apply this information to herds willing to participate in an intensive Pilot Project including their herd advisors in a Team. This cooperative Team approach is intended to utilize their varying areas of expertise in developing a coordinated plan to achieve desirable hoof health with monitoring, interpretation, treatment and most importantly, prevention. Once funding is secured, this phase is expected to launch in 2013.

At the end of the day, proactive is always better than reactive. ‘Hats off’ to the BC Dairy Hoof Health Group for taking a firm, well-coordinated approach to proactively assist the BC dairy industry in improving hoof health. As much as everyone would like a simple, magic bullet solution for lameness, we need to accept that there isn’t one, and then get serious about putting in the work to make improvements.

***“Everyone realizes that lameness costs are huge – treatment, increased days open, reduced production, and most costly, premature culling from the herd. Attaching accurate costs is not an easy exercise but one conservative estimate suggests \$550 lost for each affected cow. If your 150 cow herd has 25% affected cows, the costs are a staggering \$20,625 per year – probably higher!”***

Dr. Dick Clegg –  
Greenbelt Veterinary Clinic

To learn more about the Alberta Dairy Hoof Health Project, check out: <http://www.hoofhealth.ca/Index.html>. Here you will find several excellent sources of information for understanding hoof health issues.

Stay tuned for further updates on the activities and results from these initiatives. □

*Merry Christmas!*



Watch  
BC Holstein News  
for updates  
on the BC Dairy  
Hoof Health Group

