



Cows grazing in a paddock are either eating or laying down to meet their need to rest.



Cows on feedpads need to be carefully managed to ensure they have enough time to rest each day.

Understand the cow to prevent lameness

By CARLENE DOWIE

DAIRYFARMERS do not treat lameness as a serious problem but it could be costing them hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, United States hoof health consultant Karl Burgi told the Australian Dairy Conference at Wollongong, NSW.

And, he warned, Australian herds that were rapidly expanding or moving to partial or total confinement feeding systems faced major challenges to keep on top of lameness problems.

The keys to preventing lameness were:

- working with the cow's natural behaviour; and
- treating any case of lameness as quickly possible.

Dr Burgi, from Dairyland Hoof Care, said a US study had estimated that each case of lameness cost \$US404. Lameness could vary from 3% to 65% of the cows in a herd - it did not matter whether it was a grazing or feedlot herd.

Dr Burgi said it was important to be able to identify lame cows. Zinpro had released an excellent poster that showed how to locomotion score cows - on a score from one to five.

"A cow that walks with an arched back we have to put a question to, because a cow that is normal walks with a totally flat back," he said.

Lameness could be prevented by working with the cow's natural behaviour. The most important factor was to ensure that the cows had enough time to lie down during the day.

"The cow has a natural will to lie down, but if you take more time for certain tasks, you disrupt this," Dr Burgi said.

Farmers needed to pay attention to the cow's daily time 'budget' - allocating the ideal amount of time for cows to do things naturally. The ideal budget was:

- 12-14 hours lying/resting;



Karl Burgi: Lame cows should be treated as quickly as possible.

- 5-5.5 hours eating;
- 2-3.5 hours milking;
- 2-3 hours standing or walking;
- 0.5 hours drinking.

Dr Burgi said in a grazing system a cow often spent more time walking to harvest feed but this was not necessarily a bad thing because walking on pasture stimulated blood circulation in the hoof.

"If you see grazing cows in the paddock, they are either eating or laying down," he said.

But as Australian farms moved to more intensive feeding systems and as herd sizes grew, it meant the ideal time budget was less likely to be met.

If cows were being forced to stand on hard surfaces (like a dairy or feedpad) for long periods of time, they were not able to meet their daily requirements for laying down time.

"It is not natural for cows to stand in milk sheds," Dr Burgi said.

Hot conditions also created problems. If cows were heat-stressed and unable to cool down, they stood up to allow air to circulate around them to help cool them. If they were coming to the dairy to keep cool and had to stand around on the yards, it meant they could not meet their other requirements - particularly their lying/resting time.

Dr Burgi said some farms he worked with in the US experienced a severe heat wave in July and noticed a large increase in

hoof lesions in their cows two months later.

The other important factor was to treat lame cows quickly. Dr Burgi said cows should be observed daily for signs of lameness and should be treated with functional and therapeutic hoof trimming as soon as a problem was noticed.

He said dairyfarmers usually treated mastitis immediately but rarely did the same with lameness, although research had shown it was just as costly.

Cows should also be trimmed before stresses such as calving, ration changes and hot weather. Dr Burgi said farmers could learn this skill through a qualified instructor.

He also urged special attention for heifers. Farmers regularly reported lameness issues with first calf heifers - and the problem was that once a cow had an episode of lameness it was more likely to recur. So tackling the problems in heifers could play a significant role in reducing overall lameness.

All heifers should be trimmed before calving. Heifers raised on a yielding surface like pasture should be introduced to a concrete, non-yielding surface 4-6 weeks before calving, allowing the hoof to adjust to the new surface.

The amount of time heifers spend in the dairy 2-4 weeks after calving should also be minimised to allow them more time to rest.

Seven-month pregnant heifers should be introduced to dry cows, giving them time to socially adjust. This could help reduce the amount of time heifers spend waiting when first introduced to the herd, thus reducing the amount of non-resting time.

Dr Burgi said cows should be moved calmly and quietly. All walking surfaces, including tracks, milking and feeding areas should be maintained for smoothness, proper traction and cleanliness. **D**