

NAVAN VETERINARY SERVICES – MAY 2015 NEWSLETTER

FOOTBATHS

Footbaths should be considered as one tool in a foot health program for your farm. The right decision on footbath use, such as frequency, product to use (antibiotic, disinfectant or cleaning agent) and number of cow passes is farm specific, and you must have an understanding of what is the main cause of lameness in your herd. The best way to determine this is by keeping records of foot lesions when trimming is done. Minimum information required would be cow id, date, are the lesions infectious (Strawberry foot rot, corns, heel erosions) or non-infectious (sole ulcers, white line separation) and treatment. Record keeping is only helpful if the information can be drawn upon to help make treatment decisions. Is the current protocol effective or are changes required? Access to older records is crucial.

Footbath strategies can and should be tailored to each farm. A great analogy presented by Dr. Gerard Cramer, a specialist in cow lameness, is that footbaths should be viewed similar to teat-dipping cows.

He reminds us that “we don’t teat dip cows to treat infectious mastitis, we teat dip cows to prevent mastitis”. In comparison we should use footbaths mainly as a prevention strategy, rather than as treatment. In rare cases, when there is an outbreak of infectious foot problems, antibiotics, usually Oxytetracycline or Lincomycin can be used aggressively to get the problem under control. Footbaths should mainly contain disinfectants. Copper Sulphate, Formalin and Zinc Sulfates for example, or cleaning agents such as soap or rock salt.

Footbaths are only effective if the product has adequate contact with the feet. To this end, footbaths should be 8 to 10 feet long and 5" to 6" deep. To prevent loss of treatment solution, as cows splash through and to prevent cows from avoiding walking through, the sides of the bath should be 18 to 24 " high. Narrow footbaths (20 – 24") seem to be preferred over wider ones. The goal is to get as much foot contact time as possible. The trick to get cows to walk confidently through the baths is to make them a part of their everyday routine.

Footbaths should have something in them all the time, whether it is a treatment mix, disinfectant or just soap and water. We all know that cows are creatures of habit and they will eventually become accustomed to walking through the foot baths.

An empty bath will soon be filled with manure anyways (not on the list of accepted foot bath products).

Dr. Nigel Cook, University of Wisconsin, Madison has prepared an excellent chart of alternative foot bath products (other than the traditional Copper Sulphate) with concentrations and doses.

If anyone is interested, we can get you a copy.