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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Extension Notes

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Dairy Cattle Footbaths

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Lameness is a frustrating experience for both the cow and the farmer. As with any disease or disorder, prevention of hoof disorders is more effective than treatment. Dairy cattle are susceptible to many hoof disorders including (but not limited to) digital dermatitis (hairy heel warts), foot rot, laminitis, sand cracks, white line disease and sole ulcers.

Reduction of pain associated with lameness is an important issue for the dairy industry. It is also important at the farm level because lameness results in lower feed intake, lower milk production, poor reproductive performance, and an increased risk of culling. Dr. Jeffrey Bewley, UK Dairy Cattle Specialist, offers the following information and advice.

Important preventive measures for managing hoof disorders include:

- keeping cows in clean and dry environments
- providing maximum cow comfort within facilities or pastures
- feeding balanced rations
- nutritional management

Many dairy producers also see improved hoof health after starting to use a footbath. The purpose of a footbath is to disinfect and clean the cow's hooves to prevent hoof lesions. Footbaths help prevent

the spread of infectious lesions and harden claw walls to prevent noninfectious lesions. They are particularly effective for prevention of hairy heel warts.

A footbath consists of a concrete, plastic or rubber reservoir filled with a solution of water and one of many different choices of effective footbath ingredients. Footbaths are typically 3 feet wide, 8 to 10 feet long, and 4 to 6 inches deep and filled with 15 to 25 gallons of solution. Footbaths should be placed on level ground. Often, cows walk through a separate footbath filled with water before entering the actual footbath solution to remove some of the manure off the hooves and keep the footbath solution clean for a longer time. Generally, footbaths are located in the return path from the milking parlor. Maintaining good footing within the footbath to minimize cows slipping is another important consideration.

Footbath solutions should be changed regularly to maintain effectiveness. If footbaths are not changed regularly, they essentially become “manure baths” rather than footbaths and may actually increase the spread of infectious hoof disorders rather than prevent them. A good rule of thumb is to change footbath solutions every 150 to 200 cow passes. Solutions may be changed automatically or manually.

The downside to the changing of a manual footbath solution is that changing tends to occur less frequently than it should. However, manual footbaths are considerably less expensive than automatic footbaths. On the other hand, automatic footbaths allow for frequent solution turnover and minimal hoof contamination. When using an automatic footbath, some cows may be startled by the noises created by the sensor, which could potentially lead to traffic bottlenecks or injuries.

Footbaths can be an important part of a preventive hoof health program on dairy farms and can reduce lameness and its negative effects. For more information, contact Jeff Smith at Fleming County Extension office (606-845-4641). Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.