Stride
The UK Dairy
Mobility Initiative

THE 2024 STRIDE REPORT

INSIGHTS INTO DAIRY COW MOBILITY

CONTENTS

www.stridemobility.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

Dairy farmers face a significant number of challenges as we strive to continue to produce milk of the highest nutritional quality with exemplary standards of animal welfare. For many businesses, the difficulty is in prioritising management time and focus to have the best effect for the business.

Ensuring high levels of mobility and foot health is an important foundation of efficient milk production. We all know that cows who are sound on their feet will be able to perform more effectively. We know a great deal about the factors that contribute to better mobility and how the condition can be managed. It is unrealistic to say that we can ever achieve a zero level of impaired mobility, but there is still progress that can be made.

Sometimes it is important to sit back and look at particular opportunities in more detail, through a fresh set of eyes and to move them up the priority list. This is why the Stride Initiative is so welcome, producing an up-to-date picture of dairy cow mobility, highlighting some of the practical opportunities that exist to drive improvements, improve productivity and welfare, and reduce costs.

It is also encouraging to see different parts of the industry coming together to create the Stride initiative.

Stride's partners and supporters represent a cross-section of the links in the supply chain that together help to facilitate improved mobility. To see the supply chain collaborating for the benefit of their customers is commendable and sends an important message.

It emphasises that improving mobility and foot health requires a wide range of management approaches and preventive measures, and that this is best achieved by collaboration. It also sends the message that farmers are not on their own but should draw on the available expertise to help develop effective strategies.

By so doing we can achieve the goal of improving mobility with all the benefits this brings and hopefully free up time to address some of the other challenges we face.

PAUL TOMPKINS

Chair, NFU Dairy Board

THE STRIDE INITIATIVE

Compromised foot health and reduced mobility has stubbornly remained a cause of reduced productivity, increased costs and higher rates of involuntary culling in dairy herds. It is also now a contributor to raised emissions through reduced efficiency of immobile cows.
Any improvements in mobility will contribute to better profits, improved cow welfare and a reduction in the herd carbon footprint.

Modern production requires constant attention on foot health but there is no clear picture of the key issues and therefore the opportunities to improve. We know that effective prevention strategies are based on a broad range of technical inputs and require a collaborative approach involving the whole farm team and the wider industry. This is why the Stride Initiative was created.

Stride is a not-for-profit initiative, managed by a group of industry partners representing key areas in foot health improvement — Ceva, HerdVision, IVC Farm Vets, Neogen and Zinpro. It is supported by many organisations across the industry. The objectives of Stride are to increase understanding of the issues, contribute to the knowledge surrounding the problems and to support producers by identifying and communicating clear management strategies that deliver sustained improvement in foot health.

Our first action was to commission a major national survey in the spring of 2024 focussed on foot health and mobility.

This survey was overseen by a Technical Board made up of the partners, with independent epidemiological guidance from Professor Alasdair Cook from the University of Surrey. It attracted considerable support, and the headline results are summarised in this report.

These results will be used to help shape practical approaches to help farms deliver tangible and sustainable improvements in mobility, helping all dairy farmers to achieve the benefits of improved foot health. We are taking our first steps with 'Stride', an exciting journey that will benefit the whole industry.

MATT DOBBS MRCVS

Chair, Stride Technical Board

CEO HerdVision
by Agsenze

THE RESULTS

The 2024 Stride dairy mobility survey was commissioned to build a picture of dairy cow mobility and how it is managed across the UK. The aim was to better understand the situation on farm and to identify pinchpoints and opportunities for improvement.

The survey was devised by the Stride Technical Board and ran from February – April 2024. The Technical Board then reviewed the results and conclusions, which are presented in this report.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

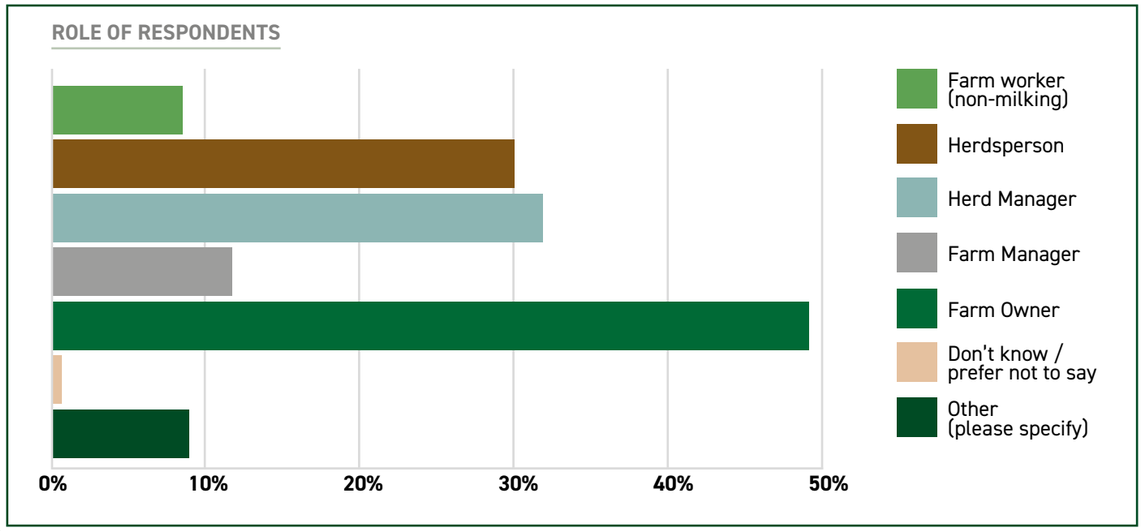
The farms represented in the survey are broadly reflective of the national herd.

- In total **359** businesses completed the full survey, representing **4.8%** of milk producers. In total they milk **119,000 cows**, equivalent to **7.3%** of the national herd.
- **76%** of herds were Holstein/Holstein Friesian with **13%** of herds milking crossbred cows.
- The herd average herd size was **330 cows** compared to the national average of **217**. There was a wide range in herd size with **8%** of herds having fewer than **100 cows** while **3%** had more than **1000 cows**.
- The average yield was **8660 litres/cow**, which is higher than the national average of **8100 litres/cow**. The survey included herds producing fewer than **5000 litres/cow** through to those producing in excess of **12,000 litres/cow**.
- **67%** of herds described themselves as all-year-round calving, with **17%** autumn block-calved, **6%** spring block-calved and **7%** running both spring and autumn blocks.
- **61%** of herds grazed cows for between **13 and 36 weeks a year,** with **19%** of herds not grazing. Herds that do not graze tend to be larger and higher yielding.
- Of those who specified a milking system, **84%** milked either twice or three times a day through conventional parlours, with **11%** of herds milked robotically.
- **98%** of respondents rear their own replacements.

The respondents covered a broad spectrum of age and position within the business.

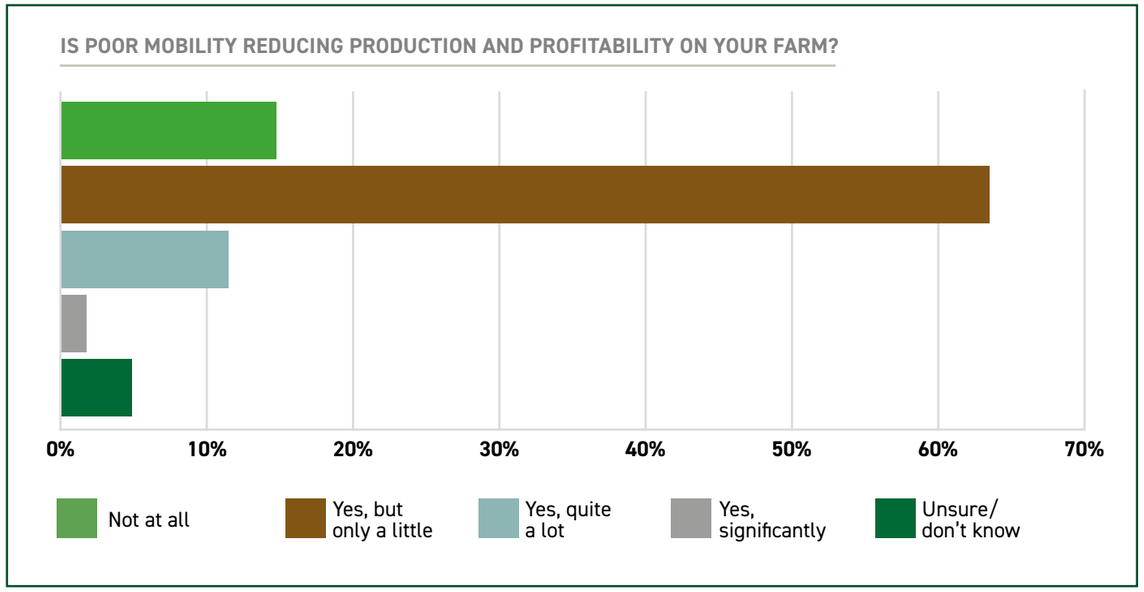
- Of those who gave details of age, **12%** were under 25 years old, **45%** were between 25 and 45, **39%** were between 46 and 65, and **3%** of respondents were older than 65.
- **47%** of respondents described themselves as the farm owner, **18%** as herd manager, **13%** as herdsman and **8%** as farm manager with a range of other job titles recorded.
- When asked who was responsible for foot health and mobility of the farm, respondents could select more than one option resulting in an average of **1.4 responses per farm**.

Responsibility principally resided with the farm owner, herd manager or herdsman/woman. Notably, many respondents attributed at least some responsibility to external advisers, principally the foot trimmer.



THE OVERALL PICTURE

HOW SIGNIFICANT IS THE PROBLEM OF REDUCED MOBILITY?



The survey results revealed that 77% of respondents believed that poor mobility had no impact or only a limited impact on herd and business profitability. Older respondents were more inclined to believe there was a negative impact on profitability.

As herd average milk yield increased, so there appeared to be a better appreciation of the impact. While 100% of herds averaging fewer than 5,000 litres/cow said compromised mobility and foot health was having no or a limited impact on profitability, 18% of herds producing between 9,000 and 11,000 litres/cow and 22% of those producing more than 11,000 litres/cow said it was a more significant problem.

When asked to say how significant the impact of reduced foot health and mobility was on their business, 51% of respondents said it was not very significant in the milking cows and 12% said it was not significant at all. Only 35% said it was a significant issue.

Older respondents were more likely to describe it as a significant issue, with 50% of those older than 65 saying it was a significant issue compared to 27% of under 25s.

Smaller herds see compromised mobility as less of an issue than larger herds. In herds of fewer than 100 cows only, 25% of respondents said it was a significant issue compared to 50% in herds of 500 cows or more. This picture was mirrored when analysed by yield level, with lower-yielding herds reporting that it was a less significant problem.

Herds that grazed for longer also considered poor mobility to be less of an issue for them.

Foot health in heifers is not typically seen as an issue among survey respondents, with 89% saying it was either not an issue or not very significant. Larger herds, overall, said it was a more important issue.

With dairy herds and businesses facing many challenges it is possible that mobility is not seen as significant as other issues, which may contribute to these results. In addition, the financial impacts of compromised foot health in terms of, for example, reduced production, compromised fertility and time spent treating cows, are not typically recorded. So it is possible that the financial consequences are under-estimated.

AHDB report that compromised mobility affects 30% of cows, with the financial consequence per case, on average, of £330. For the average herd in the survey, this amounts to more than £33,000 in reduced profitability which suggests it could be a more significant issue.

In addition, the lack of clearly understood mobility benchmarks, a lack of target setting for improvements in herds and a standard way to assess costs, may make it difficult to assess significance.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CAUSES OF POOR FOOT HEALTH AND MOBILITY SEEN IN HERDS?

The survey sought to understand the major causes of foot problems being seen on farm but did not set out to quantify the level of incidence. Instead respondents were asked to rank how significant each of the major conditions — digital dermatitis, foul, solar ulcers and bruising, white line disease and overgrown claws — was in their herd using a scale of 1-5 to indicate the degree of importance.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each condition with a score of 1 indicating a problem was more important than a condition scored 5 on that farm. It is important to emphasise that the results are respondents' perception of the importance of the main issues.

The results are shown in the table below.

Digital dermatitis, white line disease and sole ulcers are the most significant issues recorded

Diseases where management could be deployed to minimise disease, such as overgrown claws and foul are seen as less common causes of lameness. Diseases with a more complex range of causes or that require a multifactorial approach to control, such as ulcers and digital dermatitis, are seen as more important.

Digital dermatitis is associated with larger herds and higher-yielding cows, indicating this is a disease associated with production stress.

Poor foot health appears to be a more significant problem in cows that are not turned out, with more problems reported with digital dermatitis and white line disease.

These results confirm there is still a great opportunity to improve foot health and mobility to improve welfare and productivity.

	Comparative importance of each condition (1 = most important)					
	1	2	3	4	5	unsure
Digital dermatitis	34%	20.5%	20.2%	12.5%	9.0%	4.3%
Foul	8.2%	14.3%	20.5%	26.3%	26.3%	4.4%
Sole ulcers/bruising	26.6%	30.9%	20.6%	12.5%	4.7%	4.7%
While line disease	19.2%	25.2%	24.6%	17.4%	8.5%	5.1%
Overgrown claws	9.2%	5.7%	11.9%	24.5%	45.0%	3.7%

CONFIDENCE IN KNOWLEDGE

Respondents are largely confident in their ability and knowledge of foot health and mobility to address the issues on farm. This finding was consistent across herd size and yield. Younger respondents were marginally less confident, but this may be a consequence of inexperience and lack of training received.

Despite a confidence in knowledge on how to address impaired mobility, over a third of herds reported lameness to be a significant issue.

WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED IN MANAGING FOOT HEALTH AND MOBILITY?

The survey confirms that a wide range of experts and external services are available to help manage mobility and foot health, and that farms are typically willing to engage with these services to address specific components of foot health and mobility. However, 9% of respondents used no external input.

Professional foot trimmers are the most widely used external resource, with 70% of farms surveyed employing a foot trimmer. While half the respondents identified the vet as a resource used, either in treating problem cows or more proactively helping to develop foot health and mobility improvement protocols.

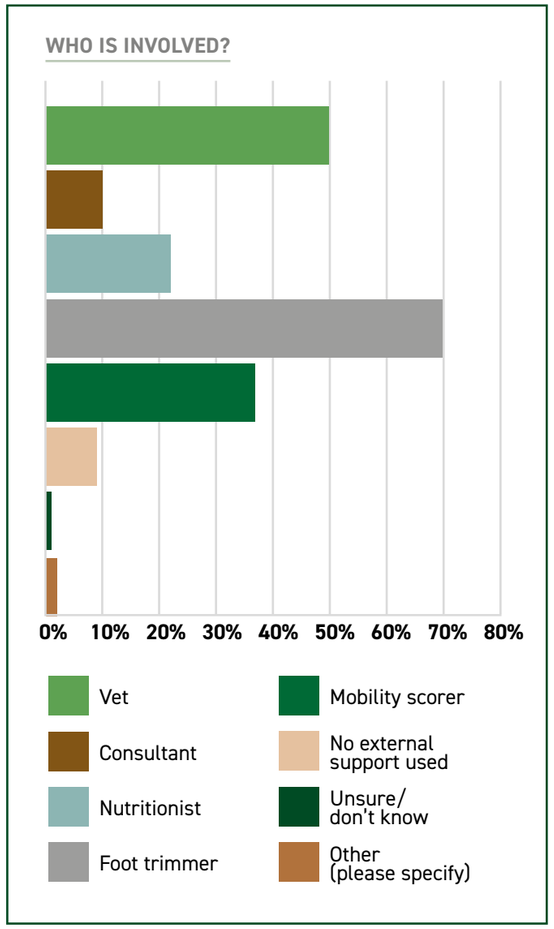
The under-25 age group are less likely to employ external resources. Older respondents are more likely to use the vet but less likely to use a foot trimmer.

The involvement of the nutritionist increases with herd size, which may simply be a reflection of the increased reliance on nutritionists by larger herds. However, it recognises the central role of nutrition in foot health.

The use of specialist mobility scorers and foot trimmers also increases with herd size, although the use of foot trimmers drops in herds comprising more than 1,000 cows, possibly due to these herds having trained farm staff.

The use of all external resources generally increased with yield.

The survey paints a picture of larger businesses using a wider team to manage mobility and foot health. But with more people involved the issue of co-ordination and communication across the extended team could be more of an issue when it comes to maintaining high levels of foot health and mobility. Assigning responsibility for managing foot health in the herd appears to be a challenge in large and small herds.



INVESTMENT IN FOOT HEALTH

There is a wide range of specialist equipment available to help with the prevention and treatment of lameness on farm and the survey highlighted that many producers see this as an area where investment is beneficial.

The survey revealed that 92% of respondents have a foot-trimming crush, with 32% of these being a powered crush, and 90% have a permanent or mobile footbath, with 15% having a dedicated heifer footbath. This means a proportion of farms do not have the most basic equipment for managing foot health and those that have invested may be using equipment which would benefit from modernisation.

However, respondents would also appear to be willing to consider new technologies because 37.5% have invested in automatic footbaths and 4% in mobility scoring cameras. The trend for investment in new and existing technologies increases in line with average yield level and herd size.

The data on investment and the use of external specialists, combined with a high degree of confidence in their ability to address foot health, suggests that businesses see mobility as a less significant issue because major steps have already been taken to improve levels.

MANAGING MOBILITY

With a wide range of approaches available to manage the incidence and consequences of reduced mobility and poor foot health, the survey set out to understand producers' opinions and experiences with major areas of management.

FOOT TRIMMING

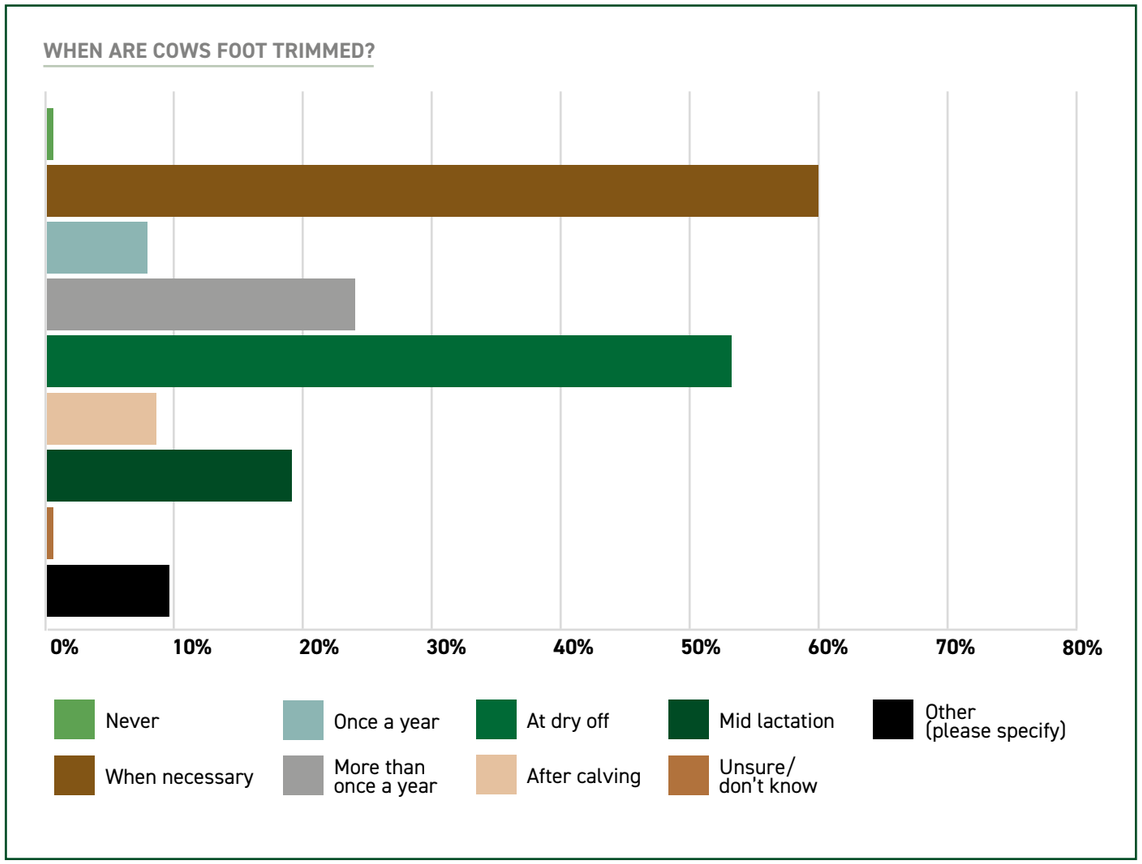
Preventitive foot trimming can play a central role in improving foot health and therapeutic trimming can be a core component in treating cases. The survey showed a mixed response with regards to the adoption of foot trimming.

While only 1% of respondents never foot trim, suggesting near-universal acceptance of the value of trimming, 60% only trim when necessary. This implies trimming is seen as a treatment predominantly, with little routine preventitive trimming.

The results also show the lack of a clear picture of when to routinely trim cows. While drying off is the most common time to trim feet, milking cows are likely to be seen by the foot trimmer when between 60 and 100 days in milk, but anywhere up to 150 days in milk.

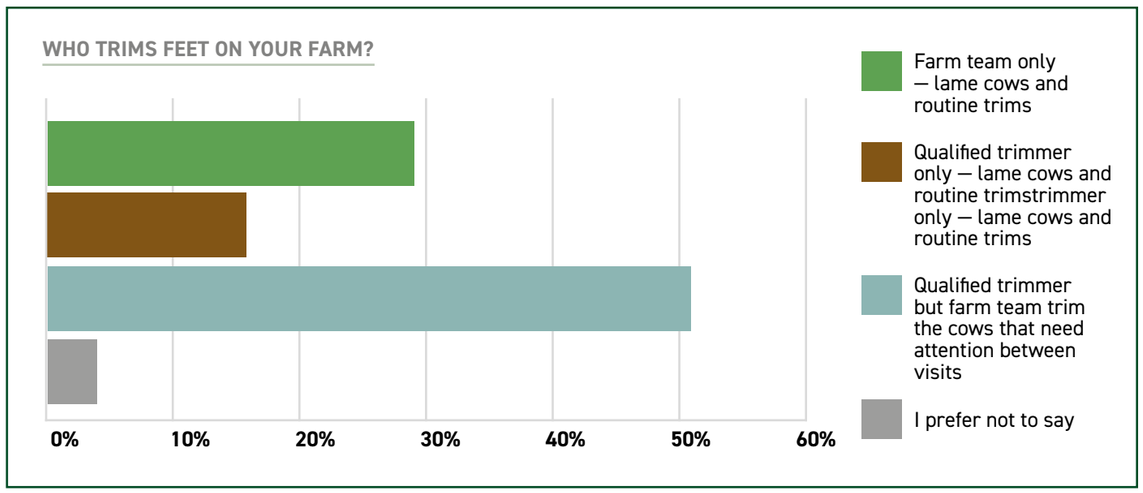
Larger herds appear to adopt a more structured approach to foot trimming with 41% trimming only when necessary compared to 71% in herds of under 100 cows. This may be a reflection of better protocols and the availability of more trained staff. Higher-yielding herds also have a more structured approach to hoof trimming, as do herds housed all year round.

The survey reveals a mixed picture on who trims feet. On 15% of dairy units, trimming is only carried out by a qualified external foot trimmer with a strong trend towards this typically being in smaller herds. The combined approach of qualified external trimmer working with the farm team increases with herd size, which is perhaps recognition of the importance of routine preventitive and treatment trimming.



Overgrown or lame I don't care if it's Christmas Day. If a cow needs trimming we do it straight away.

We aim for dry-off and post-calving trims but this is rarely achieved.



FOOTBATHING

The survey asked about the frequency of footbathing of milking cows, dry cows and heifers.

78% of respondents footbath milking cows weekly or more often. 6.5% footbath up to three times per month, with 4.5% monthly or less often. However, 11% never footbath milking cows with a number of reasons given for this, including no facilities or lack of a perceived need.

Some respondents commented that the frequency of footbathing is increased when problems such as a digital dermatitis outbreak occur, implying a reactive rather than preventative approach and a belief that footbathing can be used to treat lesions.

Dry cows are footbathed less frequently with 34% of respondents never footbathing dry cows and only 28% footbathing weekly. 47% never footbath in-calf heifers, despite the benefits of developing robust foot health during the rearing phase.

Larger herds are more likely to footbath all classes of stock, as are herds housed all year round.

Need to footbath dry cows and youngstock more often but difficult to do.

BREEDING AND CULLING

Compromised mobility and poor foot health still remains a major reason for cows being culled, with 60% of respondents saying it was in the top three reasons for culling cows, while another 32% said they take it into account if a cow is identified for culling for another reason. Respondents commented that chronic lame cows will be culled.

Cows are more likely to be culled for mobility reasons in larger and higher-yielding herds. Younger respondents were also more likely to cull for mobility.

Mobility improvement still remains a major breeding goal, with 32% of respondents always considering it when selecting sires and 33% often including leg, feet and locomotion traits.

However, other traits such as £PLI and milk constituents were often given priority. Older farmers tend to give a higher priority to mobility in breeding decisions.

Genomic testing has opened up access to more data on the female side but as yet 70% of respondents are not genomically testing females, which is in line with the overall uptake of genomics in the UK herd.

Those who do use genomic testing are including lameness advantage, legs and feet and locomotion information in their decision making. Younger respondents and larger herds are more likely to be using genomic information.

TREATMENTS AND VETERINARY INVOLVEMENT

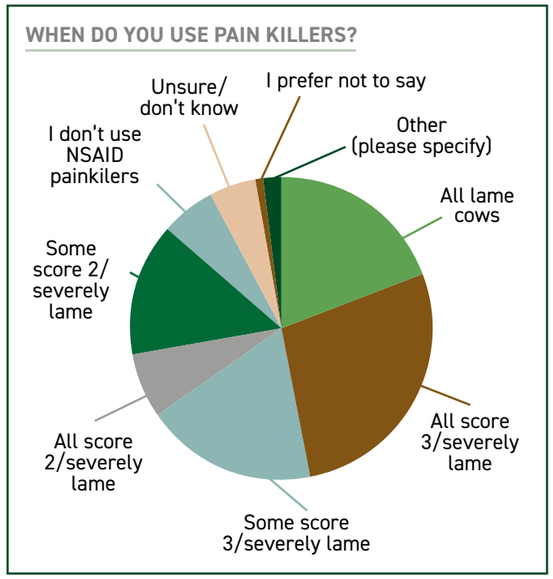
The vet and other veterinary staff such as vet technicians are seen as key members in the team approach to foot health management. Vets are involved in treatment of specific cases and the supply of medicines. 74% of respondents are supplied spray/topical and injectable antibiotics by their vet and 36% source non-antibiotic treatments like painkillers and anti-inflammatories.

Blocks and bandages are used by most respondents, showing the importance of routine nursing and 'non-prescription' treatments.

Painkillers are a widely used tool in the treatment of foot issues.

A quarter of farmers use painkillers for all mobility-compromised cows. Some respondents blanket-treat all mobility score 2 and 3 cows, while others treat these cows selectively. This poses two questions – who makes the decision, and what is it based on?

Use of painkillers tends to increase with larger herds, with low-yielding herds tending to use them less frequently.



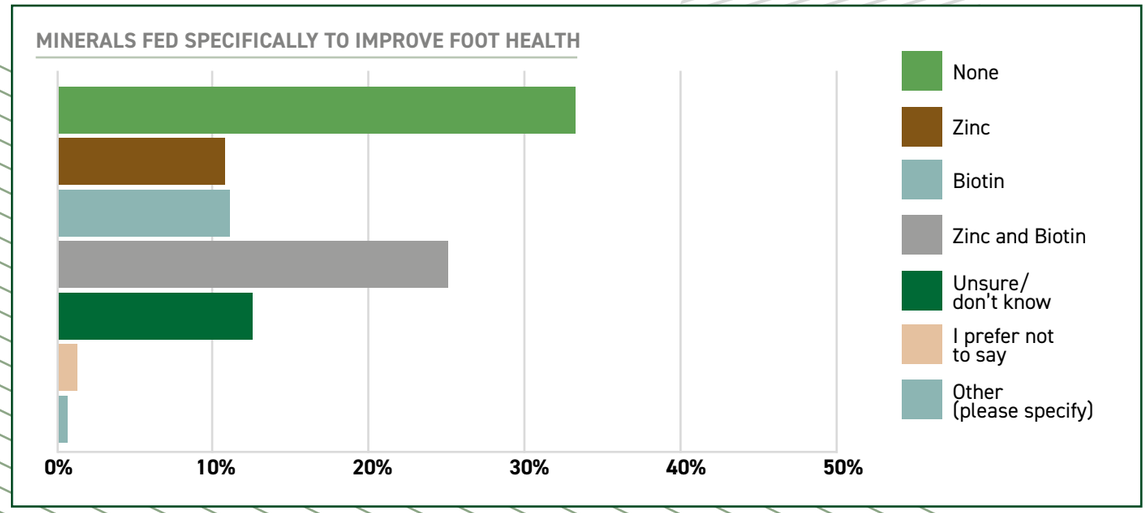
THE DIET AND FOOT HEALTH

There was a range of opinion on the importance of diet with regard to foot health with higher-yielding and larger herds more likely to be refining diets. Lower-yielding and smaller herds are more likely to be making extensive use of grazing and forage. While several respondents commented that they expect the nutritionist to balance the diet and consider lameness within this. Notably, 22% of respondents include the nutritionist within the people involved in advising on mobility.

Dietary interventions include limiting dairy starch (14%), feeding rumen buffers/yeasts (36%) and increasing fibre levels (49%). In addition, reducing protein levels was another intervention mentioned.

Looking specifically at the role of specific minerals in foot health, the addition of zinc and biotin is used by a proportion of respondents.

The use of specific minerals increased with yield. 67% of respondents with herds producing less than 5000 litres/cow use no additional minerals. The proportion falls to 21% in those herds producing more than 9000 litres/cow.



MOBILITY SCORING

This is now accepted as an effective way to assess trends in impaired mobility at a herd level, directing to long term solutions while also identifng problem cows. Increasingly it is attracting the interest of milk processors keen to demonstrate higher welfare levels across their supplier herds.

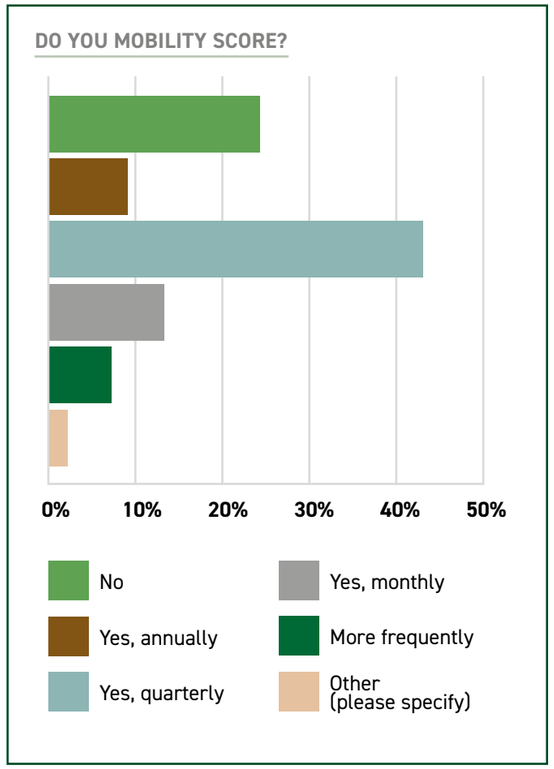
The survey showed a wide spread in the frequency of mobility scoring indicating that the method is still not widely accepted on farm.

51% of respondents mobility score quarterly or less frequently and 24% do not mobility score at all. As with other prevention measures, the uptake of mobility scoring is greatest in larger and higher-yielding herds.

Many respondents commented that they are effectively mobility scoring as cows are observed every day in the parlour or elsewhere on the farm, negating the need for formal scoring. Herds housed all year round are more likely to mobility score herds regularly, but robot milked herds are less likely to mobility score due to the practical difficulties.

Many farms now have staff qualified as mobility scorers, and 29% of farms always use farm staff for mobility scoring. However, 45% rely on external scorers whether the vet, foot trimmer or a RoMS scorer. 17% use a combined approach utilising farm staff and external contractors.

The survey shows a small number of farmers investing in camera technologies to automate mobility scoring, a technology that has only been available for the last two years.



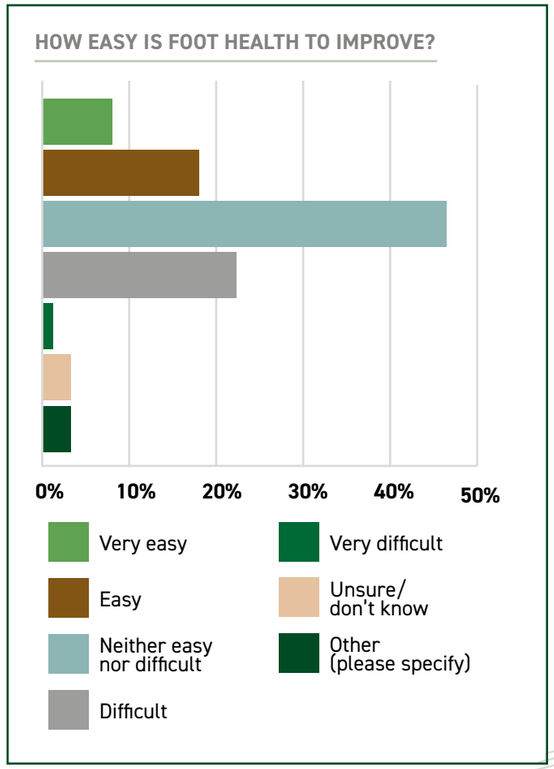
THE FUTURE

The final section of the survey explored attitudes to foot health and mobility in the future.

When asked how easy it would be to improve levels of foot health in the future, 23% of respondents felt it would be easy to reduce lameness levels although 22% concede it will be difficult, perhaps a recognition that levels have been reduced and that marginal improvements will be more challenging. Availability of time was quoted as a particular barrier.

Notably around 40% did not express an opinion either way. This could indicate that those farmers have poor engagement in foot health as a problem, despite already knowing this is a challenge.

> Easy but not simple to implement. Spot 'em earlier, get them in the crush, don't skip foot baths because it doesn't suit, scrape the dry cow house more often. All the steps are easy, but manpower, and resource prioritisation limit implementation.



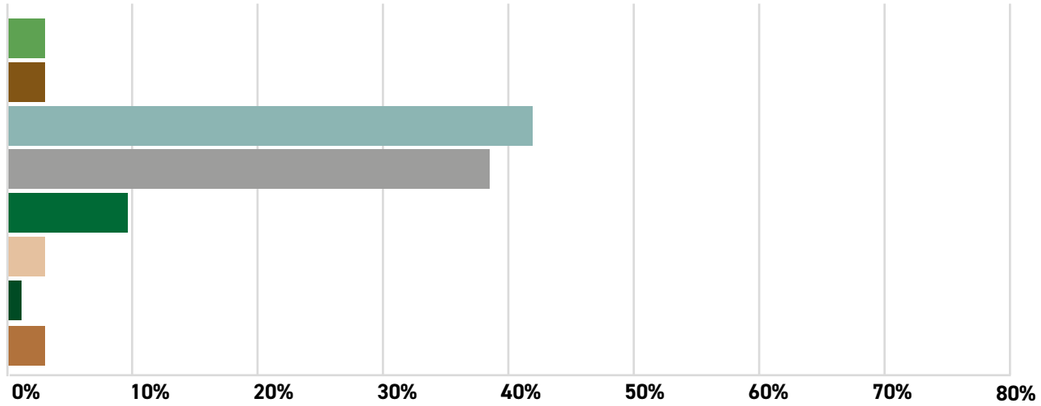
When asked if they agreed with the statement; *'The level of lameness will reduce in my herd in the next 12 months'*, only 5% disagreed, suggesting a high degree of confidence in the ability to reduce lameness. Notably, younger respondents were the most confident.

Finally, respondents were asked for their opinion on new technologies to help improve mobility and hoof health and there was interest in a wide range of technologies to improve management and potentially release time.

Automated footbaths, genomic testing, mobility cameras, wearable devices that identify lame cows and new treatments were all seen as possible investments.

Younger respondents were more likely to invest, along with larger herds. The herd size may be a reflection of the capital cost of some investments.

RESPONSES TO STATEMENT: THE LEVEL OF LAMENESS IN MY HERD WILL REDUCE IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS



CONCLUSIONS

The key findings from the survey can be summarised as follows:

- Compromised mobility and foot health is still a significant issue for UK dairy herds and will be impacting of profitability. Therefore addressing the causes of impaired mobility and improving foot health remains a significant opportunity to reduce costs and improve productivity and welfare.
- There are big differences in attitude and approach to addressing the challenge based on the farming system, herd size, production level and age of survey respondant.
- There appears to be an acceptance of current levels of poor mobility. This might reflect an opinion that significant progress has already been made or that the issue is not seen as a high priority and therefore does not receive a high level of attention or that the marginal gains of further progress yield a lower cost-benefit.
- The true cost of poor foot health may be understated as the condition is not clearly recorded and the savings made by improving mobility are not easily calculated.
- Many people can be involved in managing mobility on farms, including farm workers and external contractors/vets/trimmers. An unclear derogation of accountability can lead to confusion, unclear responsibilities and a potential lack of progress.
- All the major causes of poor foot health and compromised mobility remain problematic, although digital dermatitis and sole ulcers/bruising are of greatest concern.
- Despite an understanding of the many components of an effective foot health programme, there is variable uptake on all the main preventative measures. The benefits of an integrated foot health programme communicated clearly and consistently enough to allow farmers to follow a structured approach are not widely understood.

There is a generally good level of confidence that foot health and mobility could be improved further by both large and small, high-yielding and extensive producers.

LEARNING FROM THE SURVEY

The Stride survey has provided an invaluable, detailed and timely picture of dairy cow foot health and mobility in the UK. Its value now is in how it is used to encourage change, create practical tailored solutions to help producers address their specific concerns, and to help the industry to grasp the opportunities identified in the survey to make further and sustained improvements in foot health and mobility.

Many farmers have made, and continue to make, good progress in improving foot health and mobility. This is a result of considerable dedication, commitment and a focus on the key issues. But, at an industry level, the wide range of prevalence of foot issues across herds shows there is still scope for improvement.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The industry must be more proactive in communicating the importance of better foot health and mobility to dairy farm businesses.**
2. **Remove barriers to engagement.**
3. **Clearer and more effective allocation of responsibilities across the whole team.**
4. **Develop holistic prevention programmes.**
5. **Encourage the adoption of new technologies to support diagnosis, treatment and prevention.**

RECOMMENDATION 1

The industry must be more proactive in communicating the importance of better foot health and mobility to dairy farm businesses.

It is important that everyone working in the industry recognises the consequences of poor foot health. It leads to lost milk production and can compromise herd fertility. Treatment adds to costs of production, further reducing profitability. Managing cows with impaired mobility takes time away from other activities so can impact the whole herd and dairy business. Poor foot health is still a major cause of involuntary culling, pushing up replacement rates and depressing the rate of genetic gain.

Compromised mobility is a recognised welfare issue and can negatively impact wider perceptions of the industry. More recently, the effect of poor foot health on dairying's carbon footprint is becoming clear, with higher replacement rates and reduced production adding to a herd's kgCO2e/kg milk. Yet improving foot health does not appear to be a high priority for many businesses. This is understandable as impaired mobility usually leads to indirect losses, the financial value of which are seldom calculated and quantified.

The establishment and wide communication of clear industry benchmarks, coupled with regular reporting against these, should be implemented as a priority to allow farmers to assess their herds, record progress and demonstrate commitment to tackle mobility at an industry level.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Remove barriers to engagement.

All dairy businesses know that they need to continue to take steps to reduce the issues associated with compromised foot health. Yet the survey clearly highlights a range in the degree of engagement in mobility management and the importance attributed to it.

If the industry is serious about achieving and maintaining enhanced levels of mobility, it is important to understand and reduce the barriers to engagement.

Barrier 1: Economic

With profits under pressure and a range of demands for available cash, a proportion of farmers may question the economic return on further investment in foot health, particularly if they have already taken, and are continuing to take, action.

To demonstrate the cost–benefit of investment in preventative actions to improve foot health, there needs to be a clearly communicated assessment of the true cost of compromised foot health including the cost per case, the impact on carbon footprint, and a whole farm model showing the return on adopting a comprehensive prevention strategy.

All economic gains from improving herd mobility must be demonstrated as tangible gains rather than hypothetical opportunities. Most dairy businesses are able to respond positively to direct financial rewards if the targets are clear, objective and understandable.

Barrier 2: Information
More assistance needs to be available to help farmers and their herd-management teams understand what and where changes are required to achieve the best results. A systematic approach to understanding the underlying issues and root causes, combined with better target setting and clearer and more easily implementable protocols, can provide a robust framework to improve foot health. This will require the engagement of the whole farm team, both those directly working with the cows on a daily basis and also all those who advise and support the herd and dairy business.

Barrier 3: Skills
Anyone involved in managing mobility must be trained in the various activities and understand how to interpret data to guide action and decision making. There should be wider availability of initial and on-going training to ensure all employees with any degree of responsibility for foot health are educated to an appropriate level of proficiency.

Given the multi-factorial causes of compromised foot health, a holistic strategy should be delivered through a collaborative approach involving partners across the supply chain. Improving mobility is in everyone's interests and progress will be accelerated and sustained with a common approach.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Clearer and more effective allocation of responsibilities across the whole team.

Addressing a mobility problem is not easy. It involves a carefully considered and balanced approach, an investment, in both time and money, and a dedicated approach by the whole farm team. In building a foot-care programme, all the team should have their responsibilities defined and know their role. Bringing together the team to discuss the problem, the common diagnoses, the plans for reducing the disease and the preventitive measures to be deployed is a key part of success.

However, the survey revealed that overall responsibility for foot health is often unclear and in some cases delegated to an external adviser who by definition will not be regularly involved with the herd.

Clearer delegation of overall responsibility for foot health should be seen as a priority for all dairy businesses. Who is the person on the farm with the biggest vested interest in driving for high standards of foot health? Giving them the responsibility and then investing in them to develop the skills they need, provide the appropriate resources and making time available to focus on the task will underpin better foot health.

Setting targets helps to give herds focus and the means for celebrating success once targets are met. Targets should be measurable, achievable, real and set to be achieved within a designated time span.

Data is key to knowing and addressing a mobility problem, so understanding the common diagnoses, tracking mobility scores and the losses due to compromised mobility and foot health are all crucial to success. Everyone in the team should sign up to the target and work together to achieve it.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Develop holistic prevention programmes.

Effective foot-health strategies have their foundation in prevention, helping reduce incidence rates and costs, while also improving the welfare of both the animal and the farm team. Addressing foot-health problems involves the whole farm team. From those managing the cows on a daily basis, undertaking preventative foot bathing or managing the cows' 'time budget', through to those who feed the cows and those who makes decisions about the investments the dairy business should make.

In addition, all advisers should be engaged with contributing to the overall plan to improve mobility, from ration formulation by the nutritionist, through to the vets advising on care and foot trimmers supporting routine and corrective trimming. Bringing the entire team together will improve focus and accountability.

Most advisers have a wealth of knowledge that can help farmers to improve herd health and they should be encouraged to work with the herd data to better understand the herd's problems and recommend improvement strategies.

Most herds will need to undertake routine foot trimming and routine foot bathing, but advice should be sought as to what, when and how these procedures are best deployed in an integrated way. Significant advances in scientific knowledge on building design and cow-time budgets have been made in recent years and are essential to reduce standing times – a key component of improving foot health.

Prevention is the key to achieving the best financial savings, and while these investments may have an initial capital cost, farmers should consider new and technological improvements as an investment in medium- and long-term profitability. Investments in buildings and new technology, such as powered foot crushes or automated footbaths, have an initial capital cost, but these investments will give a compounded return, so early investment should be considered.

Unfortunately, many preventative approaches, rather than being routinely adopted and applied are seen as reactive treatment regimes. Foot bathing, dietary support of foot health and hoof trimming are all examples of procedures that historically were only applied once a foot health problem had been diagnosed when their biggest value, and the best return on their investment, is in achieving low incidence and fewer clinical cases. Herds with the lowest levels of impaired mobility are adopting these as routine health care measures and cows benefit from this constant focus on their mobility.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Encourage the adoption of new technologies to support diagnosis, treatment and prevention.

Our world is being changed daily by the adoption of new technology. New technologies to support mobility are being developed all the time, from safer and more effective foot bath solutions, through to improved mineral specifications in rations and monitoring technologies, such as wearables and camera systems. Early adoption of technologies may feel like being the 'guinea pig', but early adopters in all industries typically out-perform their more 'traditional' peers and competitors.

The survey demonstrated that the responsibility for identifying lame cows is not usually down to one person and, as such, can be overlooked on a busy farm.

Technologies that identify cows with impaired mobility report this information on mobile and web and, where necessary, report this information to advisers and milk purchasers. This saves time and money, and improves welfare.

Once a cow has been diagnosed with a problem, new treatments can help bring about a cure more quickly, reducing the pain associated with the condition while maintaining milk yields. The return on investment of new treatments is compelling, and all farmers should discuss treatment protocols with their advisory team.

Pressure should be maintained to encourage the continued availability of grants for investment in technologies that are proven to improve foot health and mobility.

The earlier the problem is dealt with, the higher the chance of cure

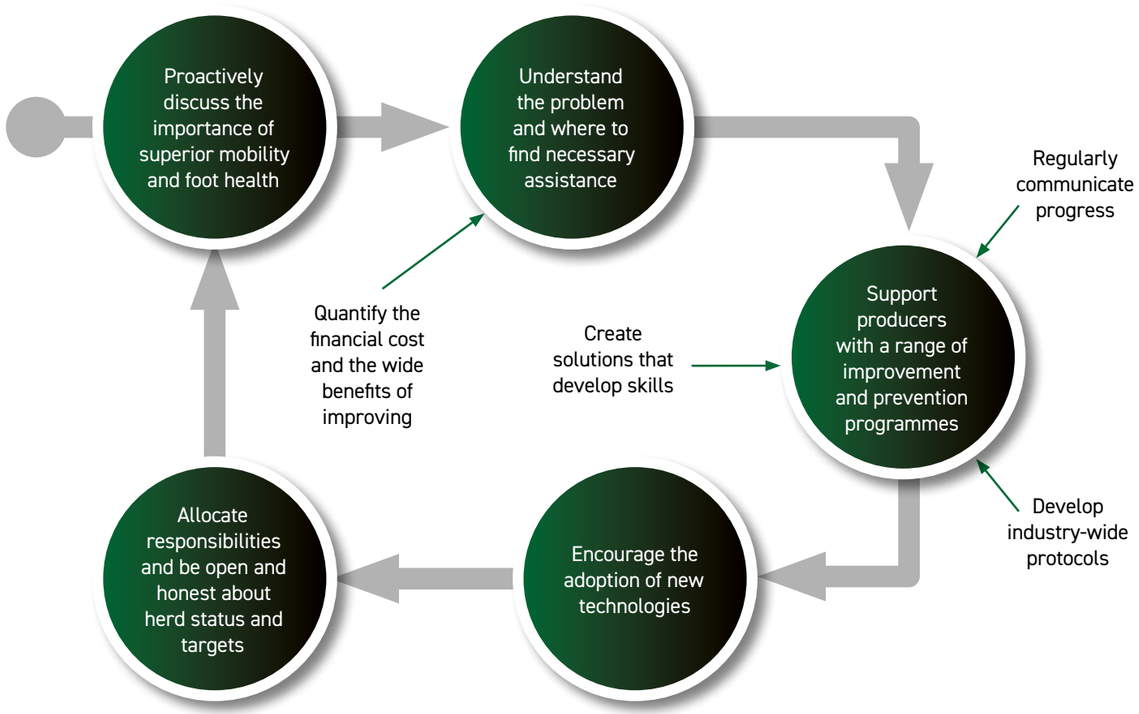
OVERALL SUMMARY

Foot health and mobility continues to be a challenge for many UK herds, yet complacency, a lack of data and a lack of understanding of the cost-benefit of addressing the problem, hold many farms back from addressing the problem. The benefits prove there is a need for continuous improvement. New products, services and technologies bring an opportunity to improve cow mobility and will allow producers to realise positive incremental change to the health of their herds.

The benefits that will be realised include better performance and financial returns, improved human and animal welfare, and a contribution to reducing the carbon footprint of milk production.

The challenge is to raise the priority of this opportunity and for the industry to come together to help farmers deliver even better standards. Our hope is that the next Stride survey will be able to report that significant and continued progress is being made.

THE STRIDE PATHWAY TO IMPROVED DAIRY MOBILITY



Stride

The UK Dairy
Mobility Initiative

www.stridemobility.co.uk

Our Partners

NEOGEN® HERDVISION

ZINPRO FARM VETS

In association with cowmanagement

Designed by Mono Design Derby