



Tips On Reducing Lameness and Keeping Cows Moving After Floods and Storm Damage

Storm and flood damage to lameness results in damaged tracks and cows that get softened hooves that are easily damaged. While long term nutrition management that reduces acidosis risk and provides adequate levels of zinc and biotin is essential for setting up healthy hooves, extreme laneway conditions such as we are seeing on many farms now require urgent attention.

These controls are readily available through the **Cows-R-Us** feeds that many of you use. Our feeds contain control for acidosis and biotin which is a powerful agent to improve hoof health, organic zinc that also assists. However, it takes about 4 to 6 months for these to improve hoof integrity.

The goal is to rapidly make tracks safe to reduce further hoof damage, harden hooves where possible and focus on stockmanship and careful cattle handling to reduce risk of further damage.

Some tips to consider include:

1. Identify areas of laneways where stones have come up and cows have risk of damage to the bottom of hooves. These areas can be focussed or extensive. Short term options that can assist while you wait for more thorough repair include:
 - a. Laying down rubber conveyor belting- we have done this either on short sections or for over 500m, particularly with flatter surfaces
 - b. Roll out old silage or hay to cover stones. This is a great use for weather damaged silage rolls and can be inexpensively and quickly executed. Running a tractor wheel over the silage can help compress it a little after rolling out
 - c. Old carpet (free of nails) or astro turf can be laid out on laneway "hotspots" and road crossings where stones may have come to the surface or been washed onto
 - d. Woodchip and coarse mulch is also an excellent topper for coarse laneways
 - e. Concrete surfaces where stones have been washed onto should be cleaned off ASAP

2. Think about using a foot bath or foot mats near the dairy. Footbaths containing solutions of copper sulfate or formalin can be used to disinfect skin and may help harden hooves.
 - a. Formalin must be used carefully due to potential human health risks. Wearing PPE and setting baths or mats up well away from the dairy, perhaps at the end of long exit races is advisable. A mix of 40% formalin diluted one part in 10 with water is normally used, but discuss usage regimen in detail with your Scibus adviser. Generally, use once daily for three days and then every few days thereafter.
 - b. Copper sulfate is also effective as a skin disinfectant and should also assist with improving hoof hardness. It is also used in rates of one part in 10 to one part in 20 by weight. It can be used daily in baths or mats closer to the dairy and baths can be set up at the exit or entry of the dairy. Note, all bath solutions need to be replenished after 200 cows pass through them so larger herds may need a top up or two during milking.
3. Move stock carefully and slowly and work closely with staff to ensure they are patient and that they give cows time to “pick their way” through nastier patches on laneways. Avoid using dogs once cattle are in laneways.
4. Get lame cows seen to by team members skilled in lameness treatment or call your veterinarian or other hoof care expert to treat lame cows as quickly as possible. Generally, the quicker a cow is treated when lame, the sooner and more likely she is to make a good recovery. Thorough clean-up of damaged claw and use of hoof blocks or Cowslips can make a big difference. Don't make lame cows walk great distances- try and keep them close to home.

There is so much to get on top of as we recover from the recent flooding and wet weather. If we can keep cows safely moving around farm and promptly treat and prevent lameness, cows will be saved, treatment costs and losses will be reduced, there will be other benefits with milk quality and reduced labour costs with happier cows and people all round!