

Hoof Trimming Made Easy

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One segment of herd health that is being almost totally ignored is hoof trimming. An individual or two should be professionally trained to trim feet and be part of a dairy practice group. Hoof trimming, as it is presently performed, can be markedly improved because this procedure often predisposes animals to lameness when it is not properly performed.

A variety of stocks, tables, and chutes have been designed and built to restrain cattle for hoof trimming procedures. The instruments used for the actual trimming process, however, have not been changed basically since hoof trimming began. Instruments in the form of hoof knives, picks, chisels, nippers, and long-handled clippers, all require good physical strength and stamina on the part of the user. High speed sanders have been used for some time to smooth irregularities and shape sharp corners; however, these devices, if used with any force or for any duration, have often created laminitis with resulting acute lameness. Many of these cases of laminitis often end up as culled animals.

More recently, a much needed device in the form of a round wheel with a series of slot openings in the wheel face was introduced. This device is attached to a 4-1/2" high speed grinder. This unit has been used extensively for over two years on all types, shapes, and consistencies of hoofs. It is apparent that this new unit is to the veterinarian, dairy producer, or farrier, what the air drill is to the dentist. If this unit is maintained in a clean, sharp condition, there is absolutely no heating of the hoof surfaces contacted and therefore no induced laminitis. The hoof is trimmed rapidly with a minimum of effort and therefore it is less traumatic to the animal. Good restraint is a necessity, especially for the novice operating this high speed device. In order to familiarize oneself with this trimmer, a piece of pine wood should be secured in a bench vice as a good experimental beginning to get the feel of this trimmer.

In teaching senior veterinary students how to operate this unit, it has been helpful to begin by trimming the excessive length of the cow's hoof with a long-handled hoof trimmer. This provides a "benchmark" to gauge

depth and angle of cut. The sole of the hoof is then removed with the electric trimmer, primarily over the toe, so that the squared off cut, left by the long-handled clipper, is removed. This rotates the tip of the hoof down when the cow is placed in the standing position after trimming is completed. The foot of the cow will then assume a normal conformation (approximately 45° angle) with respect to the flat surface on which the cow is standing. Unless the heel of the foot is cracked and needs medical attention, only minimal trimming is performed over this structure.

A mistake seen commonly in hoof trimming is to trim so that the entire sole of the hoof is flat on the floor when the cow assumes a normal standing position. When cows' hoofs are properly trimmed, the sole of the entire hoof should be concaved. When this is accomplished, a large percentage of the cows' weight will be born on the walls of the hoof (at the outer edge). When walking, the cow will wear down the hoof wall and hoof trimming is required only once or twice yearly as opposed to three times yearly if the sole is left flat. Concaving the bottom of the foot reduces sole bruises which often occur when the sole of the foot is improperly trimmed.

Trimming should cease with this or any device when the sole of the foot "gives" under thumb pressure.

This wheel is an excellent method to remove excessive hoof in a diagnostic hoof trim. Abscess tracts are more easily found, investigated, drained and treated. In addition, this often unpleasant task is made easier. The cow is under stress for a shorter period of time and the outcome of the case is improved.

Wrapping the treated foot is best accomplished by the application of strong tincture of iodine or Betadine® solution on cotton. The cotton with iodine or Betadine® is then applied to the affected area. Three inch roller gauze is used to secure the cotton to the foot followed by one roll of Vetrap® (3M). When Vetrap® is used, the bottom of the foot is completely closed to reduce contamination for at least three to four days. The client should be instructed to keep the cow in an environment which is as dry as possible to encourage healing. When the bottom of the foot has worn through the Vetrap® bandage, the owner should be instructed that the remainder of the bandage circumventing the hoof, should be removed. Healing is usually complete if the case is not complicated in a short period of time.

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