



Dairy Tips By Dr. Randy Lyle, Ph.D

Purina Mills Dairy Consultant

# GOOD HOOF HEALTH FOR COWS

by Dr. Randy Lyle

The most common problem we see today is cows with sore hooves. You may not know the problem exists until you watch individual cows walk. Observing how cows stand can also provide clues to hoof health. Cows that walk slowly or reluctantly are obvious examples, but also watch for cows that walk with an arched back, cows that shift their weight off of a leg frequently, or cows that stand with rear legs set back. Long, overgrown hooves are an obvious problem.

Why the high incidence of hoof problems? We can blame environment, nutrition, and genetics. Impact of these three factors can be in combination, or just one can lead to a serious problem.

Important aspects of healthy hoof management are:

1. Identify a problem, if it exists. Determine if hoof problems are the result of foot rot or abscesses, laminitis (nutritional founder), or "warts" (may actually be caused by bacterium).
2. Maintain environment as clean and dry as practical. Use a foot bath, regular hoof trimming, well bedded stalls, get cows off concrete when possible.
3. Feed a balanced ration that provides adequate roughage and fiber. Avoid high grain levels, particularly high moisture grains. Don't chop forages too finely.
4. Selection for type traits and appropriate culling of problem cows

**If cows can't walk comfortably, they won't perform well.  
Intensive management may be needed to keep  
this potential problem under control.**

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