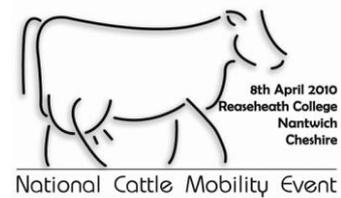


First Step™: A Tool to Assist in the Investigation and Prevention of Lameness Problems in Dairy Herds



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While interest and concern in dairy cow lameness has grown in the last decade world-wide, there has been little improvement in the prevalence of lameness despite growing understanding of the role of important risk factors such as management, environment and nutrition. If anything, the situation has worsened as herds have increased in size and cows spend more time on concrete surfaces.

First Step™ is an attempt to improve the delivery of a functional and effective action plan that will facilitate a reduction in lameness in dairy herds. Lameness is a complex problem with many contributing factors. This complexity leads to confusion and the implementation of ineffective control programs targeted at the wrong issues. First Step™ is literally the first step to be taken down the road to healthier cows. It is the end result of a four year collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Veterinary Medicine and combines ideas and information from multiple consultants from all around the world.

It consists of an educational section – referred to as ‘More Info’ combined with a database that stores data collected from the farm and compares it with benchmarks and standards to identify areas that need improvement. Each risk area has an ‘assessor’ which summarizes the data and creates a dedicated report unique to the farm. Assessors have been created to cover all of the common management systems for dairy cows worldwide – including cubicle, tiestall, straw yard, dirtlot and grazing herds, and there are 20 in all, covering lesion analysis, hoof-trimming assessment, transition, cubicle design, footbath management, walking surfaces and tracks, nutrition, heat abatement, biosecurity and time budgets. For each assessor, the More Info section provides information, pictures, animation and video to improve education and training.

The consultant may choose to complete one or a few assessors for a farm, or complete a thorough appraisal using all of the assessors available for any given farming system – this is usually a maximum of 14 assessors.

First Step™ has been used in the US for approximately 12 months and is now available in the UK.