

Communication is the Key – Mitigating Lameness is Only Possible When Working Together

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Even though Canadian dairy producers identified lameness as the most important dairy cattle health issue and lameness has an undeniable negative influence on the economics of a dairy farm and animal welfare, cow-level lameness prevalence in Alberta has maintained at 20% over the last decade. In light of an acceptable lameness prevalence of 10% (Dairy Code of Practice), it is time for action. Lameness is a unique health issue in terms of the variety of causes and their prevention and control, along with an indirect economic benefit. Despite knowledge on lameness, there is little knowledge of dairy producers' perception of lameness. Because each dairy farm has its unique facilities and management, we must embrace the difference among farms and find an individual solution tailored to each specific farm and include communication in our path towards lameness reduction. The first step was done in the summer of 2019. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine dairy producers in an effort to garner an understanding of their perspectives and perception of lameness as well as the day-to-day challenges that they face. Interviews were transcribed and methods used to identify a range of themes that came from conversations with producers. These interviews revealed a variety of challenges and a range of attitudes, values, beliefs, concerns and feelings regarding the significance of lameness. Combining the knowledge of the producer perceptions with knowledge-based lameness control programs will provide a more effective approach to the reduction of lameness occurrence. Take home message: Communication is the key to work on solutions to mitigate lameness together. Taking the team approach has the potential to reduce the negative economic and welfare aspect by reducing the lameness prevalence.