Cow's hoofs need to be watched

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia
Cows’ Hoofs Need to be Watched

THE need for thorough trimming of the hoofs of sheep for the control of foot rot is recognized, but few realize the need for trimming the hoofs of cattle.

Dairy cattle suffer much inconvenience because of bad feet. To produce high yields year after year a cow’s feet must be in good condition for walking around pastures in search of food and to and from the milking shed. Bad feet not only prevent the cow from grazing her fill, but cause much pain and lower both milk and butter-fat production. Long toes and dew-claws on the hind feet do much damage to udders and teats, particularly to heavy producers near calving time.

The hind hoofs usually grow longer than the front ones, because pawing the ground and the natural bending over during grazing have rasping effects on the front hoofs and help to trim them.

It is much easier to trim the front feet, because the foot can be easily lifted up and trimmed with hoof snips and knife. To trim the hind feet it is either necessary to throw the cow or to bail her securely so that she cannot throw herself down. Then tie the leg back for attention. Tools required are snips to cut the hard outside horn and a knife to trim the sole of the foot. The cow should then be able to walk squarely on her feet again.

By standing the cow on a wooden floor two men, one on each side of the cow, using chisels and mallets, can trim the long edges off, but they cannot trim the sole to throw the weight of the cow off the heel of the foot. The edges are cut on the foot on which the cow is standing.

Once the hoofs have overgrown they cannot be corrected simply by running the cows over hard, gravelly roads. More wear is placed on the heels, and the cow is unable to get on to her toes to wear them down.

As feet grow long the quick tends to grow further along them, and it may not be advisable to cut the toes back as far as necessary to make a good job. Thin layers should be pared off as one gets near the quick, and little harm will be done by paring until bleeding starts. When paring the hoofs the dew-claws should be trimmed, as the udder and teats can be badly cut by them while a cow is attempting to get up after lying down. Trimming of the feet is a good job for a wet day, as the hoofs will then be much softer and easier to cut.

A normal cow-hoof, left, compared with an over-grown hoof right. C-D indicates the correct way to cut the hoof, A-B the incorrect angle.

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