

Digital Dermatitis

Digital Dermatitis (DD) is one of the most prevalent and costly hoof diseases in cattle worldwide. First identified in Italy in the 1970's, it has since become a leading cause of lameness in UK dairy herds, any many beef operations - directly impacting animal welfare, milk production and farm profitability.

Digital Dermatitis is an infectious skin disease affecting the feet of cattle, particularly around the heel bulbs and interdigital area. Caused by a group of bacteria known as *Treponema* spp., DD leads to painful ulcerative lesions, commonly referred to as 'strawberry foot rot' due to their raw, red appearance. Lesions range from mild inflammation to severe, proliferative wounds, often causing noticeable lameness. The disease is highly contagious and thrives in wet, dirty environments - making it a year-round challenge, especially in confined housing systems.

Early detection is key. Routine hoof inspections can prevent minor cases from progressing into more painful and infectious stages. Clinical signs to look for include:

- **Red, raw lesions** - around the heel or interdigital space
- **Lameness** - especially cows walking on their toes to avoid heel pressure
- **Hair loss and foul smell** around the affected area

The estimated costs associated with DD are probably inaccurate and an under-estimation of the true cost. According to NADIS the annual cost per average farm is roughly £3000 per 100 cows, with much of the cost related to milk yield loss and increased calving interval. From a welfare perspective, painful lesions diminish quality of life and mobility, raising concern among consumers and regulators alike.

Once a herd is infected, DD appears to be impossible to eradicate. There are various species of *Treponemes*, some produce more severe disease than others. Therefore, even herds with DD are likely to benefit from strict biosecurity measures to prevent new sources of infection entering the herd. Consider having:

- Closed herd status or buying-in protocols to reduce the risk of introducing new strains
- Boot and equipment disinfection facilities for visitors before entering cow yards
- Dedicated hoof trimming equipment that is only used on your farm



Whilst DD cannot currently be eradicated from a herd, it can be managed and its impact significantly reduced.

Hygiene and Housing:

- Keep walking surfaces clean and dry
- Scrape manure frequently
- Remove sources of deep slurry, water or mud
- Avoid overcrowding

Footbaths:

- Frequency will vary from farm to farm so speak to your vet for a tailored treatment plan
- Good cow flow through the footbath is essential - carefully consider design and placement to get the most effective results
- Don't forget your dry cows and youngstock



SHEEP SCAB MEETING

We are holding an evening meeting in conjunction with NFU Uttoxeter to discuss the increasing problems with the spread of sheep scab.

Our vet, Emma Crust, will talk about causes, prevention and treatments.

John Royle, NFU chief livestock adviser, will be there to talk about the legislation and the proposed sheep scab strategy.



Thursday 11th September



7.30pm



Field Head Farm, Combridge, ST14 5JA

Open to all to attend, please call the Farm Office on 01889 567200 to book your place.

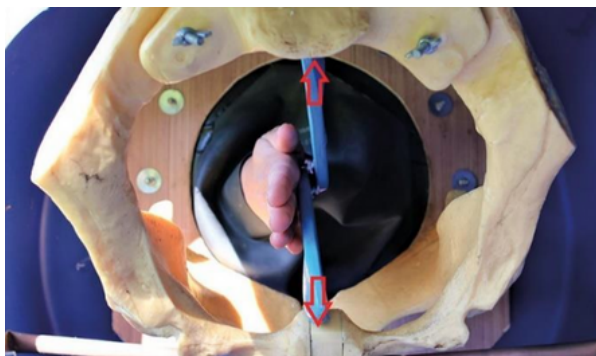


PELVIC SCORING FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Pelvic scoring is a simple and low cost tool which can be used to identify heifers which have a narrow pelvic area and would be most likely to have a difficult calving. Calving difficulty increases calf mortality, cow mortality, farm labour costs and veterinary costs. It also delays the return of cows to oestrus and reduces conception rate. By selecting heifers with larger pelvic areas, farmers can reduce the risk of difficult calvings.

The pelvic score is measured through rectal examination using a Rice Pelvimeter. Both vertical and horizontal measurements are taken to determine the pelvic area. This is then referenced against age and breed. Heifers should be ideally 12-14 months of age at scoring. If you are either keeping or buying in your replacement heifers, allow yourself some time as scoring is advised at around 6-8 weeks before mating. Because pelvic size is an inheritable characteristic, breeding from heifers with favourable pelvic sizes should mean that their daughters will have larger pelvic areas also.

Pelvic scoring is just one tool in the toolbox which can help improve calving ease. By using this tool and considering other factors such as body condition score, nutrition, age and genetics - farmers can improve the overall breeding productivity of the herd.



KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- A BIG HEIFER DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN A BIG PELVIS
- PELVIC SCORING IS A CHEAP AND EFFECTIVE WAY OF SELECTING THE OPTIMUM HEIFERS FOR BREEDING
- KEEPING ACCURATE RECORDS ALLOWS YOU TO MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF THE PROCESS

JOHNE'S MANAGEMENT - PROFIT THROUGH PREVENTION

The AHDB have organised a farm walk and talk, designed for the whole farm team which will equip you with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to take the next step in Johne's disease control.

As the industry moves into a new phase of Johne's disease management, testing requirements are changing and disease management protocols are progressing. Any steps taken to tackle Johne's have a cascade impact in control of other diseases in the herd, so attending is highly recommended even if you don't consider Johne's a challenge to your herd.

The event promises to offer practical guidance, share real-farm experience and give you expert advice to help refine your Johne's plan, reduce disease prevalence and improve overall herd health.

The meeting will cover:

- Making the most of milk recording data
- Johne's control through better calf hygiene
- Managing cows during calving according to their infection status
- Critical Biosecurity principles: biocontainment and bioexclusion
- Fine tuning your team approach to on-farm behaviour change

Thursday, 02 October 2025

10:30am - 2:30pm

Cotonhall Farm, Fauld Lane, Coton in the Clay, Ashbourne, Staffordshire

DE6 5GY

To book a place please go to:

<https://ahdb.org.uk/events/staffordshire-johne-s-management-profit-through-prevention>

Or alternatively scan the QR code to access the link.

