

Electronic claw health registration – now also in Finland and Sweden

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Claw health in dairy production has a significant effect on farms economy. Claw health is also ethically important since it has a large effect on animal welfare. Documentation of claw health on cow level helps the farmers to improve claw health through management, feeding and breeding. Claw health data is soon collected electronically through a PC program also in Finland and Sweden. In Denmark this system has already been used for a couple of years.

Claw diseases cause major economic losses in dairy farms today. For example, a single sole ulcer is, based on Swedish data, is estimated to cost about 500 Euros if you include both direct and indirect costs, such as reduced milk production etc. (Swedish Dairy Association, 2008). Claw diseases often cause lameness, which is an important reason for cows being culled. A lame cow eats less, moves less, its milk production decreases, fertility becomes poorer and the cow is most likely replaced with a new heifer prematurely. When a cow becomes lame many of the symptoms described above might have already occurred. To prevent and treat the claw diseases and lameness, it is important to identify the problem and take actions at an early stage.

New tools for hoof trimmers in Finland and Sweden

Registrations from treatments made by the hoof trimmers have been collected in Sweden since 1995 and in Finland since 2003. Currently both Finnish and Swedish hoof trimmers are using a paper report. In Denmark hoof trimmers have used a PC program for sending the claw health data to the central database since spring 2010 when claw health registration started in Denmark. In 2011 Swedish Dairy Association and Faba decided to start using electronic registration and use the same PC program first developed by the Danish Knowledge Centre for Agriculture, Cattle. The three countries are now partners in the ownership of the PC program and a new version of the program has been developed in close co-operation between the countries. Soon Norway will be in the partnership as well.

The hoof trimmers use the program with a tablet PC with touch screen that endures cold, dirt, moisture and damage. Information about the herd is collected from each countries central cattle database and the animal currently treated is easy to search according to animal ID from the animal list. The hoof trimmer records claw diseases, claw conformations, lameness and possible treatment with bandage or shoe. Most diseases are recorded only in one grade but some are divided into mild and severe (see table 1).

The program creates lists which are very useful as a management tool for the farmer. The *summary list* shows information about the prevalence of different claw diseases found in the herd. The *claw cut list* presents individual information about each treated animal and the *follow up list* is a summary of animals that need further observation. The reports are available via each country's milk recording organizations web page.

Table 1. Claw diseases registered with the Claw Health Registration program. * means that the disease is divided into mild and severe.

Disease
Dermatitis
Digital dermatitis
Heel horn erosion *
Sole hemorrhage *
Sole ulcer *
Wart growth
ID fibroma
ID phlegmon
Fissure white line
Abscess, ulcer of white line
Abscess, ulcer of toe
Double sole
Chronic laminitis / Laminitic ring
Asymmetric claw
Screw claw
Over grown claw
Scissor claw
Lameness *
Hock lesion *

Some of the benefits with the electronic system vs. paper report are:

- Easier to use for the hoof trimmers
- Data comes faster and easier to the central database and is easily available for the farmer
- More accurate data in the central database and for the farmer
- Easier to see earlier claw health information of the cow

More information – better claw health

The new registration program will improve claw health through many ways. Farmers get an up to date report of the herd's claw health in general as well as for each individual animal and changes in feeding and management can be made accordingly.

Experiences of the PC program in Denmark have been very positive. The farmers, the hoof trimmers, the advisors and the veterinarians have been able to use accurate information for improving claw health. At the moment, the project is in a pilot stage in Finland and Sweden. Electronic registration is an innovative development of claw health registration and a good example of co-operation within the Nordic countries.

The claw health information is also used to calculate breeding values for claw health. Breeding for claw health improves claw health in a long run and can be seen as an investment for the future. An index for claw health has been included in NTM since August 2011. Claw health shows moderately positive correlations for example with longevity and resistance to other diseases. This means that breeding for better claw health results in healthy, long-living cows. With the new registration system, it is expected that the amount of claw health data increases and that the quality of the data will be improved. This results in more reliable breeding values for claw health.