

Development of a scoring system to assess lameness status in dairy cattle farms

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Lameness is a frequent issue that causes important economical losses in adult dairy cattle. In Belgium, prevalence and risk factors for lameness in cattle are not well defined. The aim of this study was to develop a scoring system allowing the determination of prevalence and major or minor risks factors for lameness in dairy cattle farms, as well as the welfare status.

The scoring system included 35 parameters and associated points. The system was divided into 11 categories: locomotion score, plumbs score, hock injury score, waiting area, milking parlour, access to the pasture, pasture, housing, nutrition, foot care and hoof diseases prevention. The maximum amount of points to be obtained is 400. This scoring system was tested by 5 veterinary.

Six hundred seventy-eight cows in ten farms were investigated in Wallonia. The mean duration of the scoring was 3 hours per farm. Thirty-five percent of the cows were considered as lame (locomotion score $> 2/5$). Major risks factors were identified as nutrition and, in particular, acidogenic rations, access to the pasture with stones, cleaning of the duckboards and lack of spaces in waiting area. The system showed the implication of the housing in lameness in 33% of the investigated farms. Welfare concerns were present in half of the farms. Sixty percent of the visited farms did not use footbaths to prevent lameness.

This new scoring system is able to identify risks factors and prevalence of lameness. Nevertheless, it needs to be improved and tested in a larger number of farms.