

A SOUND FOOTING FOR THE DAIRY INDUSTRY

By Charles G. M. Edgerly¹

In many instances the dairy industry has been and still is on a very insecure footing. The feet and legs of the dairy cow can well be considered the footing of the dairy industry, as they are definitely the footing of the dairy cow. Without the dairy cow there would be no dairy industry. The strength of the feet and legs of dairy cows can have an influence on the lives of a large portion of the people in this country due to their dependence on the dairy industry for a living.

Poor conformation of the legs and feet of dairy cattle, regardless of what the cause may be, is responsible for much of the foot trouble the cattle encounter. These misshapen legs and deformed feet will reduce the efficiency with which the cow can produce milk. They may even be so poor as to shorten the life of the dairy cow. Legs that are not spaced sufficiently wide apart will also reduce the capacity of the dairy cow, both to produce milk and to handle feed.

There are two main causes of poor feet and legs in our dairy cattle. They are inheritance and improper management of the dairy herds. It has been established that factors for poor feet and misshapen legs are inherited and by careful selection the occurrence from this cause can be reduced. Management of dairy cattle has a direct effect on the condition of the feet and legs both in summer and in winter.

Inherited defects of the feet and legs of the herd sire can become very important when it is remembered that the sire will pass on his inheritance to the offspring of the cows he is mated with. To prevent an increase in defects of feet and legs, careful attention must be given to the feet and legs of the herd sire. Proper attention to this selection, and mating may materially reduce the undesirable leg conformation of dairy cattle.

In cows with correct leg conformation, the legs are set wide apart so that there will be plenty of room for a good wide, capacious udder. The legs should be nearly straight and when viewed from the rear should be lined up in a plane with the body, enabling the cow to take strong, straight and easy strides. The legs should show enough substance of bone to insure strength without losing refinement or quality. Hocks and pasterns should be well defined and molded. Correct leg conformation will place the legs squarely under the cow so that they will support and carry their load with greater ease.

¹Assistant Dairy Husbandman.

The foot of the dairy cow is of equal importance to the legs but will usually require more care from the herdsman. Improperly trimmed toes which have grown out long will tend to throw the weight of the cow back onto her hocks and pasterns. This places an undue strain on pasterns and legs and may result in permanent injury to the pasterns and to leg conformation.

Under present day management, the toes of the dairy cow may not become worn off as nature intended. Cows that are pastured in nice soft, lush pasture and kept in well bedded pen barns, or tied in stanchions do not wear off their toes as do cows on the open range. The solution is not to go back to old rundown pastures where the cow has a lot of walking to do, but to observe the toes and feet of the dairy cow and to trim them as needed.

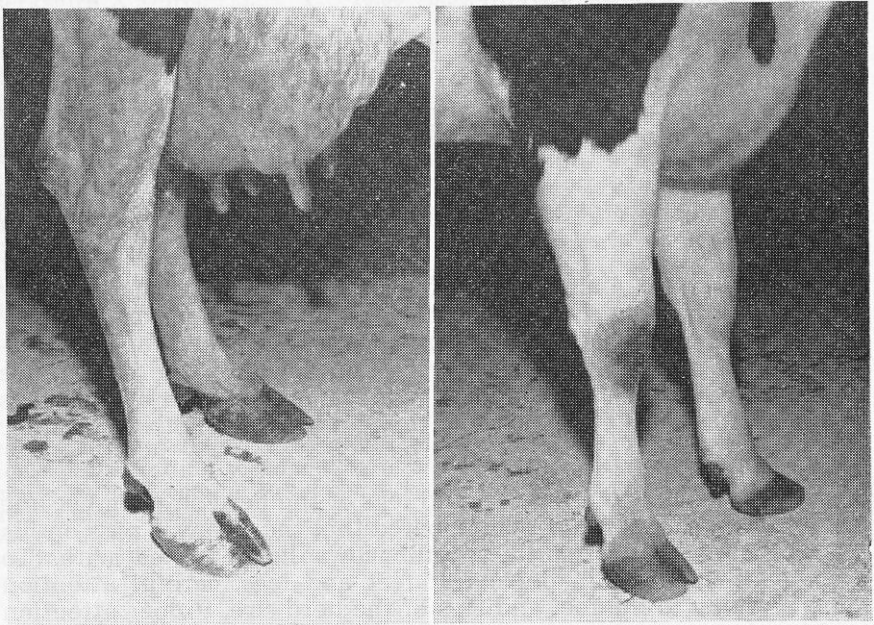


FIGURE 1.—The hind feet, at left, are neglected. Note how long, unshapely feet shift the weight of the animal backward to the heel, putting undue strain on hocks and pasterns. In contrast, note the pair of front feet, at right, which have been neatly trimmed so the weight of the cow is carried squarely on the surface of the hoof and not on the heel.

To trim the feet of the dairy cow properly the first step is to immobilize the cow so the feet can be worked on. This may be done in a regular hoof trimming rack or sling, or by laying animal down by the use of a rope around her body.

The feet should then be thoroughly cleaned and any loose pieces trimmed off. This is usually accomplished with a hoof paring knife. The long toes are then clipped off with hoof nippers or with a

hammer and chisel if they are too long or hard. Do not cut deep enough to draw blood. A pink color on the hoof is the danger signal not to trim any deeper. There should be some trimming from the inside of the toes to open the foot. There should be some of the toe trimmed on the underside as well as on the length of the toe. This helps to put the weight of the cow on her toes where it belongs.

When the trimming is completed the edges should be smoothed with a rasp so there will be a neater and cleaner appearance.

One of the best ways to increase profits from a dairy cow is to increase her life span. A dairy cow that has poor feet and undesirable leg conformation has a poorer chance of remaining in the herd long enough to be a profit to her owner than a cow with good feet and desirable leg conformation.

THREE TOUGH TREES FOR THE NORTHERN PLAINS

Boxelder, green ash, and the shrubby silver buffaloberry are considered best for farm windbreaks in the severe climate of the Northern Great Plains. This finding is based on 38 years of testing by USDA scientists at Mandan, N.D., Ardmore, S.D., and Moccasin, Mont. Other tree species tested but found too susceptible to drought for good growth in the area were brittle willow, Daphne willow, northwest poplar and Amur maple. The best arrangement of the three recommended species for windbreaks is to plant the boxelder in the center rows, the green ash on each side, and silver buffaloberry on the outside. The USDA scientists also found that proper spacing, clean cultivation, and little or no pruning are important factors in maintaining successful windbreaks.

WEED SPRAY WITH INSECTICIDES?

Evidence obtained by Iowa State College scientists indicates that it is not so good to mix insecticides and weed killing chemicals and apply them at the same time, especially where grasshopper control is involved. In most cases, the Iowa specialists say, the weed killers cause plants to curl and dry up in a few days. Since grasshoppers prefer fresh plants to the dying or sprayed ones they move on to more tasty fare.

SHEEP SHEARING PARTIALLY MECHANIZED

Two kinds of mechanical wool shearing tables are on the market in Australia. With this equipment, a Foreign Agricultural Service report says, the shearer can stand up and shear sheep with standard shearing machines. The tables can be used as a single unit or several of them can be combined into a merry-go-round arrangement or production-line shearing system.

HYBRID CORN ON 90.8 PERCENT OF ACREAGE

Of the total 79,016,000 acres planted to corn in the United States in 1956, 71,757,000 acres of it, or 90.8 percent, are planted with hybrid seed, according to the Crop Reporting Board. The 90.8 percent figure for 1956 compares with 89.4 for 1955 and 87.3 for 1954.