

# Foot bathing checklist

Footbathing should be used when all other methods of control are failing. None-the-less, if done correctly, footbathing can be a very effective means of controlling digital dermatitis and foul-in-the-foot. However, it needs to be done to high standards to be effective. Use this checklist to ensure you're meeting your highest standards.

## Indicators of problems with your routine foot bathing:

- (1) Outbreaks of digital dermatitis or foul-in-the-foot
- (2) Lameness outbreaks straight after footbathing
- (3) Lameness due to digital dermatitis (regular & effective footbathing should prevent this)
- (4) Superfoul
- (5) Severe or chronic digital dermatitis
- (6) Cows weight-shifting and shaking feet (particularly after going through the footbath)
- (7) Growths between the claws
- (8) Burnt skin around feet or on udder
- (9) Poor cow flow
- (10) Cows jumping through bath
- (11) A time consuming job

## Type of treatment

Please consult your vet on regimes, withdrawal times, precautions and dose rates

- (1) Antibiotic - useful for strategic treatments
- (2) Disinfectant - useful for routine prevention

## Is the bath the appropriate dimensions:

- Depth should be enough to cover the heels (>3 inches, 75mm) and deeper the better (up to 6 inches, 150mm). Deeper baths mean more agent runs trickles down onto heels
- Wide enough - preferably wide enough to allow one cow to pass another.
- Long enough - 2 sections each 8foot (2.4m) long. An island of more than 2 foot (600mm) in between the 2 compartments

**Is footbathing agent correct concentration at the start and the end:**

- Work out the volume of the bath and the right amount of agent you need (see sheet). Double check.
- Dung will dilute any solution so that the last cow through gets less treatment. Under typical conditions, a 200 litre bath of formalin will treat 200 cows. Best policy is to empty and refill once the number of cows bathed exceeds the volume of bath. Some agents evaporate or bind with slurry, so refilling after 24-48 hours is also recommended. Refill if you think it looks severely contaminated.

**Are the feet clean?**

Feet may be excessively dirty in winter, if yards are deep with slurry, if straw is used sparingly or not at all, or if automatic scrapers are used.

Foot bathing is more effective if the feet are cleaned by:

- Washing with powerhose (important for antibiotic treatments)
- Footbathing daily
- Straw yards
- Being out at pasture

**Or kept clean by:**

- Thoroughly cleaning the area around the foot bath

**Slurry (and straw) deactivates disinfectants. Therefore, maintain an effective footbath you should:**

- Completely clean the bath of slurry before starting - you need running water, a sloped bath, a good squeegee and a good drain to do it properly
- Make bathing a daily routine - cows are more relaxed and produce less slurry. Use something like diluted hypochlorite solution on days between treatments.
- Make good cow flow - minimise the stress for cows
- Do not run sore footed cows through strong formalin - its cruel
- Use a pre-wash bath - cows defaecate in this and preserve the second bath
- Do not use straw in baths (except when encouraging good cow flow at the start of a programme)

### **Is cow flow good?**

- Put bath on normal exit route for cows (or make part of normal exit route) i.e place the bath between parlour and feed barrier/cubicles
- Place distant from the parlour (so one row of cows can queue, especially if the bath is single cow width)
- Make bathing a part of the daily routine for cows
- Use solid baths that don't bang or clatter
- Make the bottom comfortable to walk on - no sharp ridges

### **Allowing treatments to work**

Cows need to walk out onto a clean, dry yard for 20 minutes to allow agents to work on feet. This is hampered by:

- Walking into unscrapped yards or muddy tracks/gateways
- Walking out onto pasture or straw yards
- Deep pools of water or slurry in yards

### **Miscellaneous problems need to be identified and corrected:**

- Spread of infection at foot bathing due to dirty conditions around the foot bath
- Foot bath a hassle to fill - make sure a hose reaches the bath
- Foot bath a hassle to drain - have a plug to pull out a sidewall drain, and make the drain 4 inches diameter
- Fumes in the parlour - make sure the bath is located away from the parlour pit if you're using formalin, and do not allow cows to walk through a foot bath immediately prior to milking
- Cold weather - dissolve copper sulphate salts with warm water
- Rain water - make sure rain water doesn't flood the bath (fix drains and gutters, refill regularly in very wet weather)

Please consult your vet on aspects treatment or prescription. If you have any queries about the items covered in this document then please don't hesitate to contact me. All I ask is you complete an action planner detailing the things you are doing and things you intend to do.

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