

Farmers' guide

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Section 1: Setting the scene



Introduction

The DairyCo Healthy Feet Programme (DHFP) aims to help dairy farmers (DairyCo levy payers) reduce the number of lame cows on their farms through improved management of cows and people.

Lame cows cost the industry time and money, are a serious welfare problem, and affect staff morale. Dairy production in the UK generally enjoys a positive image in the eyes of the consumer, which is important to preserve. The industry is open to criticism on the basis of current average levels of lameness.

The programme builds on the widely respected work of the Healthy Feet project, supported by the Tubney Charitable Trust and carried out at Bristol University Vet School. It has been developed in consultation with vets in practice and foot trimmers, as well as local and international lameness experts.

Lameness is a term which covers many conditions: some are caused by infection, and some by physical and management factors. An understanding of which types of lameness are present, coupled with a structured approach to tackle the underlying causes is required to tackle lameness effectively.

The DairyCo Healthy Feet Programme is a step-wise approach which will help dairy farmers make important progress towards diagnosing the problems, devising an action plan, and developing the skills necessary for long-term lameness control. Trained providers (vets or consultants who have attended a specialist course) facilitate the whole process and act as one-to-one advisers, or 'mobility mentors'.

The programme is supported by various materials and resources to ensure that the correct and relevant information is always to hand, and to encourage successful participation by farmers, vets, foot trimmers and advisors. The aim is to give farmers the confidence to make the necessary management changes to reduce lameness and improve their business performance.

The programme is a logical next step following on from the development of the DairyCo Mobility Score System, which helps farmers quantify the amount of lameness in their herds, as well as identifying those cows which require treatment.

How the programme works

The programme works through the following steps:

Step one: Training, skills review and diagnosis

The mobility mentor visits the farm and carries out an assessment of a proportion of cows' feet. During this visit, the mentor will also discuss how different diseases arise, review the foot-trimming process, and what foot conditions are most commonly seen. This is also the opportunity for veterinary mentors to assess the current effectiveness of any trimming and treatments which are carried out, and provide limited skills training. Some support for staff will also be provided through a range of resources in the Mobility Toolkit, including a Hoof Care Field Guide and a Lesion Picture Card. Where records of lesion types are available, they are used to devise a 'Lameness Map': a simple visual representation of the relative incidences of the most common lesions. The likely costs of lameness for the farm are also reviewed using a lameness calculator based on previous research. This visit is likely to take around three to four hours.

Step two: Full farm risk assessment

The mobility mentor will visit the farm and carry out a thorough risk assessment of the farm and management with respect to lameness. This visit is likely to take around three hours, part of which will be during milking time. The mentor will go everywhere the cows go, will work with a check list, and will ask plenty of questions!

Step three: Action plan

Following the first two visits, the mobility mentor will be in a position to help the farm team understand where the critical points on the farm are in relation to lameness. Solutions are discussed and points of action agreed. The action plan will centre on the four key success factors for healthy feet:

- Low infection pressure
- Good horn quality and hoof shape
- Low forces on the feet (good cow comfort and good cow flow)
- Early detection and prompt, effective treatment of lame cows

and how these relate to the farm's specific lameness map. This process should involve the whole farm team and include further discussion on which measures are important for each type of lameness condition. The culmination of this step will be the production of a 'Mobility Contract' which contains the agreed points of action. The visit is likely to take around one hour.

Additional visits may be necessary to give training in mobility scoring, or to give more specific advice, to devise a new foot bathing protocol, for example.

After the initial three steps, the programme is ongoing.

Step four: Recording, monitoring, reviewing

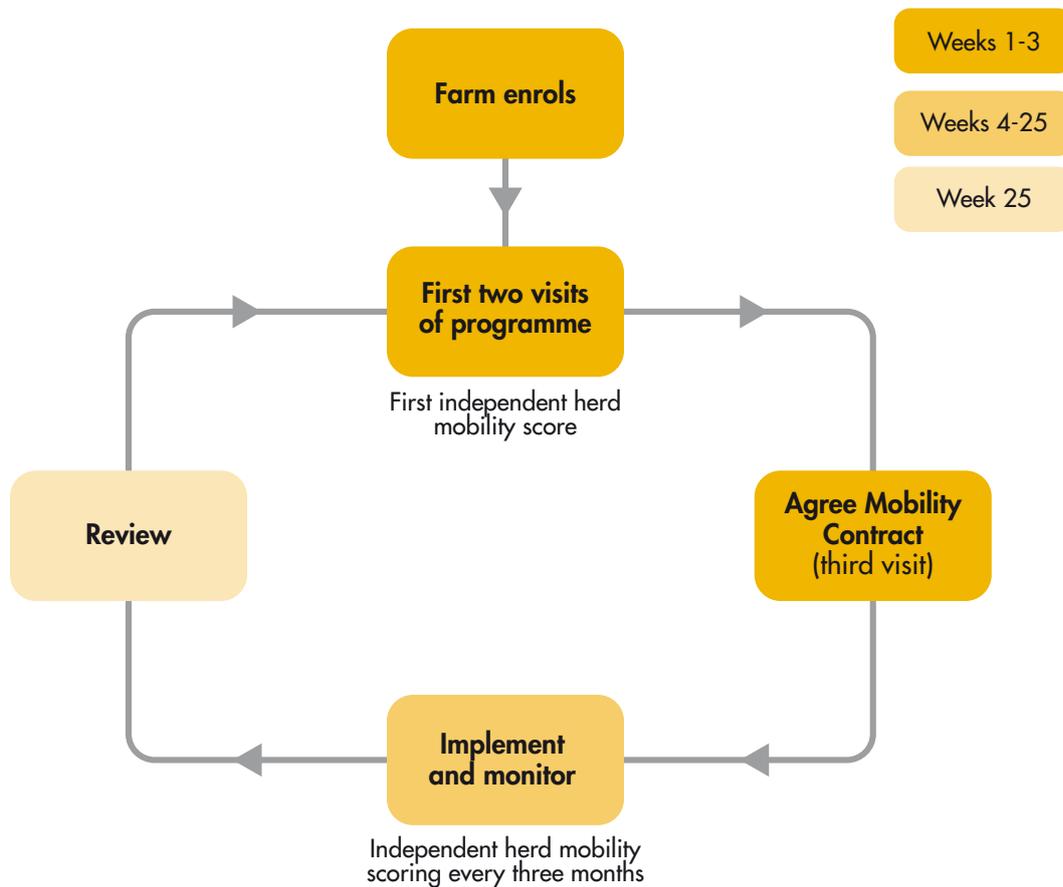
An action plan will not in itself reduce lameness. The farm team will use appropriate recording of all lame cows and lesion types found during routine foot checks. Mobility mentors will ensure that the herd is mobility scored (ideally independently) on a three-monthly basis to measure progress, including one at the start of the programme. This information will be used to monitor improvements and update the farm's lameness map. Mobility mentors will review how the action plan is being implemented with follow-ups at appropriate intervals. On-farm reviews at six-month intervals will continue to check that the plan is still appropriate and monitor implementation and skill levels on farm. New team members are updated, and if necessary steps one, two and three are repeated.

The review phase is probably the most important step for encouraging effective changes to take place. It is also the phase most vulnerable to being ignored, or carried out poorly.

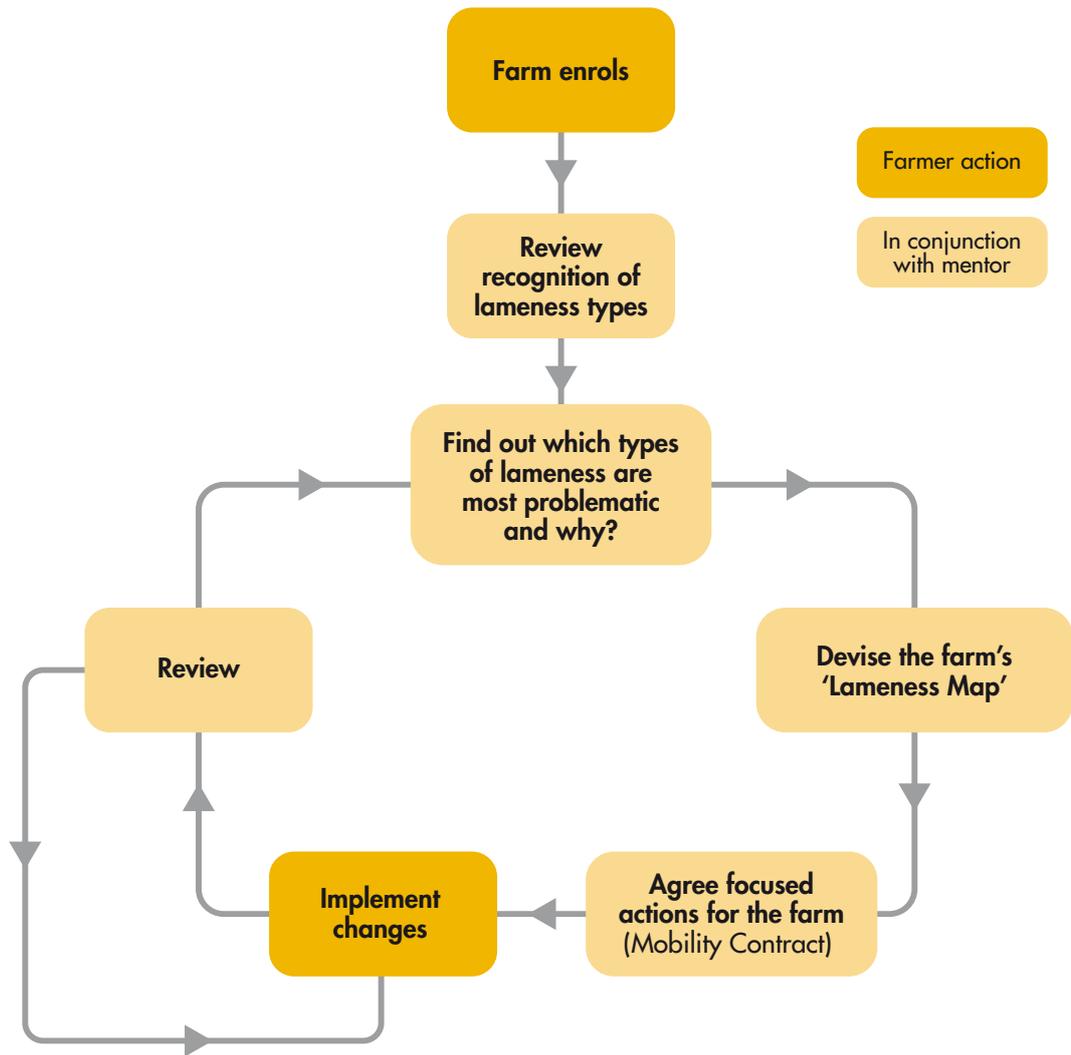
Registration of participating farms

Mobility mentors will register participating farms with DairyCo prior to the initial visit. Support materials will be sent directly to the farmer in the form of a Mobility Toolkit, including resources to aid with lesion recognition and mobility recording.

Time frame of the programme



Summary of the DairyCo Healthy Feet Programme



The DairyCo Healthy Feet Programme in context

What?	Why?
<p>...is the DHFP?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proven approach to lameness reduction • Targeted assistance using external input (mobility mentors) • An array of resources to increase understanding and knowledge (mobility toolkit) • A systematic approach tailored to individual farms (lameness map and mobility contract). 	<p>...use the DHFP?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce the number of lame cows (severe, chronic or new) experiencing pain and loss of productivity • To save time and money and improve staff morale • Reducing new lame cases rather than dealing with those already lame is a more intelligent (and valuable) use of your input.
How?	What if?
<p>...does the DHFP work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It increases skills and knowledge so the whole farm team knows what to do to reduce lameness • It uses trained facilitators (mobility mentors) to guide the process • It brings the farm team together in a structured way to implement the necessary changes • It provides a framework to measure lameness, monitor progress and motivate all staff. 	<p>...it is not for me?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may feel confident that you already have a planned approach to lameness control • You may feel you have little to gain by reducing lameness further. Check out the potential cost benefits using the DHFP lameness cost calculator at www.dairyco.org.uk • You may feel this is for large herds only. It is for all herds • You may be concerned about your ability to commit to the DHFP. Why not speak to a farmer who has already enrolled and see how it works for them? Your local extension officer or mobility mentor will be able to help with contacts.

The Mobility Mentor

What?	Why?
<p>...is a mentor?</p> <p>A mentor is a trusted friend, counsellor or coach, usually a more experienced person</p> <p>Examples of famous mentors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In politics, Aristotle mentored Alexander the Great • In Star Wars, Obi-wan Kenobi mentored Luke Skywalker • In business, Freddie Laker mentored Richard Branson. 	<p>...use a mentor?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce lameness on your farm you will need to make some changes • You will need guidance to work out which changes to make, and what is likely to be effective • You will need someone with more expertise and experience than you in reducing lameness.
How?	What if?
<p>...does it work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility mentors are trained, and have expertise in lameness • They will use the processes in the one-to-one DHFP to help you decide your mobility contract • They will guide you so that the changes you make are likely to be effective, and you will be shown ways to measure and monitor this • They will be able to give you back-up support to help you ensure the changes work. 	<p>...I just want an expert to tell me what to do?</p> <p>Experience shows that this approach doesn't work well. People do not respond to being "told" what to do – however "expert" the advice!</p> <p>Here are some reasons why:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may not agree with the recommendations • You may not feel they are practical or relevant • You haven't had the opportunity to think them through first • The rest of the farm team may not be on board too • The chances are you will not make the changes.

Section 2: Tips for success



The Mobility Contract

A plan must be practical, agreeable and effective.

How do we achieve that?

Every farm has a different set of circumstances which leads to their lameness picture.

Some actions will influence your lameness picture significantly, while others will be less important.

Your mobility mentor will help you devise *your* plan, using their knowledge and skills to guide you in the right direction. The mobility mentor will act as an “outside pair of eyes”, helping you to discover the aspects of your farm which, if improved, will give you the best benefit.

The mentor will guide you and the whole farm team through the process to devise a plan. This will be your farm’s *mobility contract* which identifies the success factors which you all agree to implement to reduce your herd’s lameness.

How do we implement the plan?

Successful reduction of lameness will involve *change*. Change can be challenging – harder for some than others. Always keep your goals in sight: less lameness, happier, healthier cows, more profitable milk production, and better job satisfaction.

Your mobility mentor is there to help you through the essential process of implementing the plan. Nevertheless, success will depend on the farm team.

Reviewing the contract is vital: if success is not immediately apparent, this may be because the initial actions were inappropriate, misunderstood, or poorly implemented. The mobility mentor will identify where these problems lie and help you to make the necessary corrections. Keeping records of lameness types and regular, independent mobility scoring will help track progress.

Monitoring lameness

There are two things you will need to monitor lameness:

- Mobility score records
- Lesion records

Targets:

The first target for most dairy farms is to record these two factors well so lameness can be measured.

The second target will be to see a downwards trend in both. You cannot go too low!

Benchmarking: some people like to see how they are doing compared to the average, their neighbours or the best 5% of herds. Benchmarking can be a motivator, but experience in lameness control shows it can also lead either to complacency or despondency. Recording of farm data and then reviewing this data is key to achieving change.

Lesions and mobility scores should be *recorded* continually, ideally an independent herd mobility score should be undertaken every three months. *Monitor* both every 6 months. If you are a seasonal calving herd, reviewing and evaluating your lameness records at the end of each season is a sensible approach.

If your DairyCo Healthy Feet Programme is working you will see a reduction in lesion numbers and mobility scores. You may also see a change in proportion of lesions thus your lameness map will change shape.

Make sure the whole farm team knows the results of your monitoring. Give credit where it is due to all staff who contributed to improvements.

Your mobility mentor will help you in the monitoring process, and may be able to help with arranging your independent herd mobility scoring. You will take responsibility for keeping and monitoring your records and tracking your own changes. The mobility mentor will assist in refining changes which need to occur.

The DairyCo Healthy Feet Programme works along the lines of the "Cycle of Change" (page 18). The last part is *experimentation*; if at first you don't see the improvements you expect, don't give up. Revisit, review, reinforce and fine tune the changes you agreed in your mobility contract.

Recording lesions

What?	Why?
<p>...recording is required?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simply a record of lesions found on cows' feet whether at routine trimming/ drying-off hoof checks or lame cow treatments • The layout needs to represent these records in a way that is immediately useful for example using the Lameness Map or milk recording packages. 	<p>...record?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record it but when tallying up lesions for the lameness map only count it once • To work out what type of lameness your cows have • To check the mobility contract is working • To keep track of changes on your farm.
How?	What if?
<p>...do we go about it?</p> <p>Recording increases skills and knowledge so the whole farm team knows what to do to reduce lameness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a system which suits you • You could use computers/ on-line recording/ hoof trimmers/ milk recording bodies/ paper records • To record you must first be confident in accurately recognising the lesions. 	<p>...I see the same cow for the same lesion month in month out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record it but when tallying up lesions for the lameness map, only count it once <p>...our lesion records contain a high percentage of uncommon lesions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check again your lesion recognition with your mobility mentor <p>...the lesions aren't necessarily causing severe lameness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are still relevant as they tell you a lot about your farm's risks. Each lesion does have different severities, and some (for example sole ulcer) are more costly/ longer term than others (for example heel horn erosion or digital dermatitis). Mobility scoring is more relevant for measuring the impact of lesions on your herd.

Lesion records do not replace mobility score records. Both are necessary but tell you very different things: mobility scores quantify your herd's lameness; lesion records help you work out the causes.

Staff management

If you are the farm owner or manager, it is your responsibility to oversee an effective plan so that all work related to lameness prevention can be taken care of.

These tasks include:

- Detection of lame cows/ mobility scoring
- Treatment of lame cows
- Routine trimming
- Daily stock-handling (milking times/ herding/ bringing to parlour)
- Recording lesions and analysing lame cow data
- Maintaining hoof care equipment
- Liaising between mobility mentor and farm team
- Reviewing mobility contract
- Maintenance of tracks and surfaces
- Maintenance and cleaning of cow accommodation/ yards
- Liaising with farm vet
- Identifying staff training requirements.

Ensure that enough staff are available, and that sufficient training has been given to do these tasks.

It is likely that every member of the farm team will have some part to play in reducing lameness – be sure that these roles are understood by everyone, and work as a team.

Work to correct gaps in skills by planning training for individuals. Consider if back-up is required in certain tasks – for example, more than one person able to mobility score, to cover for staff days off.

Ensure that the necessary equipment is available. A well trained individual in hoof care is wasted if he/she is made to use unsuitable tools.

Example staff responsibility chart:

Name	Detection	Treatment	Stock handling	Other
Rob	Y*		Y	mobility records
Sally		Y	Y	
Smithy		Y*	Y	lesion records
Jim				knife sharpening

* = key person responsible

Training plans

A good starting place with training plans is to consider where you and others are along the four steps to competency, for various aspects to do with hoof health.

The steps to competency:



Step 4 can lead to complacency. Refreshment training could be useful.

Step 1 is a dangerous place to be. It is when you carry on blithely unaware that you may be doing something wrong.

Developing a training plan:

- Beware of assuming staff will gain skills and knowledge as they go along
- Beware of gaps in knowledge which can be detrimental to safety and the farm business
- Be realistic of the time scale required to gain competency, but set target dates to complete specific training
- Use outside assistance to help fill the gaps: e.g. vet, *accredited* hoof trimmer, external mobility scorer
- Use your mobility mentor to help establish your plan, and to help fill in some of the gaps: for example on-farm workshops
- Choose a suitable trainer who is accredited. Training is a skill which not everyone possesses.

Establish the level for staff members and yourself with respect to each required competency:

Name:

Date:

Trained?	Qualification?	By whom?	When?	Confident?	Competent?	Training requirement?
Mobility scoring						
Safely lift and inspect a foot						
Routine trims						
Stock handling						
Lesion recognition						
Treatment						

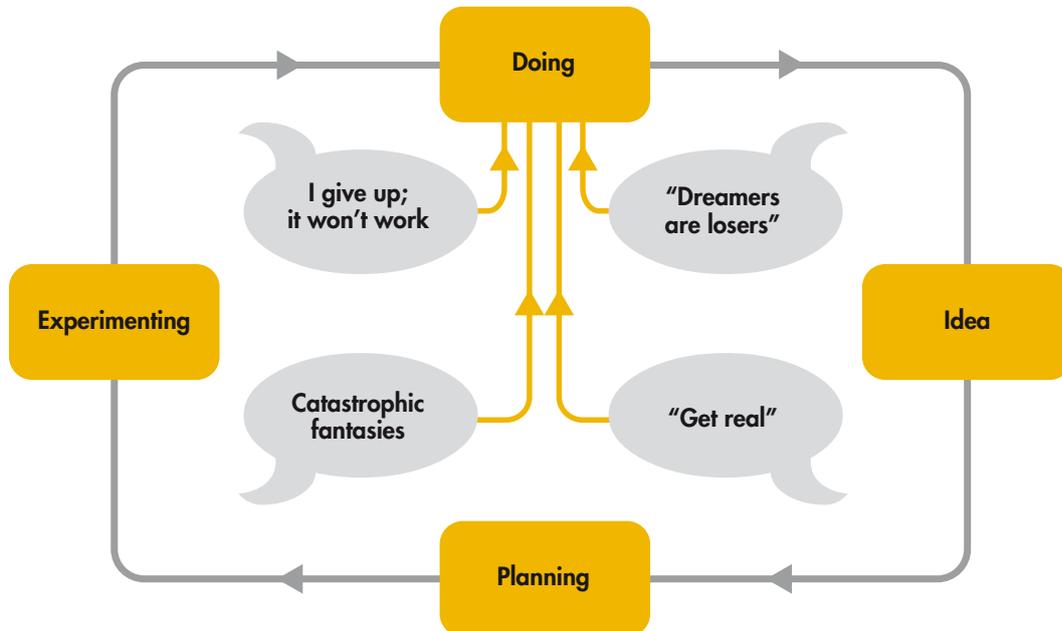
Review annually for each member of staff.

Making changes happen

It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change. **Charles Darwin.**

Reducing lameness on your farm will require you and your farm team to make some changes.

All change happens in stages, shown on this diagram, starting at the top:



Some people make changes readily, others less so. There is no right or wrong type of person but it may help to understand what type of person you and those around you are.

The status quo “doing” phase can act like a magnet, and there are many reasons for returning there – not all bad.

With any change, we all start at the beginning: the “doing” phase: the here and now. It may be getting up, milking cows; completing your chores; eating; washing; going to bed; going out; watching television. It is living your current life.

The first thing for change to happen is to have an idea. Some people find this difficult (“dreamers are losers”) and prefer to continue in the same way they always have.

But what if you do have an idea? Let’s take an example of converting your old mattress cubicles to deep sand beds for better cow comfort. Oh, but no way! I can’t afford to handle sand, not on my milk price! You must be mad!...This is the “get real” feeling. You will be straight back to “doing” ...unless you can venture beyond this initial fear phase.

The “planning phase” is the rational stage of change. It is when pros and cons are weighed up. Lists are drawn, advice is sought. The feasibility of the change is properly investigated. Often outside help is valuable.

It may be that the cons outweigh the pros. Whether the decision to stick to “doing” is based on rational argument or irrational fear of catastrophe will depend largely on the individual and the quality of input in the planning stage. It is perfectly healthy to get this far around the change cycle and then dismiss the idea. It may be true that in this case, the problems of dealing with sand in the slurry do outweigh the potential benefits of better cow comfort.

Conversely, you may take the plunge. At some point, the planning phase moves to a point of “no return”. For the sand cubicles, that may be arranging the finance, appointing the builder, and pulling out the old cubicle mattresses.

Then you move into the “experimentation phase”. The change is not completed, and it would be foolish to think differently. In our example, you must experiment with different amounts of sand, frequency of bedding and overcome teething problems.

In short, you have to make your decision work for you.

After a while, though, you will be back to the “doing phase”. It will be part of your normal routine to manage the new sand cubicles, deal appropriately with the slurry, and hopefully enjoy having happier, less lame cows. At this stage, you will have completed the cycle of change.

Appendix



Responsibilities of each party

DairyCo will:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support development of the programme, both initially and with ongoing refinements • Appoint an administrator for the programme to manage resources • Maintain a register of trained mobility mentors, with an online search facility • Provide all the support materials outlined • Promote the programme, including through the extension officer network • Support the on-line aspects of the programme • Co-ordinate a steering group for the programme, and maintain an effective group of stakeholders • Maintain records of farms enrolled, and data collated during delivery of programme, to refine and further develop technical aspects of the programme • Ensure anonymity of enrolled farms' in correlated data.
1-2-1 Programme provider (mobility mentor) will:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver the programme in its entirety to dairy farmer clients, consistent with the programme outline • Register enrolled farms with DairyCo • Use the support materials for enrolled farms only • Encourage accurate recording of lameness (mobility scoring and lesion incidences) in order to effectively monitor progress on enrolled farms • Feed back lameness data for enrolled farms to DairyCo in order that the effectiveness of the programme can be monitored • Provide feedback to DairyCo (via the administrator) about strengths and weaknesses of programme • Keep up to date with best practice by regular attendance of update meetings.
Dairy farmers will:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit to the programme by encouraging (and making it possible) for the whole farm team to be involved • Agree to pay the mobility mentor the pre-arranged fee • Record lameness (lesions and mobility scores) so that progress can be monitored and the agreed actions can be reviewed and if necessary adjusted.

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