

## The North-West Mobility Study: Does the Healthy Feet Programme Work?

We know lameness is a problem in our dairy industry. It costs us a lot of money and it gives a bad impression of dairy farming. It isn't necessarily straight forwards to tackle because there are many causes and there isn't a single solution which fits every farm the same.

In 2011, the AHDB Healthy Feet Programme was launched, whereby a trained Mobility Mentor, usually a vet, helps a farm reduce their lameness levels in a planned way after logically assessing the issue on that farm. The concept was based on extensive research, but does this approach work in practice, is it cost effective and do farmers rate it? In 2012, a research group in North West England set out to answer just those questions.

### What they did

50 dairy farms throughout Cheshire, Shropshire and Lancashire were recruited. Half of them did the Healthy Feet Programme (HFP) with a trained Mobility Mentor from their own vet practice, and half didn't. All farms had independent mobility scores done every 3 months for 12 months. A researcher from Reaseheath College interviewed all farmers at the end of the project and information was collected about what changes farmers made and how lameness levels altered over the course of the year.

### What they found

1. Farms that did the Healthy Feet Programme reduced their lameness by an average of 22% over the year. Farms that ***didn't*** do the HFP had no overall reduction in lameness.
2. All farms made some changes over the year to try and reduce lameness. Overall, only the Healthy Feet Programme farms had a reduction in lameness though.
3. The average cost benefit for farms doing the HFP was estimated to be £6.50 for every £1 which they invested.

### What the farmers said

- *"The Healthy Feet Programme is really good with a structure which worked for us."*
- *"The Healthy Feet Programme helped clarify things."*
- *"The best thing was having an independent and professional assessment of the situation. The external 'check and balance' of regular independent mobility scoring means you can't push the issue aside. It would be a real eye opener if all dairy farmers did it!"*
- *"I didn't want to be told, but was encouraged and informed. My Mobility Mentor provided information and knowledge on lameness that we could trust."*
- *"The best thing is the knowledge I've gained - far more than I could have imagined and it exceeded my expectations."*
- *"The programme has been a real benefit to my business and the whole team. We are more focussed on prevention rather than cure and we have a solid plan in place."*
- *"The best thing is I'm more positive as I have more control over lameness than I thought was possible. We are more aware of why problems occur. We've gone from treating lameness to preventing it."*
- *"The Healthy Feet Programme provided targets and goals. We focussed our minds and the attention we gave to reducing lameness has paid off. It wouldn't have happened without the structure and discipline of the programme, or without my Mobility Mentor."*