

BCVA Position Statement: Professional Cattle Foot Trimming

September 2020

Background

A recent survey by the Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCs) highlighted that lameness is the top welfare challenge facing vets and farmers across the UK (Vet Times, August 2020). With an average 30% of dairy cows lame at any given time, it represents a huge welfare concern alongside a substantial source of economic loss to the industry. The impacts on production and culling rates means that lameness presents a significant challenge to food sustainability and efforts to reduce the negative environmental effects of milk production (Chen and others 2016).

BCVA is fully supportive of the Dairy Cattle Mobility Steering Group's (DCMSG) proposed goal of reducing lameness levels to less than 20% by 2025 and less than 10% by 2030. However, to achieve these aims it is recognised that we need to engage all stakeholders in lameness control, including the professional foot trimmer.

The Vet Surgeons Act and the Vet-Led Team Approach

The forthcoming consultation on the review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act (VSA) creates the potential for foot trimmers to become a regulated 'paraprofessional'. BCVA continues to be concerned that there remains no formal regulation within the foot trimming industry with no legal requirement to undertake any training or achieve qualified status prior to providing services as a professional foot trimmer. There are many potential opportunities presented within the VSA review to improve the standard of foot trimming in the UK.

BCVA is supportive of any future legislative changes that ensure that foot trimmers must be both qualified and regularly assessed in order to continue providing professional services. It is BCVA's belief that the focus for all legislative changes should be based on welfare outcomes for the benefit of the cow and the progression towards improved foot trimming standards for improved lameness management.

BCVA is supportive of the vet-led approach to ensure closer working relationships between the vet, farmer and foot trimmer on individual farms. However, it is not the view of BCVA that the vet-led team approach should require every foot trimmer to work within a veterinary practice. Alongside the vet-led approach on individual farms, there should also be a vet-led over-arching framework to ensure robust regulation and monitoring of standards within the profession.

Qualifications

Despite the absence of any formal requirement for foot trimmers to be qualified, BCVA still believes that it is vital that all professional foot trimmers should be suitably qualified. BCVA recognises the work of the two professional foot trimming bodies, the National Association of Cattle Foot Trimmers (NACFT) and the Cattle Hoof Care Standards Board (CHCSB), in raising the awareness of professionalism within the industry and promoting the need for foot trimmers to become qualified.

The current qualifications recognised within the foot trimming industry are:

- **Royal Agricultural University (RAU) Level 4 in Bovine Lameness and Professional Cattle Foot Trimming** (Recognised by UK Regulated Qualifications Framework)
- **City & Guild's NPTC Level 3 Certificate of Competence in Cattle Foot Trimming** (Recognised by UK Regulated Qualifications Framework)
- **Dutch Diploma** awarded through the Dutch Training College and The Utrecht Veterinary University

Although still recognised by the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), the NPTC Level 3 qualification ceased to be awarded at the end of 2019. The Level 3 was originally launched in 2007 by the NACFT, with support from BCVA (Just and Cutler 2007), in recognition of the need for a national qualification that was recognised by the RQF (Atkinson 2005). The aim was that it would establish a minimum standard for professional foot trimmers to reach in order to become a UK licenced trimmer.

BCVA still supports the need for a national qualification and was encouraged by the establishment of the RAU Level 4 qualification in 2019. Currently in order to be able to sit the qualification exam, foot trimmers must have attended the 5-day Level 4 training course. BCVA is supportive of the move towards a stand-alone Level 4 examination which can be taken by foot trimmers who wish to obtain an RQF recognised qualification and can demonstrate that they have already achieved the required notional learning through previous training.

It is increasingly likely that it will become mandatory in the future for professional foot trimmers to hold a recognised qualification and we continue to support and encourage all those in the industry to strive to achieve this. BCVA remains supportive of the creation of a central register of foot trimmers as evidence of qualification and monitoring provided this is fully checked with proof of qualification required prior to inclusion on the list.

Foot trimming method

BCVA continues to recognise and endorse the Five Step ('Functional' or 'Dutch') Method as the current gold standard and the method that all professional foot trimmers should adopt. There is a lack of evidence base surrounding other alternative methods that are increasingly being introduced into the UK; these cannot currently be endorsed and BCVA does not believe these should be promoted within the profession until there is sufficient evidence base to support their implementation.

Maintaining Standards

It is recognised that achieving a minimum standard is insufficient to ensure that standards of professional foot trimming are maintained in the long term. BCVA is supportive of schemes that provide ongoing monitoring and auditing where these are robust and are based on a clear set of standards and expectations. There should also be a mentoring system (or similar) in place to support foot trimmers who do not achieve the required standards.

BCVA acknowledges that spot-audits provide more evidence of performance in the field in comparison to exam-style audits and that this should be the target standard for all foot trimmers in the future.

Assessments should not just encompass the quality of the trimming but the professionalism of the foot trimmer and their adherence to biosecurity practices including appropriate use of a Defra approved disinfectant (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/controlling-disease-in-farm-animals>) and adherence to the AHDB foot trimming equipment disinfection protocol (AHDB 2019). Cattle handling, health and safety and communication with the veterinary surgeon and farmer should also be included and assessed. Audit schemes that include anonymous farmer feedback are favourable and BCVA would like to see veterinary feedback incorporated into this in future.

BCVA remains supportive of CPD programmes for foot trimmers where these share best practice and evidence-based information. However, BCVA does not feel that attendance at CPD events alone is sufficient to ensure that standards are maintained.

Vet-Trimmer Communication

BCVA firmly believes that good communication between the foot trimmer, farmer and farm vet is key to managing lameness. Sharing of information is vital, and a communication framework should be in place to ensure that any welfare concerns, emerging problems, and indeed, improvements can be shared quickly and easily.

The foot trimmer should ensure that the farmer and vet (subject to the farmer's permission) have access to the foot trimming records and BCVA encourages the use of electronic recording to facilitate this.

Foot trimmers are encouraged to work with the vet to enable the collation of the required data for the annual herd health plan and BCVA is supportive of software programmes and documents that assist this, such as the CHCSB Herd Health Plan Summary. Treatment protocols should also be discussed and agreed between the foot trimmer, farmer and farm vet.

BCVA recognises that foot trimmers sometimes encounter problems when trying to engage with the farm vet regarding a farm or specific case. In this situation the foot trimmer is encouraged to have an open dialogue with the farm vet or their practice to establish the most appropriate means of engaging in discussion for the benefit of the client.

Similarly, where a vet may encounter concerns regarding a foot trimmer, BCVA wishes to establish the mechanisms for raising these concerns with the relevant bodies to ensure that these are dealt with appropriately and professionally.

References

AHDB (2019) Reducing the spread of digital dermatitis by disinfection of hoof trimming equipment. <https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/reducing-the-spread-of-digital-dermatitis-by-disinfection-of-hoof-trimming-equipment>

Atkinson, O. (2005) National Association of Cattle Foot Trimmers. *Veterinary Record* 157(10):298

Chen, W., White, E. and Holden, N.M. (2016) The effect of lameness on the environmental performance of milk production by rotational grazing. *Journal of environmental management* 172: 143-150.

Just, C. & Cutler, K. (2007) Setting Standards for Cattle Hoof Trimmers. *Veterinary Record* 160(25):882