

Five-point Foot-bath Fitness test

1: Cow Flow: do the cows walk through steadily and willingly?

The bath should be:

- A) Familiar - improves with frequency of use
- B) Wide enough to avoid one cow to cause a backlog
- C) Comfortable to walk through (not ridged, but not slippery either). If cows' heads are up, it isn't comfy.

2: Dilution: do you know the volume of your bath? Have you correctly calculated the amount of product? Most plastic baths are 250 litres filled to the ridge (not 200) and require 12.5 litres or 12.5kg of product to make a 5% solution.

3: Chemical: use a chemical which is going to work. That's formalin, glutaraldehyde, copper sulphate, or antibiotic (on veterinary advice). Peracetic acid or organic acids, found in many products, are inferior. Use of parlour washings was a popular fad which has largely been discredited as they can deactivate formalin, glutaraldehyde and copper sulphate, and the soaps soften the skin making cows more prone to DD.

4: Longevity: for how many cows the bath works will depend on:

- A) how clean the cows' feet are
- B) a water pre-dip - these are always beneficial
- C) the chemical used and the initial strength
- D) topping up with chemical through use
- E) acidity: copper sulphate is more active when used with a buffered acid (eg Healthy Hooves), lasting up to 5x more cows. Check the pH with litmus paper - when it creeps above pH 5, replenish.

Whatever the chemical, in many farm situations, baths are effective for only 100-150 cows. Better to split the herd and bath the second half with fresh solution, than run them through a bath of slurry.

5: Frequency: this depends entirely on the extent of the problem. Typically 3x/week is recommended when things are bad, and 1x/week as maintenance. However, if bathing isn't done well, it will not matter how often it is done, because it still won't work!

Footbathing is useful for digital dermatitis and slurry heal. It has no benefit for ulcers, bruising and white line disease, so if these are a problem for your cows, you will need to tackle other areas of lameness control too.