

Tools That Make Hoof Trimming Easier

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When the subject of hoof care arises, I often hear dairy producers complain about trimming. They tell me they already have too many chores on their daily lists. Then they go on to add that lameness treatments and hoof trimming aren't their top priority. Besides taking too long, these activities may require at least two people assisting. In short, many herd owners just dislike trimming hooves. The sentiments you just read about are understandable. Hoof trimming is a dirty job and requires practice. However, it has its rewards. With that in mind, I've put together some pointers to some tools that will make this element of hoof care a less taxing job. Let me start with some cautionary figures. Lameness rates are typically quite high in most dairy herds: 25% on average are lame cows! Moreover, the cost per lame cow is around \$300 per incident! Producers often leave hoof trimming to the experts, that is to say, professional hoof trimmers. It's partly because dairy herd owners don't exactly consider it a pleasurable activity. In fact, it ends up being a hateful chore because they usually have little experience in hoof trimming techniques.

Important hoof trimming tools

In addition, many producers will often delay trimming a lame cow because they may not have the right equipment on hand to hold the cow safely and easily. Obviously, proper hoof care products and trimming tools will ease the job and speed up the trimming process. My aim in writing this article is to make trimming a much faster, safer, stress-free, and rewarding procedure. Let me give you a quick overview of the basic tools you'll need to trim a cow. Here's to hoping these pointers will help you rise to the lameness challenge!

1. Chute

A good chute will make all the difference! You have many different options when deciding on a chute to install in your barn. The possibilities are endless, ranging from a simple manual chute to an extensive hydraulic one. The choice will depend on your preference and usage. For example, an average 120-cow herd may have a handful of animals requiring a trim each week. Although a hydraulic chute makes it easy to lift individual feet, it might not seem the most logical financial choice. A good chute ensures a safe working area for both the trimmer and the cow. Lameness is expensive (remember that \$300 per incident?), so it doesn't take much to justify the investment in a hoof trimming chute that will be around for years to come. If you're only helping 10 lame cows a year and the chute

lasts you 20 years, the return on investment is phenomenal!

2. Proper gate systems

Gates and an alley lead-way are assets that will make it a breeze to sort and maneuver an animal to and from the chute. You don't want to engage in a rodeo every time you have to put a cow there: it becomes a pretty boring game after a while. Play it safe and set up the gates for the years ahead. This investment saves on labour and frustration for the cow and its owner.

3. Hoof trimming knife

A hoof care kit won't be complete without a [sharp trimming knife](#). When the blade is dull, you need to exert too much pressure. As a result, the knife goes too deep into the claw or takes off too much horn. It's precision work, and therefore sharp tools won't tire you out as quickly.

4. Grinder

Most professional hoof trimmers use this tool to grind off excess horn from the hoof. Grinders come in several shapes and sizes and include an array of blades to choose from. Just as you would all sharp tools, use this one with caution. It cuts horn quickly but won't mind your fingers either!

5. Treatments

Depending on the cause of lameness, you may need to apply a treatment. [Hoof-fit Gel](#) has been the proven curative product for treating infectious hoof problems like [digital dermatitis \(warts\)](#). Based on the severity of the problem, you may need to apply the Gel also on a gauze and [wrap the hoof](#) for three days. Trimming and [blocking](#) can help deal with other [non-infectious hoof problems](#).



Figure 1. [Hoof-fit Gel](#) is proven to be effective in treating [digital dermatitis](#).

6. Cleaning supplies

You'll find it easier to properly diagnose the hoof when the area is clean. A hand towel or paper towels to wipe the manure off the hoof will be helpful. Using a coiled air hose at the chute has proved a great practical benefit. Using water in a chute to clean the hooves makes a mess and is often unnecessary.

7. Tension hoof tester

Sometimes you'll have difficulty finding the cause of a sore spot just by judging from the outside of the hoof. That's why a valuable addition to your cow hoof care products will be a tension hoof tester. It will help you to check the inside of the hoof and test where the cow is hurting. The cause may be an ulcer or a white line defect in the hoof. With this tool, you'll be able to determine which it is.

Concluding remarks

Delaying the hoof care chore will only make lameness problems worse. A fully stocked cabinet or storage unit close to your chute will make your life easier and allow you to tackle problem feet early on. It pays off to assemble a hoof care arsenal with all the tools and supplies you may need to trim, diagnose, and treat a foot. This way, you'll be ready to spring into action the moment you notice a lame cow in your barn! If you have further questions about common hoof trimming supplies, please contact us at [our contact page](#).