

The British Cattle Veterinary Association held its annual congress in Southport at the end of November. Mike Green reports on some of the many interesting presentations.

Welfare perceptions

A massive 93% of consumers said they would be willing to pay more for their milk if good welfare standards could be guaranteed according to a survey conducted in central Scotland and northern England. In fact 37% said they would pay 30% more for their milk if this was the case.

"Although 50% of consumers perceive welfare to be good on dairy farms, most people do not feel well informed about animal welfare and would like more information," said Dr Kathryn Ellis from the University of Glasgow.

"Consumer food purchasing choices are complex and do not always relate in a reasoned way to the presentation of information. However, consumer spending power can bring about significant changes in animal husbandry systems."

Highlights from the survey include:

- 95% of respondents thought that keeping cows permanently indoors was unacceptable.
- 32% thought it was unacceptable to keep cows outside all year round.
- The average consumer estimated a cow's average life expectancy at 10 years. The range was from one to 75 years.

"There is potential for increased income to farmers meeting welfare-assured production systems," she concluded. "The challenge therefore is to improve consumer education and provide clearer labelling leading to habitual product choice behaviour."

Counting cost of lameness

The 'average' case of lameness costs UK dairy herds £323.47 per cow according to vet Jim Willshire. This adds up to £7,499.30 per dairy herd or 0.97 pence per litre.

While the incidence of lameness in the UK dairy herd had reduced, the total cost to the industry amounted to a record £127,822,885

per year, he calculated.

"Given the interest that the retailer and consumer, together with the media are beginning to show in this subject, endemic disease lameness control is likely to become a priority," said Mr Willshire.

"Clinical lameness has been demonstrated to cause pain, reduce normal behaviour, and has

Cost of lameness

Solar ulcer	£518.73
White line disease	£300.05
Interdigital lameness	£154.31
Digital dermatitis	£75.57
Average cost per case	£323.47

been described as the single most cause of distress in dairy cattle.

"Knock-on affects of lameness into other areas of disease and production were also common with reductions in fertility and corresponding increases in the risk of culling and reduced milk production.

"Studies have shown that digital dermatitis can extend the calving interval by 20 days, solar ulcers by 40 days, white line disease by 30 days and general lameness by 8.9 days. When the total costs due to lameness for the typical herd is examined, 82% are derived from reduced fertility and milk yield," he said.

A breakdown of the figures are shown below.

First treatment costs have been estimated at £21.29 for solar ulcer (repeat treatments £43.10), interdigital lameness £21.41, white line disease £9.18 (£45.41) and digital dermatitis £0.95 (£0.78).

Breakdown of costs due to clinical lameness

Fertility costs	39%
Reduced yield	24%
Culling costs	24%
Medicine costs	10%
Labour costs	2%
Vet costs	1%



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