

Foot Trimming

FOOT CONDITION has an important bearing on the usefulness of cattle. For example, poorly kept feet may harbor infections causing foot rot. When feet become too long they crack or break off, causing the animal to be lame. Bulls with long or sore feet may be unable to serve a cow. Lame cows will lose weight and decline in milk production. However here we are concerned mainly with the effect of untrimmed feet on the animal's type.

The condition of hocks too close together (cow hocked) can be corrected to a considerable extent by trimming the outside toes as closely as possible, or closer than the inside toes. This throws more of the weight on the outside of the foot and helps straighten the leg. When the toes on the hind feet are too long, their abnormal relationship with the ground will tend to make the hind leg crooked or sickle hocked and will cause the animal to go down on its pasterns. Because of the muscle attachments to the pin bones, a sloping rump also may result. Proper trimming will help greatly in straightening the hind legs and leveling the rump if these faults are caused by long toes. It is also believed

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that short, properly trimmed front feet will help keep the shoulders well laid in and smooth.

Watch the feet on young, growing calves and yearlings, and keep them trimmed at all times so that the legs will develop correctly. You should trim the feet of show animals at least three weeks before the show in order to avoid any temporary lameness that may result from accidentally cutting the feet, or tenderness from cutting them too closely.



Fig. 4.1—Trimming the bottom of the foot with the small hand chisel.



Fig. 4.2—Note how the operator is holding the hind leg up in position on the box to trim the bottom of the foot.

You'll need only a few tools to trim the feet on dairy cattle: a hammer, wood chisel, and another short chisel with a cross handle that will fit easily into the palm of the hand. Pruning shears with handles about two feet long also are an excellent tool to have, as they will quickly and easily cut off a lot of the hard shell from the bottom of the foot. If you keep your tools sharp, you'll save a lot of time and work in doing the trimming.

Stand the animal on a small, wooden platform three or four feet square, or on a piece of plywood resting on

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a solid floor. Make the platform large enough to accommodate either the front or back feet of the animal, whichever is being trimmed.

First, shorten the hoof to the desired length with the hammer and chisel, cutting straight down or perpendicularly to the ground, at the desired length of foot. Be careful not to cut too short or too deep and make the animal lame. Hoof shortening also can often be done easily with the pruning shears—placing the hooked part between the toes, and the cutting blade as far as possible around to the outside and bottom of the toe that is being trimmed. If you hold the handles fairly level with the ground you can take off the excess length and much excess growth from the bottom of the foot.



Fig. 4.3—Here the foot is being shortened with the hammer and wood chisel.

When as much has been taken off by these two methods as desired, pick up the foot and place it on a box, with the front part of the hoof and pastern resting on the box, and the bottom of the hoof exposed and facing backwards. The box should be about a foot square and of the same depth. Pare the sole down with the hand chisel until the foot will stand properly and evenly on the ground. A little more of the sole usually is taken off at the inside of the toe than at the outer edge, giving a slightly beveled appearance to the floor of the foot. Quite a bit may be taken off at the toe part, but be careful not to take too much, or the foot will bleed and become tender. Usually little needs to be taken off the heel, unless it is grown out abnormally long. Then some of the rough growth should be removed. Remove all excess growth of hoof or shell in between the toes, and round the end of the toes with a chisel instead of leaving it in a sharp point.

Fig. 4.4—Many use hoof nippers to shorten the edges of the hooves as is shown here.

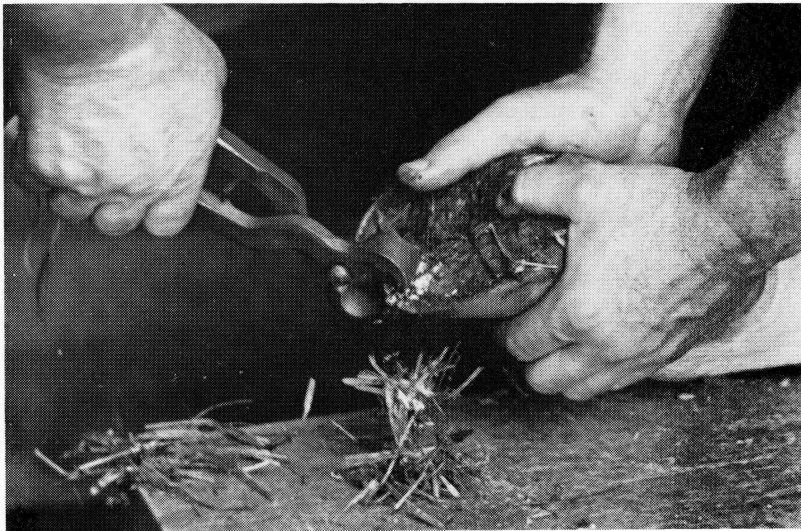




Fig. 4.5—This picture demonstrates using the pruning shears to shorten the toe and at the same time, taking some off the bottom of the foot.

When the animal's foot is picked up, an assistant should stand on the opposite side of the animal to keep it in place. If there isn't an assistant available, stand the animal against a wall. The animal can either be tied to the side of a stall or someone may hold her by the halter while trimming the feet.

The front feet can be picked up rather easily and put on the box, but the hind feet are more difficult to place. The operator should stand alongside the cow just in front of the hind leg, facing the rear of the cow.

By reaching over slowly and gently lifting up on the dewclaws or on the pastern, the hind foot usually can be placed on the box and held there while trimming off the bottom of the foot. The animal may kick and refuse to cooperate, but by exercising a good deal of patience the job usually can be done without too much effort. Show animals that are worked with a great deal usually will allow their feet to be picked up rather easily and an assistant may not be necessary.

After the feet have been trimmed, and before leaving for the show circuit, take a file and smooth out all the rough spots and ridges on the hoofs. This will make it easier to clean the feet on wash day at the show, and an assistant may not be necessary.