Recording of claw disorders in dairy cattle: overview and prospects of international harmonization


1 Vereinigte Informationssysteme Tierhaltung w.V. (vit), Verden, Germany; 2 Valacta, Quebec, Canada; 3 University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Clinic for Ruminants, Vienna, Austria; 4 Conafe, Madrid, Spain; 5 Association of Certified Hoof trimmers, Munich, Germany; 6 Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, Norway; 7 Freie Universität Berlin, Clinic for Ruminants and Pigs, Berlin, Germany; 8 SEGES P/S, Aarhus, Denmark; 9 Dairy Australia, Southbank, Victoria, Australia; 10 Geno Breeding and A. I. Association, Ås, Norway; 11 La Trobe University, Agribio, Bundoora, Victoria, Australia; 12 Institut de l'Élevage, Paris Cedex, France; 13 ZuchtData EDV-Dienstleistungen GmbH, Vienna, Austria; *Email: friedereike.katharina.stock@vit.de
Background

- lameness as major issue of dairy production
  - impaired animal health and welfare
  - significant proportions of lame cows
    not rarely > 50% (e.g. Van der Waaij et al. 2005), large variation between herds
  - considerable economic impact
    estimated annual costs of up to 450 Euro per lame cow

- foot and claw disorders as primary causes of lameness

- claw traits as new phenotypes in dairy breeding
  - relevant genetic basis (e.g. Häggman et al. 2013)
  - possible data sources:
    documented health events (herd management, veterinary data),
    trimming data ('test day structure' → valuable source of information)
    ⇒ standardization? accessibility? logistics? data quality?
Initiative on claw data recording

- harmonization of data recording within and across countries as basis of reliable and comparable genetic and genomic evaluations
  → International Committee for Animal Recording working group for functional traits

- survey on the recording and use of functional traits (2012): worldwide interest in foot and leg conditions

- expert involvement
  - exchange of experiences from different countries (May 2014)
  - worldwide overview: survey on recording and use of claw data (August / September 2014)
  - standard for the recording of claw data in dairy cattle (October 2014 to May 2015)
Status quo of claw data recording (I)

- survey (online questionnaire, ICAR members, 08/09 2014) on recording of claw health and foot and leg conditions

- questions on
  - current documentation practices, logistics around claw data recording
  - organization, education and training of claw trimmers
  - data usage, national programs on claw health

- overall response rate of 60% (32 of 53 ICAR member countries)
  - completed surveys (N=22) from 18 countries
    answers provided by scientists, claw experts, veterinarians, representatives from performance recording and breeding organizations
  - partial information (e-mail contacts) from 14 countries
Status quo of claw data recording (II)

- single key for claw data recording in 10 countries, harmonization across the Nordic countries (Nordic Claw Atlas, 2013)

- heterogeneity of recording
  - number of disorders:
    6-20 claw disorders plus up to 10 foot and leg conditions
  - detailedness of recording:
    leg (N=9) > individual claw (N=4) > cow (N=2)
  - common severity grading:
    all disorders (N=7) > certain disorders (N=5) > no disorders (N=2)

- role of claw trimmers and claw trimming data
  - substantially higher coverage than veterinary data (severe cases)
  - professional trimmers: 40-60% (N=8), 60-80% (N=2), 80-100% (N=3)
  - no routine trimming in pasture based systems (New Zealand, Australia)
Currently recorded claw disorders

- White line disease: 12
- Toe ulcer: 12
- Sole ulcer: 8
- Sole hemorrhage: 12
- Scissor claws: 4
- Rusterh. ulcer: 2
- Overgrown claws (simple horn overgrowth): 4
- Laminitis: 4
- Lameness: 5
- Interdigital phlegmon (foot rot): 12
- Interdigital hyperplasia (corns): 12
- Interdigital dermatitis: 7
- Horny pillar: 1
- Hock lesions: 5
- Heel horn erosion: 9
- Double sole: 9
- Digital dermatitis (Mortellaro disease): 12
- Dermatitis: 8
- Coronary digital phlegmon: 3
- Corkscrew claws: 8
- Chronic laminitis: 8

Number of countries
Documentation practices

- Standard form with reference to the key for claw health recording on herd management system: 3
- Standard form with reference to the key for claw health recording on mobile device: 10
- Standard form with reference to the key for claw health recording on paper sheet: 5
- Individual free text notes (no standardized form) on herd management system: 1
- Individual free text notes (no standardized form) on mobile device: 2
- Individual free text notes (no standardized form) on paper sheet: 4
- NA / no information available: 2

REMARK: large proportions of claw trimmings probably not documented at all!
Use of claw data

- central data storage
  - precondition for benchmarking and breeding use
  - not common standard (yet)
    electronic documentation ≠ data transfer to central data base (limited statistical analyses, accessibility for research purposes)
  - established in countries with routine genetic evaluations (NL, Scand.)

- status of genetic evaluation for claw health
  - routines in NL and DK-FIN-SWE since 2010, in NOR since 2014
  - genomic breeding values in DK-FIN-SWE since 2014 (10,000 cows with G+P)
  - several R&D projects, regional and national activities:
    infrastructure for claw trimming data (ESP, FRA; 25-30% of cows),
    genetic research using data from commercial dairy farms (e.g. CAN, DE)

⇒ few routine applications so far, but many things under way
(http://www.icar.org/Documents/Berlin_2014/functional_traits_meeting.htm)
Recording standard for claw data

- need for international harmonization / standardization
  - many different documentation schemes and recording practices
  - highly important and dynamic field of worldwide R&D

- joint initiative started and coordinated by ICAR WGFT
  - invitation of internationally respected claw experts
    (claw health experts, hoof trimmers, bovine practitioners, geneticists)
  - great engagement, fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration

- key factors (of success):
  - agreed aim of providing a universal tool for the practice → claw trimmers (!), veterinarians; support of on-farm interventions, basis for breeding applications
  - focus solely on standardization and harmonization of data recording
    → comparability of claw data within and across countries
  - purely descriptive trait definitions → clear and accurate classification (data quality)

⇒ harmonized descriptions of 27 conditions (approved by ICAR in June 2015)
ICAR Claw health atlas (2015)

- basis: new recording standard for claw data (ICAR) as first internationally agreed reference with harmonized descriptions of foot and claw disorders in cattle
- illustration for further increased value for the practice
- original (English) version freely available for download: https://www.icar.org/Documents/ICAR_Claw_Health_Atlas.pdf

- promotion and distribution of the ICAR Claw Health Atlas
  - hard copies (high quality electronic version for printing available on request by ICAR)
  - translations in other languages (forms for providing translated text)
Authors and Contributors

Austria
Johann Burgstaller, University Clinic for Ruminants, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna
Christa Eggge-Danner, Zuchtdata EDV-Dienstleistungen GmbH, Vienna
Johann Kofler, University Clinic for Ruminants, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna
Robert Penserholer, Federation of Austrian Hoof Trimmers, Hitzendorf

Australia
Jakob Maione, Maffra Veterinary Centre, Maffra
Erika Oakes, Dairy Australia, Southbank, Victoria
Jennie Pryce, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, La Trobe University, Agribio, Bundoora, Victoria

Belgium
Nicolas Gangler, Université de Liège - Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, Gembloux

Canada
Anne-Marie Christen, Valacota, Québec
Victor Daniel, Vic's Custom Clips est. 1984, Quality Bovine Hoof Care, Ontario
Paul R. Greenough, Professor Emeritus of Veterinary Surgery, University of Saskatchewan

Jean Prodhonhomme, Hoof trimmers training team at CFPPA, Le Rheu
Gilles Thomas, Institut de l'Élevage, Paris

Ireland
Keelin O'Driscoll, Teagasc, Moorepark, Cork

The Netherlands
Menno Holzhauer, GD Animal Health, Deventer
Gerben de Jong, CRV, Arnhem

New Zealand
Anna Irwin, DairyNZ, Invercargill

Norway
Terje Fjeldtøa, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Oslo
Bjarg Heiringstad, Norwegian University of Life Sciences / Geno, Ås
Cecilie Ødegard, Geno, Ås
Maren Knapp-Poindécker, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Oslo
Åse Margareth Stegstad, TINE, Ås

Spain
Noureddine Charfade, Conafe, Madrid
Adrián González Seguínes, Anka Hoof Care, Orkoien, Navarra
Pedro Codacesio, Seragro, S. Coop. Galega, A Coruña
Filippo Miglior, Canadian Dairy Network and University of Guelph, Ontario
Francesca Malchiodi, University of Guelph, Ontario

Denmark
Nynne Capion, Department of Large Animal Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen
Pia Nielsen, SEGES, P/S, Aarhus

Germany
Andrea Fiedler, bovine practitioner / Association of Certified Hoof Trimmers (VGK o.V.), Munich
Kerstin Müller, Veterinary Medicine Faculty, Freie Universität, Berlin
Kathrin Friederike Stok, vit - Vereinigte Informationssysteme Tierhaltung e. V., Verden

Finland
Reijo Junnila, Environmental Health Office of Central Ostrobothnia, Kokkola
Elna Paakala, Faba co-op, Vantaa

France
Joël Blanchard, Hoof trimmers training team at CFPPA, Le Rheu
Marc Delacroix, Veterinarian, member of training team at CFPPA, Le Rheu

Switzerland
Adrian Steiner, University of Bern, Vetsuisse Faculty, Bern

Sweden
Christer Bergsten, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp
Karin Ulvshammar, Vaxa Sverige, Stockholm

United Kingdom
Andrew J Bradley, Quality Milk Management Services Ltd, Somerset
Jonathan Clarke, SKS Foot trimming Services Ltd, Seaford, East Sussex
Michael Parkinson, Holstein UK, Herts
Becky Whay, University of Bristol, School of Veterinary Sciences, Langford, Bristol

United States of America
John Cole, Animal Genomics and Improvement Laboratory, ARS, USDA, Beltsville
Dorte Døpsøe, Food Animal Production Medicine, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Wisconsin in Madison, Madison
Gerard Cramer, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Minnesota, St. Paul

ICAR CLAW HEALTH ATLAS
# Overview of Foot and Claw Disorders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Synonymous Terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asymmetric claws</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Significant difference in width, height and/or length between outer and inner claw which cannot be balanced by trimming</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concave dorsal wall</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Concave shape of the dorsal wall</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corkscrew claws</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Any torsion of either the outer or inner claw. The dorsal edge of the wall deviates from a straight line</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital dermatitis</td>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Infection of the digital and/or interdigital skin with erosion, mostly painful ulcerations and/or chronic hyperkeratosis/proliferation</td>
<td>Morteilaro disease, Strawberry disease</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdigital/superficial dermatitis</td>
<td>ID</td>
<td>All kind of mild dermatitis around the claws, that is not classified as digital dermatitis</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double sole</td>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Two or more layers of under-run sole horn</td>
<td>Underrun sole</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heel horn erosion</td>
<td>HHE</td>
<td>Erosion of the bulbs, in severe cases typically V-shaped, possibly extending to the corium</td>
<td>Slurry heel, Erosio ungulae</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn fissure</td>
<td>HF</td>
<td>Crack in the claw wall</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axial horn fissure</td>
<td>HFA</td>
<td>Vertical (longitudinal) crack in the inner claw wall</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal horn fissure</td>
<td>HFH</td>
<td>Horizontal crack in the claw wall</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Vertical horn fissure</td>
<td>HFV</td>
<td>Vertical (longitudinal) crack in the outer or dorsal claw wall</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interdigital hyperplasia</td>
<td>IH</td>
<td>Interdigital growth of fibrous tissue</td>
<td>Corns, Tylosma, Interdigital fibroma</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>Interdigital phlegmon</td>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Symmetric painful swelling of the foot commonly accompanied with odorous smell with sudden onset of lameness</td>
<td>Foot rot, Foul in the foot, Interdigital necrobacillosis</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
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<td>Scissor claws</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Tip of toes crossing each other</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>Sole hemorrhage</td>
<td>SH</td>
<td>Diffused and/or circumscribed red or yellow discoloration of the sole and/or white line</td>
<td>Sole bruising</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole hemorrhage diffused form</td>
<td>SHD</td>
<td>Diffused light red to yellowish discoloration</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole hemorrhage circumscribed form</td>
<td>SHC</td>
<td>Clear differentiation between discolored and normal colored horn</td>
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<td>Uni- or bilateral swelling of tissue above horn capsule, which may be caused by different conditions</td>
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<td>Ulcer</td>
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<td>Penetration through the sole horn exposing fresh or necrotic corium</td>
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<td>TU</td>
<td>Ulcer located at the toe</td>
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<td>Toe necrosis</td>
<td>TN</td>
<td>Necrosis of the tip of the toe with involvement of bone tissue</td>
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<td>Thin sole</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Sole horn yields (feels spongy) when finger pressure is applied</td>
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<td>White line disease</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>Separation of the white line with or without purulent exudation</td>
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<td>White line fissure</td>
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<td>Separation of the white line which remains after balancing both soles</td>
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<td>White line abscess</td>
<td>WLA</td>
<td>Necro-purulent inflammation of the corium</td>
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**Sole ulcer (SU)**

Penetration through the sole horn exposing fresh or necrotic corium

![Sole ulcer images](image-url)
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## White line fissure (WLF)

Separation of the white line which remains after balancing both soles

![Image of White line fissure (WLF)](image-url)
Conclusions & perspectives

- worldwide increased awareness (→ focus of R&D) of the important role of foot and claw health in dairy

- maximum use of the potential of genetic improvement of claw health
  - claw trimming data as important source of information
  - large enough quantity of high quality phenotypes as crucial factor for implementing genomic applications for novel traits
  → support of the practice (data recording)!
  - data standardization across countries allowing international cooperation
  → harmonized descriptions of foot and claw disorders as major step forward, but reference availability ≠ use
   ⇒ continuing engagement needed!

- ICAR Claw health atlas as example for the benefits of international and interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration

We can do better when we work together!
Acknowledgement
The ICAR Working Group on Functional Traits acknowledges the excellent cooperation with the international experts on claw health and expresses its gratitude for their support and proposals for the elaboration of new standards for the recording of claw health information.

Without their expertise and their great support, it would have been impossible to succeed with the ambitious plans of making available this new ICAR Claw Health Atlas.

Education & training of claw trimmers

- 'free market' of claw trimmers: no education required to work as trimmer in most countries
- existing organization for licensing and/or certification of claw trimmers (e.g. Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Norway)
- special education programs and/or regular professional training by claw trimming experts (e.g. Canada, Denmark, Finland, Israel, Spain, The Netherlands or United Kingdom)
- quality control in claw trimming: organization of regular training sessions, measures to ensure comparability of the results between the different hoof trimmers (e.g. Charfeddine 2014, Van Pelt 2015)