

» MANAGEMENT

A practical sow hoof trimming guide

From proper equipment to correct timing, claw trimming comes with its own learning curve that ultimately can increase sow longevity and make a farm more profitable.

By Laura Fernandez

» Approximately 15 percent of sows are culled due to lameness, according to the National Animal Health Management Services (NAHMS). Swine producers that have adopted hoof trimming as part of their management say that it's an investment that more than pays for itself with fewer culls and more productive sows. But according to researchers, the key isn't for you to carry around a pair of clippers in your back pocket

for emergency trims. The key is to implement a farm protocol that includes both preventative and corrective claw trimming care, starting with careful observation.

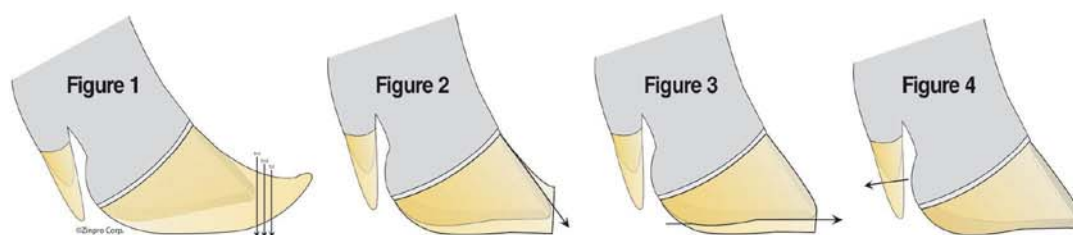
Monitor locomotion in the gilt herd

Watch for pigs that have toenails longer than 2 inches (5.8 cm). If the hoof length is about 3 inches or 7 centimeters, then it is time to trim down the hoof. An easier way may be to notice

how evenly a sow walks on all four legs and if she caters to one leg. Keep in mind that pigs carry 58 percent of their weight on their front hooves so they may not cater as much to a front hoof as they would to a back hoof.

Robert Dove, an associate professor at the University of Georgia, advises to start watching for hoof issues early rather than later. Specifically, start monitoring gilts when they enter the breeding herd. "Research shows that

FIGURES 1-4: HOOF ANATOMY



Understanding hoof anatomy is important for effective hoof care and treatment.

gilts are already showing some hoof issues prior to breeding," he said. "Go ahead and do corrective trimming to make sure one toe isn't overgrown or that the medial nail isn't overgrowing on the lateral side."

Schedule trimming when sows are least stressed

The benefit to doing corrective trimming on gilts when they enter the breeding herd is that you're avoiding putting them in a chute during gestation or lactation. Chutes that pick up sows by their bellies may cause problems with implantation if the sow is put in the chute early in her gestation. Likewise, putting sows in a chute when they're close to the end of their gestation puts extra pressure on their full udder and belly full of piglets. "Ideally, you need to trim the sow's claws when she is 30 to 40 days from implantation or when she is open," said Dove.

Plan a preventative and corrective trimming protocol

Corrective trimming prevents long toenails from breaking off on their own. If a nail tears off too far back on the hoof, then you'll have a lame sow. Claws that break off are also more jagged

and tend to catch on the floor and gates causing the hoof to get bruised.

Experts at Zinpro Corporation recommend

using clippers to clip off the end of the toe, but to do so in small increments

Laura Fernandez is a freelance writer.

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