

## Managing Tail Switches on Dairy Cattle

Trimming tail switches is an effective mechanism to keep cows clean and workers safe.

Three viable options are available to trim the tail switch:

- **Shears/scissors**
  - Advantages:
    - Shears can be sharpened relatively easily.
    - Cheap and easy.
  - Disadvantages:
    - Care has to be taken when cutting the hair to ensure the bottom of the tail is not cut.
    - Typically only removes the bottom hairs (figure 3), the longer hairs of the tail can still get soiled.
  
- **Electric Clippers (corded or battery operated)**
  - Advantage:
    - Ability to remove more hair from the side of the tail therefore reducing the frequency that tails need to be trimmed.
    - Can re-sharpen clipper blades.
  - Disadvantages:
    - Need to drag an extension cord around the barn or worry about battery life.
    - Dust/dirt/sand can dull blades quickly.
  
- **TailWell®2 Tool (attached to a cordless drill)**
  - A commercially available tool called the TailWell®2 tail trimmer was invented in New Zealand and consists of a circular clipper blade attached to a cordless drill.
  - Advantages:
    - Removes hair from the side of the tail reduce trimming frequency.
    - Portable.
    - Sharpening of blade is possible.
      - Recommended by manufacturer after about 2000 tails.
  - Disadvantages:
    - More expensive than the other methods and requires regular maintenance.



Figure 1 – Tools for trimming

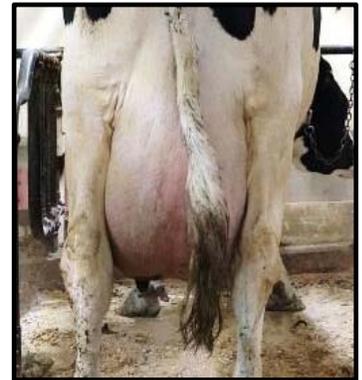


Figure 2 – Tail not trimmed



Figure 3 – Tail cut with scissors

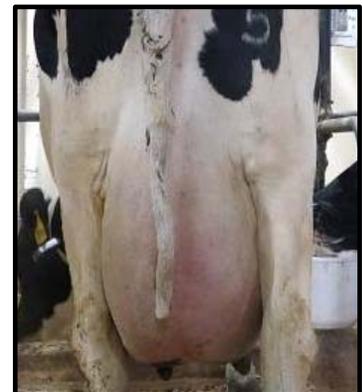


Figure 4 – Tail trimmed with TailWell®2

A video demonstrating these trimming methods can be found at <http://dairyknow.net/topics/> (under the Cow Care tab). How frequently these methods will need to be used is somewhat farm dependent, if one chooses a method that removes the hair from the side of the tail it is likely switch trimming will only need to be done 2-4 times per year.

**Tail ties for Tie stalls** - In tie stall barns an additional option exists where part of the switch is tied to an elastic string. This elastic string is then tied to a line that is suspended from the ceiling. This allows the cow limited freedom to move her tail but when properly tied, suspends the switch out of the gutter.