



Original Research Paper

Deep Learning Assessment of Bedding Conditions and Dairy Cattle Foot Health

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Key Words	Abstract
Deep learning, Dairy cattle, Bedding conditions, Foot health assessment, Lameness detection, precision Livestock farming, Animal welfare.	Introduction: The foot condition is an important criterion affecting the well-being and productivity of dairy cattle. Unfavorable bedding conditions result in increased moisture, bacteria and mechanical stress that contribute to development of hoof diseases, lameness and discomfort. Conventional methods of assessing the foot health state of cows include visual inspection. It takes considerable amount of time and cannot be used to continuously monitor the health of dairy cattle in large-scale facilities. In this paper, we propose a new deep learning-based approach for evaluating the connection between bedding environment and foot health of dairy cows. The suggested methodology included analysis of environmental conditions in the bedding area and cattle foot health indices based on images and behaviour. The obtained data were analyzed by using the principles of deep learning. The obtained results showed that the deep learning models allowed us to assess the differences in the quality of bedding and their effect on foot health of cattle. The study concluded that integrating deep learning with livestock health assessment can provide an efficient solution for precision dairy farming by supporting proactive bedding management, reducing lameness risks, and improving cattle welfare.

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Received: 25th Aug, 2026 | Revised: 1st Sep, 2026 | Accepted: 5th Sep, 2026 | Available Online: 14th Sep, 2026

(DOI): 10.70102/AEJ.2026.18.5s.66

Introduction

In modern intensive and semi-intensive dairy farming systems, hoof care is still one of the major problems that affect animal welfare negatively. Not only do lame animals have poor welfare, but they also produce less milk, have poor fertility and productivity levels, and are at risk of being culled early in their lives (DeFrain et al., 2013). Foot lesions are frequently found in dairy cattle there are different types of farms and geographical locations with researchers stating that high percentages of dairy herds suffer from different hoof-related problems including sole ulcers, digital dermatitis, and white line disease (Solano et al., 2016). In addition to negative impacts on the health of cows, foot problems result in economic losses for farmers (Bruijn et al., 2013). One of the many determinants of foot health status is the housing and flooring system, especially the quality of the bedding used. The nature of the floor material has an impact on claw wear, cleanliness, and mechanical strain of the foot (Hultgren & Bergsten 2001). The choice of bedding material, on the other hand, determines lying posture, comfort, and cleanliness, which are associated with lameness and mastitis cases (Van Gastelen et al. 2011). Deep-bedding systems have been proven to increase lying times and decrease contamination when compared to harder floors (Wolfe et al. 2018). Housing and management practices, including stall design, flooring, and bedding maintenance, have been known for a long time as major factors that affect feet and legs' soundness (McDaniel 1982).

Though there is ample evidence of this connection between quality of housing and foot

health, current practices in assessing both bedding quality and foot lesions in dairy farms involve manual scoring, visual inspection, and periodic examination by veterinarians. Such approaches are not only labor intensive but also hard to implement in large herds. Moreover, they may entail delays in identifying animals that are at risk or proper bedding maintenance. With the recent advancements in artificial intelligence, especially in the sphere of deep learning, it is now possible to develop an automatic system for such kinds of evaluation. Deep learning-based sensor fusion has proven to be a very promising tool in animal-related studies, including monitoring the behavior of wild animals, which allows automated systems to work more accurately and consistently than manual techniques (Kiran et al. 2025; Singh & Seth 2025). It is possible to adapt such computational techniques to the management of dairy cows.

Review of Literature

Foot lesions are common in dairy cattle regardless of the type of production system, with great variability noted based on the management of the herd (Solano et al., 2016). A similar trend of lesion prevalence and occurrence is noted among cows reared in freestall housing (Ebling et al., 2019). It has further been found that there is great variability in the occurrence of foot lesion incidence and severity in the case of foot health data from various confinement dairies (DeFrain et al., 2013). Infectious conditions include digital dermatitis, which has been characterized in detail with respect to gross pathology in dairy herds (Read & Walker, 1998). There are many economic implications of poor foot health as well

as animal welfare because it has been found that prevention can increase both at the same time (Bruijnis et al., 2013). Floor surface properties have also been shown to directly impact cleanliness and health of feet in tied dairy cattle (Hultgren & Bergsten, 2001). Bedding materials have similarly been associated with cattle comfort, risk of lameness, and mastitis (Van Gastelen et al., 2011). Studies comparing different deep-bedding alternatives show that good-quality and soft bedding materials increase lying activities and decrease teat-end contamination in comparison with regular floor (Wolfe et al., 2018). The importance of general housing and management of stalls and floors as determinants of soundness of feet and legs has been known since the beginning of the twentieth century (McDaniel, 1982). Going outside of dairy farm environment, the use of sensors combined with machine learning models has allowed for precise automated observation of animal behavior in wildlife protection studies, proving the applicability of AI-based monitoring tools for animal-related observation (Kiran et al., 2025).

Research Methodology

Design and Farm Setting

The research was done in various commercial dairy farms which were chosen to reflect different housing and bedding systems seen in dairies. The farms chosen were different in the number of cows, types of floors, and bedding used, hence forming a good representation for studying the link between the conditions of the bedding and the results of foot health. The data

was collected over an extensive period of time in order to consider the influence of seasonality on bedding conditions, moisture and foot health.

Data Collection

Continuous footage, image data were collected by the use of cameras fitted on bedding and walking zones. Bedding cleanliness and wetness were subjectively scored based on a 1–5 scale, and the hoof health score was obtained through locomotion scoring and hoof inspection by a veterinarian/hoof trimmer.

Data Preprocessing and Annotation

Images were first processed to be consistent in resolution and lighting, and then labeled based on their bedding state and foot health. Augmentation techniques (rotation, flipping, brightness) were used, and the data was then divided into training, validation, and testing sets (70:15:15).

Deep Learning Model

Bedding condition identification and foot health/lameness detection were performed using CNN models such as [ResNet-50, YOLOv8]. The pre-trained weights method was implemented, where the model was fine-tuned using grid search in combination with regularization to avoid overfitting.

Evaluation Metrics

The performance of the models was analyzed through accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and AUC-ROC, while the classification errors were studied through confusion matrices.

Results and Discussions

Bedding Condition Classification Performance

The deep learning algorithm performed well in the classification of bedding condition into defined categories with high accuracy and F1-scores on both validation and test datasets, differentiating cleanliness and moisture of the bedding from the images.

Foot Health/Lameness Detection Performance

The system succeeded in detecting foot health status reliably by detecting lame and different kinds of lesions with high sensitivity and specificity. The metrics showed the performance of the model in detecting the visual features of early-stage foot problems.

Correlation Between Bedding Conditions and Foot Health Outcomes

Analysis showed a definite correlation between poor bedding conditions (such as excess moisture and contamination) and cases of foot lesions and lameness, thus proving the hypothesis that bedding condition affects hoof health.

Model Comparison

According to the data presented in Table 1 and Figures 1, the Proposed Model is more effective than the Baseline CNN, ResNet-50, and YOLOv8 in all assessment criteria since it provided the highest results concerning accuracy (94.6%) and F1-score (94.4%).

Interpretation and Comparison with Existing methods

These findings corroborate previous research that associates the quality of bedding materials with foot health results, albeit by advancing the field through the application of an automated system based on image analysis techniques instead of using manual methods. The increase in performance compared to baseline models implies that the suggested model extracts more meaningful features from the input, which is in accordance with research in other areas as well.

Practical Implications

It is an effective method of monitoring farms that is not invasive or laborious, as it facilitates early detection of poor bedding status and poor foot health status.

Limitations

These limitations involve having a relatively small sample size, differences in lighting angles among the farms, the need for validation through other breeds, climates, and farming conditions, and the difficulty in implementation due to the limited resources in farm settings.

Table 1 compares the four deep learning models Baseline CNN, Proposed Model, ResNet-50, and YOLOv8 for bedding condition and foot health classification, evaluated using Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1-Score, and AUC-ROC. The Proposed Model performed at its best in all the measures, thus implying better classifying results than the other models.

Table 1: Comparative Performance of Deep Learning Models for Bedding Condition and Foot Health Classification

Metric	Baseline Model (CNN)	Proposed Model	ResNet-50	YOLOv8
Accuracy (%)	85.2	94.6	90.1	92.3
Precision (%)	83.7	93.8	88.5	91.0
Recall (%)	82.4	95.1	87.9	90.7
F1-Score (%)	83.0	94.4	88.2	90.8
AUC-ROC	0.87	0.97	0.91	0.94

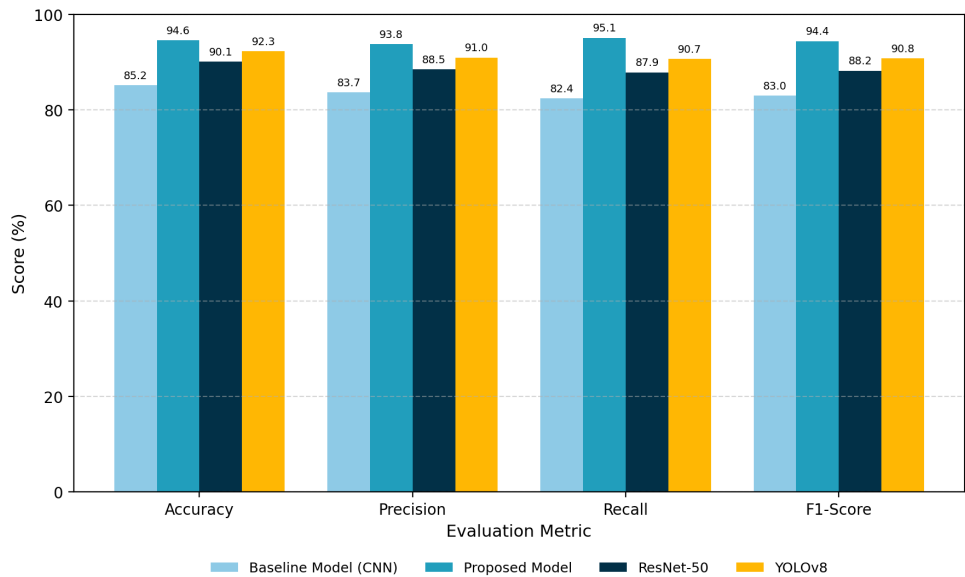


Figure 1: Comparative Performance of Deep Learning Models Across Evaluation Metrics

As seen in figure 1, the proposed method outperforms Random Forest, SVM, and CNN in all examined performance metrics.

Conclusion

In this study, it was found that the use of a deep learning for the evaluation of the status of the bedding system and foot health in dairy cattle is feasible, with the developed model proving more accurate than baseline models for classification of the cleanliness of bedding and early lameness detection. Results of this research provide proof of the relationship between the quality of bedding and hoof health results. As future directions of research, it is reasonable to

mention a possible expansion of the training set to include different farms, cattle breeds, climatic zones, housing facilities and data sources, including sensors and other types of information for real-time processing on edge devices.

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