

Post Rock Answers
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Considerations for Livestock Management in Late Summer Months

Have traditional summer setbacks struck your livestock operation yet? Heat stress and fly trouble are the common battles during the hottest part of the year. I think it is safe to say the harshest part of summer has hit and that it is time to make sure both of these issues are well managed and under control.

Truly selecting cattle that fit the environment is always beneficial, but extended periods of high temperatures will still have an impact. Even the best managers and stockmen have experienced frightening DMI reductions and decreased cattle performance at one time or another. There are some simple, yet effective routes to take in order to stay in front of heat stress. First off, make sure there is plenty of surface area available for cattle to access the necessary amount of water. Three inches of linear space per head at watering systems is recommended. If we fall short, some cattle within the group will be pushed away and, consequently, not consume enough water to maintain an acceptable body temperature during times of high to severe heat. Waterers should always be well managed and kept clean, but they should also be placed in a shaded area if your setup allows. Secondly, if in a dry lot setting, keep the surface beneath your livestock under control. Radiation of heat can increase internal temperatures and alter cattle behavior and inhibit them from meeting the gains we are after. Utilizing a sprinkler system or manually spraying down pens early in the morning can keep surface temperatures steady as well as cut back on dust and debris in the air. Furthermore, shade and air movement will also play a big factor in managing summer heat.

Flies further compound summer stress. There are many fly control practices available for livestock operators, and often times, using a combination of these practices is most effective. For example, fly tags that were administered early in the season can be effective for face flies that carry *M. bovis*, the bacteria responsible for pinkeye, but have significantly reduced efficacy on stable flies, which bite on the legs of livestock and can only be managed with fly spray. Common hatch grounds for stable flies are near bunk lines or in feedlot and dairy operations as they rely on a mix of organic matter with moisture and manure. Maintaining a clean operation and minimizing commodity spills can reduce the distress that these flies will bring to cattle.

However, it is horn flies that producers battle most often. Horn flies are what we see on the shoulder, back, and rib of our livestock. These are biting flies that take between 20-30 blood meals daily and cause great distress to infested animals. Individual cattle that exceed the threshold (200 flies) can experience reduced efficiency, abnormal behavioral patterns, and decreased milk flow. In a trial done on pastured cattle in Nebraska, calves weaned 10-20 pounds higher when flies on the cows were kept in check and under the threshold. On the flip side, weaning weights could be reduced anywhere from 4 to 15 percent when good fly control practice is lacking (Boxler).

Being late in the season, some options will prove more effective than others. Spraying for flies should provide, on average, two weeks of relief but will be at the producer's discretion as to when the cattle need sprayed again. Placing back rubbers and dust bags in areas that are mandatory for the cattle to cross can also be effective. Attaching them to mineral feeders is a popular option, but they can also be of good use at certain watering systems.

Honest evaluation and good record keeping will help make great strides in regards to these summer setbacks. Knowing the facts about feed through additives such as IGR, keeping track of rotating pyrethroid (CyGaurd) and organophosphate (Corathon) tags, and exploring new options for fly control is sure to pay off in the long run.

Source

- Boxler, Dave “Fly Control for Cattle on Pasture in Nebraska” University of Nebraska Extension <http://beef.unl.edu/cattleproduction/controllingflies>

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