

VETERINARY CALL

by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

Fly Control for Grazing Cattle

Flies can bring various health issues to the cattle herd out on pasture, but there are several treatment options available to help control the fly population.

Several types of flies can cause problems for cattle. Some types of flies are a greater problem for cattle on pasture, while different types of flies are primarily a concern for cattle in a drylot. Producers with grazing cattle typically focus on battling horn flies and face flies.

Horn flies take more than 30 blood meals a day and spend almost all their time on the backs, sides and polls of cattle. Female horn flies deposit eggs in fresh manure. The larvae survive better in the manure of grass-fed cattle compared to cattle consuming grain rations.

Because horn flies spend almost all their lives on cattle, applying chemical pesticides to cattle can be an effective method to expose the flies to lethal doses. Several different types of pesticides are both safe to use on cattle and effective against horn flies, but some horn fly populations are resistant to the pyrethroid class of chemicals. If you used a pyrethroid insecticide last year and were not satisfied with the level of control you achieved, then it may be wise to switch to a different chemical class this year.

Several options are available to effectively treat horn flies.

Backrubbers and dust bags can be an economical method to apply pesticides if cattle are forced to use them daily.

Insecticide ear tags can be an effective method to deliver pesticide to your cattle on a daily basis, but resistance to pyrethroid tags can be a problem unless several general rules are followed.

Delay tagging until fly populations reach about 200 flies per animal. Tag all cattle in the herd by following the instructions on the label, rotate the insecticide class so cattle aren't exposed to the same chemical class year after year and remove the tags at the end of the fly season.

Larvicide (larvae-killing) products included in mineral or feed will pass through to kill fly larvae in the manure pat. To be effective, cattle must consume these oral products daily so all fresh manure has an effective dose.

The female face fly has sharp mouth parts that damage the eyes of cattle and other sensitive tissues. Face fly bites can increase the risk of pinkeye, particularly in calves.

The face fly is different from the horn fly in that it spends very little

time on cattle and spends most of its life resting on fence posts or vegetation. Because they spend so little time on cattle, treating cattle with pesticides is less likely to result in the flies receiving a lethal dose.

It does appear daily application of pyrethroid insecticides directly on the face of cattle using backrubbers, dust bags or ear tags can reduce the time face flies will spend on cattle. Like the horn fly, face fly females also lay eggs in fresh, grass-fed manure pats, and the immature stages live in the manure pat and in the nearby soil. Because face flies can fly long distances, using oral insecticides in the mineral or feed may not be as effective as for horn flies, which migrate less.

Because fly populations will vary from one year to the next based on factors such as rainfall, grazing density and previous exposure to chemical insecticides, fly control strategies have to be flexible and may need to be changed. **AJ**

Editor's note: Robert L. Larson is a professor of production medicine and executive director of Veterinary Medicine Continuing Education at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan.

