

DECLARE WAR ON



Creeping, Crawling, Flying Pests

Story & photos by **Becky Mills**

It is annoying enough just to watch their foot stomping, head swinging and tail swishing. So imagine how your cows must feel in the middle of a swarm of biting horn flies or rubbing themselves raw on trees and fence posts because of lice.

Sorry, there are no quick fixes here. For the most part, controlling external parasites is a series of carefully planned battles rather than one all-out war.

The problem is the pests fight back, especially the flies.



“We have resistance problems across the U.S.,” says University of Florida entomologist Jerry Butler. “With pyrethroids, I’ve seen resistance as high as 200X (the lethal dose required to kill a pest) in Florida. In Georgia, it is as high as 1,000X.”

Regulatory agencies and environmental groups aren’t making it any easier. “Unfortunately, there is a major change coming in all ectoparasite control,” Butler says. “There is tremendous pressure to remove the label on organophosphates. When we lose products, we no longer have the ability to prevent resistance by changing products.”

For example, Butler cites, Dursban™ is no longer available. “That was a major weapon in fly and louse control,” he comments.

So, for now, that means a trip to your local Extension office. Your county agent can give you up-to-date information on what products are still labeled, as well as which products work in your area.

► Above: To be effective in controlling external pests, backrubs must be placed where cows and calves can’t avoid using them.

Options, combinations

Butler says whether a producer chooses one of the remaining organophosphates or a pyrethroid, ear tags are still the fly control method of choice in his area, often combined with a pour-on insecticide.

“In our area, producers apply ear tags in May, then in eight to 10 weeks, they put in new ones,” he says.

Fly tags cost approximately \$1.30 each, while a pour-on averages around 50¢/head for a 1,000-pound (lb.) cow.

University of Nebraska entomologist Jack Campbell says producers in his part of the country also apply ear tags in mid-May, but he says getting the cows off range to tag them again usually isn’t practical. He recommends adding backrubs or dusters to the pastures in August, when the fly population is on the increase.

Dust bags cost around \$25 each, and a 25-lb. bag of fly-control dust costs about \$40. Backrubbers designed for use with liquid insecticide diluted with diesel fuel are about \$20, while enough insecticide to charge it the first time will cost about \$10.

While Butler uses a 25-50 flies/cow baseline to determine when to tag again or when to add other treatments, Campbell says they normally use 200 flies/cow as a measure in his area.

More choices

Butler recommends dust bags over oil-filled backrubs, but he says neither will work unless they are placed where cows have to use them every one to three days. He also says there are fewer problems with resistance using dust bags or backrubs than with fly tags.

“When an animal treats itself, it gets a full, lethal dose each time,” he explains. “With ear tags, it drops to a low dosage, a sublethal dosage.”

When a producer is using dust bags, Campbell says, “If the flies are resistant to pyrethroids, there is only about one dust that will do the job, and that is Co-Ral®. . . . If flies are resistant to pyrethroids, they are also cross-resistant to Rabon®.”

“CyLence® is a new dust, a pyrethroid,” Campbell continues, “but so far we’ve had good luck with it.”

Feed-through treatments are not really recommended for face flies, but they are for horn flies, Campbell comments. “They are fairly effective for eight to 10 weeks, but then you’ll get your neighbor’s flies.”

Campbell also warns that the feed-through compounds, normally mixed with salt or minerals, are fairly expensive. He adds, “If you have salty vegetation, the intake is pretty poor.”

For grub control, Campbell says producers in his area have been successful

using a pour-on at weaning in the fall.

“When they treat for grubs, they assume they take care of lice, too,” he adds. “That may or may not be true. If the treatment doesn’t take care of lice by late January or February, it is too late. The cattle are already tearing the fences down scratching on them.”

He recommends inspecting a sampling of cows or calves in mid-December. If lice are present, he says to treat them again with a pour-on.

“Sprays are OK, too, but generally speaking, pour-ons work better. Basically, anything that is recommended for lice control will do, and a half rate of the grub application is usually enough for lice.”

The pour-ons for grub and lice control are less than 50¢/head for a 1,000-lb. cow.

Treating cattle for grubs when the larvae are migrating through the spinal canal or the esophagus can cause paralysis, respiratory distress or death. Read the label and contact your veterinarian for assistance.

At Chokee Plantation in Leesburg, Ga., cattle manager Billy Lee uses an integrated approach for pest control. “Starting the last of March or the first of April, we start feeding an IGR (insect growth regulator) mineral before we see any flies,” he says.


During fly season, Lee treats the 45-cow purebred Angus herd and the 175-cow commercial herd with Durasect® II

concentrate for pour-on fly control every month to two months. “It works,” Lee says.

Lee also places backrubs around the water troughs where cows and calves have to use them. He fills them with a permethrin insecticide diluted with diesel fuel and uses a trailer-mounted spray tank to refill them every two and a half weeks.

Lee says location makes the backrubs and pour-ons a must. “We’re right on the river — we have mosquitoes.”

Currently, however, he doesn’t include fly tags in his arsenal. “Fly-control tags would just add another ear decoration for most of our cows,” Lee comments, adding he might consider them in the future.

Lee also has to continue his external-pest control program during the cooler months. While grubs aren’t a problem on the southwestern Georgia operation, he says Chokee’s cattle do have problems with lice during harsh winters. As a preventive measure, he uses a pour-on for lice control in mid-December. 

Editor’s note: *The University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service maintains a Web site with management tips for pest control and an up-to-date list of labeled products for beef cattle. Go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> and click on “pest management,” then “insect management guide,” then “livestock.”*

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