

News Column

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Essential Steps for Fly Control on Beef Cattle

We cannot eliminate fly problems but can lessen their impact.

Biting flies are carriers of such diseases as anaplasmosis and bovine leukosis virus. Face flies can spread *Moraxella bovis*, which causes pinkeye, from animal to animal. The economic loss from each horn fly biting an animal 30 times/day can also be substantial.

But flies have adapted to the environment for many, many years; realistically, there is zero chance that we'll completely win the battle. Here is an outline for a multi-pronged approach for beef cattle producers to lessen flies' impact.

1. Feed a larvicide or an insect growth regulator (IGR) like Altosid® (labeled for horn flies) or Rabon™ (labeled for horn, face, house- and stable flies) to cows, starting 30 days before flies typically emerge. Continue feeding until 30 days after a killing frost.

ClariFly® is also an option, but is mainly used for confinement cattle. If an adjacent property also has cattle, the owners of those cattle also need to feed the product to their cattle or you might inherit some of the neighbor's flies. Horn flies don't travel long distances, but face flies may travel 1-2 miles.

2. Fly tags. Newer-generation fly tags that contain a higher concentration of insecticide are quite helpful in controlling fly populations. It is recommended to rotate the chemical class of tag each year now, according to Justin Talley, Oklahoma State University livestock entomologist. For example, use Organophosphate tags year one, pyrethroid tags year two, and Ivermectin type tags year three. Follow label directions on the number of tags/cow.

Many tags require two tags/cow, and one tag per weaned calf for optimum control. It is not recommended to tag bulls, or calves on cows with insecticidal tags. The key to using tags is to wait until you have 200 flies/cow, to place the tags. If one applies the tags too early, there will be decreased efficacy, usually right during the time fly populations are the highest. Plan to remove the tags in 3-5 months, in order to prevent the release of minute amounts of insecticide that can lead to resistance issues. Always wear gloves when applying or taking out tags.

3. If additional horn fly control is needed later in the year, use sprays, pour-ons, dusts or backrubbers. If possible, alternate insecticide classes when changing control methods. If pyrethroid ear tags have failed to control horn flies in the previous year, pyrethroid insecticides

in any form should not be used for at least two years. In the meantime, use non-pyrethroid ear tags, sprays, pour-ons, etc.

4. Dust bags/cattle rubs. The advantage of a dust bag or rub is that, if placed at a site where all cattle must use it, it can provide very economical control of face and horn flies. Proper placement and keeping it charged with insecticide are the keys.

5. Sprays. Timely spraying of cattle throughout the year can be effective in reducing the fly population, but can be more time-consuming and expensive; especially if cattle are grazing a large area.

There are many products on the market for fly control. Visiting with your Extension agent, Extension beef specialist, or Veterinarian to develop a plan to control flies is the best plan for success. Using just one strategy from the above list likely won't give you the results you anticipate. A multifaceted approach is best for attaining your goal of "controlling" flies.

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