

LICE CONTROL IN CATTLE

Lice are primarily a winter problem. Of necessity, Cache Valley cattle grow a thick coat of hair to survive cold winter days. Long hair helps keep cattle warm, but also provides an ideal environment for annoying external parasites such as lice. Blood sucking and chewing or biting lice are common in Utah cattle.

Lice infestations are more than a simple annoyance. The economic impact of cattle lice is highly variable and does not always correlate with the apparent severity of infestation. A USDA statistic estimates that U. S. livestock producers lose more than \$125 million annually to cattle lice. Heavy louse populations cause lowered milk production, loss of flesh, stunted growth, general unthriftiness and ultimately anemia. Louse induced anemia may cause calf abortion and may even result in the death of the infested animal. Louse-infested animals are also increasingly susceptible to respiratory diseases and other ailments. Studies at University of Nebraska-Lincoln indicate that moderate to heavy lice populations may reduce weight gains of calves by roughly .25 lb/day. These studies also indicate that calves fed at a higher level of nutrition were affected less severely by lice than calves fed a maintenance ration.

All cattle lice spend their entire lives as parasites on living cattle and the life cycle for all lice species is very similar. Female lice lay eggs (nits) that are glued to the hairs of cattle, very close to the skin of their host. Eggs hatch into immature lice that are called nymphs. These nymphs begin feeding immediately with the same sucking or chewing feeding habits as adults. Each nymph sheds its skin three times as it grows to adulthood. During cold weather, the life cycle from egg to adult is approximately three to four weeks. Reproduction slows dramatically in warm weather. Shorter hair provides less area for lice to hide and multiply. In the summer, lice have to survive in the folds of skin between the legs and body of cattle.

Lice are transmitted from one animal to another by contact. Suckling calves become infested while nursing lice-infested cows. As such, lice infested beef cows should be treated prior to delivering their baby calves.

Lice-infested cattle may be detected because they exhibit excessive scratching and rubbing. This behavior is especially noticeable on cool sunny days when cattle are not eating. Itching is indicated when cable or barb wire fences have hair on them. Infested cattle also show hair loss and often an unthrifty appearance. Cattle can be examined for lice by restraining them in a squeeze chute or locking manger and examining the face, dewlap, neck, back, and tailhead. Lice can be seen when producers make a two-handed hair part of those areas in good light. Lice numbers averaging more than three per square inch indicate a need for treatment.

Ridding cattle of lice usually results in rapid improvement. Several products can be used to control infestations of lice. These products come in various forms with

diverse application methods. Pour-ons and/or injectables are the most common. Some products are available for oral intake. Some insecticides cannot be used on lactating dairy cows and a few are restricted for use on young calves. Most have treatment-slaughter intervals and restrictions for treatment frequency. Regardless of the application method, most insecticides have little effect on louse eggs. Lice hatching from eggs after a single treatment can rapidly reinfest cattle. For this reason, a second treatment 2 or 3 weeks after the first is important to kill the newly-hatched lice before they can mature and lay eggs.

We have several reliable supply companies in the valley who carry a variety of livestock products. At the risk of appearing to endorse one product, we simply encourage producers to work with their veterinarian and supplier to select the preferred product. Some products will take care of internal parasites as well as the externals. Others are more specific.

In all cases livestock producers are responsible for using pesticides according to the manufacture's label directions. Failure to do so violates federal and state law.

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