

LICE CONTROL IN CATTLE

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. Lice infestations are more than a simple annoyance. Blood sucking and chewing or biting lice are common in Utah cattle.

Cattle lice may be among the most underestimated livestock insect in terms of economic losses. USDA estimates that U. S. livestock producers lose more than \$125 million annually to these parasites. Heavy louse populations cause lowered milk production, loss of flesh, stunted growth, general unthriftiness and anemia. During severe winters, louse-infested animals are 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 as much as 0.21 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.

The life cycle for all lice species is similar. Eggs (nits) are deposited on the hairs of cattle and hatch into immature lice. Immature lice, protected by livestock hair, find warm flesh and have the same sucking or chewing feeding habits as adults. During cold weather, the life cycle from egg to adult is only 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 host specific and spend their entire lives on the host animals. Lice are transmitted from one animal to another by contact. Suckling calves become infested while nursing lice-infested cows. As such, beef cows should be treated prior to calving.

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 running them into a squeeze chute and examining the face, dewlap, neck, back, and tailhead. Lice can be seen by making 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.

There are several approved products that can be used to control infestations of lice. They come in various forms with varied 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 some are

restricted for use on young calves. Many have treatment-slaughter intervals and restrictions for treatment frequency.

We have several reliable supply companies in the valley who carry a variety of livestock products. At the risk of endorsing one product, I 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. In all cases livestock producers are responsible for using pesticides according to the manufacturer's current label directions. Failure to do so violates federal and state law.

Treated cattle should be re-examined after about 14 days, regardless of the treatment method used. Sometimes a second treatment is necessary because most insecticides are not effective against eggs. As such, lice hatched after the initial treatment may re-infest the animal.