

Cattle Bloat Appearing Early

LEXINGTON, KY.

The University of Kentucky Veterinary Diagnostic Lab is seeing cases of bloat in cattle 20 days earlier than normal, said Craig Carter, lab director.

“From Jan. 1 through April 3, the UKVDL has confirmed seven cases of bloat in Central Kentucky,” Carter said.

Bloat, or frothy bloat, is a life-threatening disease in cattle that can occur when animals ingest young, vegetative legumes. The most common legume grazed in Kentucky is white clover, but cattle can also get bloat from grazing alfalfa and red clover.

“All forages are about three weeks ahead of schedule due to the warm temperatures we’ve had,” said Ray Smith, UK extension forage specialist. “White clover is growing very strong this spring.”

Legumes, which are high in soluble protein, can cause the formation of a slime-like substance that traps gasses in the cattle’s rumen. Being unable to expel gas can cause the animal’s rumen to stretch. As pressure increases, breathing is affected, which can lead to death from suffocation. Cattle can die from bloat as quickly as an hour after grazing begins, but more commonly, death occurs after two to three days of grazing on a bloat-producing pasture.

The main symptom of bloat is a swollen left abdomen. Other symptoms include repetitive

standing up and lying down, kicking at the belly, frequent defecation and urination, grunting and extension of the neck and head. If untreated, the animal will collapse and die within three to four hours after symptoms appear.

UK specialists say producers can reduce the occurrence of bloat by following these practices:

- Grow grass-legume mixtures instead of pure legumes.
- Avoid grazing immature legumes. Research has shown when cattle graze legumes less than 10 inches in height, they had twice the occurrence of bloat compared to those who grazed legumes 19 inches tall.
- Do not put animals on legume-rich pastures when the pastures have moisture on them from rain or dew.
- Cull animals that have frequent bloat.
- Do not remove animals from a pasture when bloat symptoms first appear. Continuous grazing causes less incidences of bloat.
- Give animals access to water and minerals.
- Watch animals closely after a significant change in the weather.
- Feed bloat-reducing compounds.

For more information on bloat, view UK Cooperative Extension Service’s publication ID-186: Managing Legume- Induced Bloat in Cattle at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id186/id186.pdf> or contact the county extension office. Δ