

Pinkeye Costs Arkansas Cattle Producers And Industry Annually

FAYETTEVILLE, ARK.

Pinkeye is a serious problem in pre-weaned calves, hitting cattle producers in the pocketbook, warned Dr. Jeremy Powell, associate professor/extension veterinarian with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"Pinkeye is the second most prevalent disease issue affecting unweaned beef calves over three weeks of age," he said. "The estimated loss to the U.S. beef industry from the disease is an estimated \$150 million annually."

The disease also hits producers in the pocketbook because of decreased weight gains and poor performance, he said. The disease can leave cattle with scarred corneas or a "blue eye", leading to discounts when marketed.

A recent study of more than 45,000 calves over a 20-year period indicated that cattle that had suffered from pinkeye were an average of 20 pound slighter at weaning, compared to healthy calves.

Pinkeye, caused by infectious bacteria, peaks during the summer months. Face flies commonly transmit the disease. "The flies move from animal to animal spreading the bacteria," he said.

Other factors contributing to disease onset include UV light, a dusty environment and seed heads from tall grass.

"All cattle breeds are susceptible to pinkeye," Powell said, "but breeds that lack pigmentation around the eye have an increased prevalence of this disease."

Initial symptoms include eyelid swelling and increased tear flow. As it gets worse, the eye will turn red and the animal will squint. Inflammation of the lining of the eye appears, and the cornea becomes cloudy and appears blue or

white. The animal becomes less productive.

Powell said producers should treat an infected animal as soon as possible. Typical treatment targets the bacteria and provides protection to the affected eye from further irritation.

Long-acting oxytetracycline is effective at killing the bacteria. It can be injected under the skin of the neck at 4.5cc per 100 pounds of body weight. Antibiotics can also be directly administered into the affected eye either by topical application or by injecting them under the outer lining of the eye. Multiple treatments may be required and could be repeated every three to four days.

If the problem is severe, Powell recommends an eye patch to eliminate repeated irritation by flies and environmental factors.

"Recovery from this disease can be slow, and occasionally the cornea may retain a permanent discoloration," he said.

To prevent the disease, cattle producers should do all they can to control the factors that contribute to the disease, Powell advised. Attempts should be made to control fly populations with insecticides. Controlling flies with ear tags, dust bags, sprays or pour-ons will limit the disease spread in a herd.

Mowing tall grass in the pasture and providing shade in the summer months is recommended.

Vaccines are also available for use in preventing this disease. Some vaccines require a booster dose to be effective during the first year of use.

For more information on cattle production, contact your county extension agent or visit www.uaex.edu and select Agriculture, then Beef. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the U of A Division of Agriculture. Δ