

# Pinkeye Problems In Cattle Showing Up Early In 2009

**SPRINGFIELD, MO.**

**P**inkeye problems began earlier than normal this summer with reports of bad eyes showing up in May according to Eldon Cole, livestock specialist, University of Missouri Extension.

“Normally, it’s mid-summer or early fall when the outbreaks of pinkeye occur,” said Cole. “2008 was a bad year for pinkeye in southwest Missouri. Herds that experience bad outbreaks one year often slip by the next with significantly fewer problems. That has not been the case this year.”

The basic cause of true pinkeye is bacterial in nature and can be brought on by animal exposure to bright sunlight, dust, weed pollen and flies. Fescue seed heads are also often implicated.

According to Cole, the primary culprit for transmitting the disease from animal-to-animal is the face fly. Close animal contact at feed bunks, shade and watering areas certainly can enhance the spread of the disease.

“Prevention involves controlling these causes, especially fly control. Face fly control is difficult, but some fly tags can help. Otherwise it requires almost daily contact with an insecticide. Dust bags and backrubbers offer fair face fly control if cattle use them daily,” said Cole.

Vaccines have not proven as successful in pinkeye control as once hoped. Most do reduce the severity of the disease if followed with boosters. Cole says a new implant vaccination is on the market now which does not require the cat-

tle be gathered and revaccinated for boosting.

“Best pinkeye control results come from frequent observation, quick treatment, isolation and covering of the eye. Antibiotics should be effective at least in reducing the severity of the disease,” said Cole.

Covering the eye with a patch or by suturing it shut can aid in keeping irritants out of the eye and may be a psychological benefit to producers who don’t have to see the weepy, ulcerated eye every trip to the pasture.

Pinkeye is an expensive disease according to Cole. Pinkeye can actually cause a 30 to 50 pound loss of gain on weaning calves. Iowa State has monitored cattle with pinkeye through the finishing phase and found a 34 pound reduction in feedlot gain for affected cattle.

“This is why feeder cattle buyers bid less on groups of cattle with several blue eyes or bug eyes on them,” said Cole.

Besides being caused by different strains of bacteria, cattle owners should watch for trends where the problem occurs. Does it show up in certain pastures? Is it worse in nursing calves or in calves on two-year old females? Did you buy cattle that could have brought it on your place?

Cole says knowing the answer to these questions may help trace down the cause for pinkeye outbreaks. Consultation with local veterinarians is also important as they can share with you experiences over a wider area than just your farm.

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