

Ranchers Need To Watch For “Hardware Disease” In Livestock

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

As Arkansans clean up after another round of destructive winds and flooding, the state’s livestock producers should not only scout fields for objects that can be a danger to grazing animals, but also check their herds for symptoms of “hardware disease.”

“Tornadoes and other strong wind events can spread debris over a large area, and the same goes for flooding,” said Tom Troxel, associate head-animal science for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. “This has set the stage for ‘hardware disease.’”

Even if an area doesn’t sustain a direct hit from tornadic winds, the debris can still carry for long distances, littering pastures and hay meadows.

Cattle, sheep, goat and horse owners should take extra time and caution to carefully inspect hay meadows and pastures for debris especially metal objects.

“It not uncommon for cattle to ingest foreign objects because they do not discriminate against metal materials in feed and do not completely chew feed before swallowing,” Troxel said. The problem is also common in areas where fields have old, rusting fences or bailing wire or grazing occurs near construction or where buildings are being torn down. Sometimes these items are inadvertently bailed up for hay.

Internal injuries

Swallowed metallic objects, such as nails or pieces of wire, fall directly into the cow’s digestive tract. Contractions that move food along can cause nails and other items to puncture the walls of the digestive tract.

Perforations can cause partially digested foods and bacteria to leak in to the abdominal cavity causing infections and scarring.

Symptoms are may include:

- Decrease in fecal output,
- Mild rise in rectal temperature
- Heart rate may be normal or slightly elevated, and respiration is usually shallow and rapid.

“Initially, the affected animal exhibits an arched back; an anxious expression; a reluctance to move; and an uneasy, careful gait,” Troxel said. “Forced sudden movements as well as defecating, urinating, lying down, getting up, and stepping over barriers may be accompanied by groaning.”

In chronic cases, the animal may not want to eat and it isn’t defecating in its usual volume. In certain animals, milk production remains low. If you see any symptoms related to hardware disease, be sure to contact your veterinarian. Treatment of the typical case seen early in its course may be surgical or medical. Either approach improves the chances of recovery from approximately 60 percent in untreated cases to 80-90 percent in treated cases.

Flooding and blackleg

Clostridium chauvoei or blackleg is a fatal disease in cattle that often crops up after flooding.

“Blackleg is a soil-borne bacterium infection and any disturbance to the soil such as a flood may increase the exposure of the bacterium to the cattle,” he said. “Blackleg is seasonal with most cases occurring in the warm months of the year – which is coming up. Excavation of soil or soil disturbance is also a concern.”

Blackleg symptoms include: lameness, depression, fever but most of the time sudden death – meaning treatment is useless. However, blackleg vaccine is one of the cheapest vaccines to purchase for cattle. It is recommended vaccinating all calves and also vaccinating the cows to ensure good maternal transfer for the next calf. Δ