



This newsletter is a joint effort from the following organizations:



Dean Thomas, Grazing Specialist and Area 6 Soil Health Tech.
dean.thomas@fillmoreswcd.org
dean.thomas@mn.nacdnet.net
507-765-3878, ext 3



Lance Klessig,
Resource Specialist
507-523-2171, ext 108

Lance.Klessig@winonaswcd.com



Fillmore & Houston Counties

Michael Cruse, Educator
mjcruse@umn.edu

Fillmore: 507-765-3896
Houston: 507-725-5807

Winona County Extension
Jake Overgaard, Educator
over0128@umn.edu

U of M Beef Team
Eric Mousel, Educator
emmousel@umn.edu
218-327-5958



Tom Gervais, Grazing Specialist
Thomas.Gervais@mn.usda.gov
218-720-5308

Lance Smith, Grazing Specialist
Lance.Smith@mn.usda.gov
507-337-0025

Jeff Duchene, Grazing Specialist
Jeff.Duchene@mn.usda.gov
218-346-4260



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Good Management Practices for Cows on Pasture

By Emily Wilmes, University of Minnesota Extension

Spring is here and summer is just around the corner, meaning beef producers have their animals grazing on pasture. Late spring and early summer pasture provides essential nutrients for cows, so it's crucial the pastures are properly managed. Pasture management beginning in early spring can directly impact the body condition score of the cow, as well as her nursing calf and her conception rates post-calving. Here are some tips for late spring and early summer pasture management.

Design a plan for fly and pest control. Flies and parasites can tie up nutrients, so the cow may be consuming what you think is enough, but she is falling behind. Most successful fly control programs include prevention beginning at least 30 days prior to fly emergence in early spring. The process should then continue through 30 days after the area's first frost. Typically, prevention is needed March through October.

Provide continuous access to fresh, clean water. We all know that water is always important, but it is especially critical during the summer months. Providing access to fresh, clean and cool water in early spring and summer will help cows meet their increasing nutrient requirements. Research from the University of Nebraska estimates that water consumption should equal approximately 1 gallon per 100 pounds of body weight during cold weather and will double to nearly 2 gallons of water per 100 pounds of body weight during the hottest weather. Additionally, lactating cows require nearly twice as much water compared to dry cows.

Create a flexible supplementation plan, as forage quality is always changing. One way to fill pasture gaps in nutrients without over-supplementing is to use products with controlled consumption or intake modification. These products are formulated to help the cows consume supplements at the rates they need and maintain a consistent body condition score.

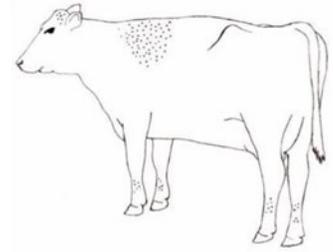
Lastly, introduce supplements early. Usually, supplements are added in late summer, when body condition score has already started to decrease, which can be expensive. For consistent conditioning, it is recommended to introduce supplement to the herd when cows have good BCS and when the pasture is still producing high-quality forage.

Fly Control for Pasture Cattle

By: Timothy J. Goldsmith DVM, MPH, DACVPM, University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine

Fly pressure on pasture cattle can have significant effects on cattle production and health. In the upper Midwest there are numerous fly species that can be found on cattle, however there are three main ones to consider for control. The horn fly, face fly and stable fly.

The horn fly is fairly cattle specific and spends nearly its entire life on the cattle, leaving only to lay its eggs in fresh cattle manure. Horn flies prefer larger animals; this can be observed in grazing cattle with cows and especially bulls having more flies than calves. The flies prefer the back and sides of cattle. It is a blood feeder and can take up to 30 blood meals a day which can be up to a pint of blood in a heavily burdened cow. The economic level for horn flies is thought to be 200 plus flies per animal, any number above this is having a negative effect on production.



Impacts of horn flies are bunching and typical fly fighting behaviors like tail switching, head throwing and stamping. All of these activities have a negative impact on normal grazing behavior. Spread across the summer grazing period this can end up reducing milk production and reproduction rates in the cow and reduced average daily gain and weaning weights (up to 20lbs) in stockers and calves.

The face fly congregates primarily on the face around the eyes and muzzle, and feeds on secretions which can include tears, saliva, mucous and potentially blood from wounds. The face fly spends less time on the cow than the horn fly and also lays its eggs primarily in fresh cow manure. While not a biting fly the female face fly mouthparts have jagged spines meant to cause irritation and mechanical damage.

The impacts of the face fly on grazing behavior are similar to the horn fly. However the face fly is associated with the spread of pathogens that contribute to Infectious Bovine Keratoconjunctivitis (IBK) or what is commonly known as pinkeye. The face fly contributes to pinkeye issues through a combination of the damage and irritation of the eye from the fly mouthparts as well as the mechanical spread of pathogens such as *moraxella bovis*.

Stable flies are the lesser known or recognized but have a significant presence. The stable fly is unique in that it spends its adult life on buildings or vegetation and is only on the animal for a short time to feed. However the bite of a stable fly is very painful and cattle can display significant avoidance behavior. The economic level can be as low as 3 flies per animal. The stable fly lays its eggs in rotting feed and accumulated manure rather than fresh manure and can be an issue in confinement settings as well as pasture settings.

The impacts of the stable fly are similar as far as grazing behavior but can be even more severe with stable flies capable of pushing cattle away from feed bunks or out of areas completely in severe situations.

There are many different options for the control of flies and successful control may require the use of multiple tools to accomplish depending on your situation.

A feed through larvicide or insect growth regulator (IGR) can be used if fed continuously throughout the grazing period. These products inhibit the development of the fly larvae in the cow manure from cows that consume it. In order for these products to work they need to be fed at the correct rate, continuously including 30 days prior to fly season and 30 days following a killing frost, and ideally fed in all the cattle in an area. For example if your neighbor is not using then you will be getting some of his flies.

Fly tags are a common tool as well. Fly tags should be placed according to the label directions as far as number of tags per cow/calf. Most importantly the tags should not be placed until well into the fly season, a common number is 200 horn flies per animal. Too commonly fly tags are placed at turnout, which can be up to 60 prior to peak fly pressure, in some cases the tag will be “used up” and will not be effective when you need it. Active ingredients in tags should also be rotated and tags removed at the end of the season to minimize resistance concerns.

Pour-Ons are an available tool as well, with many different products, which will be either an endectocide (Avermectin type products that will also act systemically and treat internal parasites) or an insecticide (primarily Pyrethroid based products). Pours-Ons require cattle handling and are placed directly on the animal and provide immediate relief, however the effective life is variable and can be significantly shortened by rain events, which may necessitate reapplication for effective control. Caution should be applied if using endectocides for fly control as this has the potential to contribute to issues related to resistance of internal parasites.

Dusters/oilers are another delivery mechanism that would primarily utilize and insecticide. These can be very effective if placed where cattle routinely pass through, such as near a mineral feeder or water tank or in a gateway cattle must go through regularly. In order to work they must be maintained, and are more difficult in extensive pasture situations.

Sprays are another way to deliver insecticides, similar to pour on application, sprays will require cattle handling and reapplication as needed for optimal control. The advantage of sprays is they can be applied to the entire body surface, not just the topline. This is a huge advantage for stable fly and face fly control where the flies are located in areas not along the topline. Sprays look to be the most effective way to control stable flies on cattle.

Biological control such as parasitic wasps are available as well, however the application and effectiveness of this type of control on pasture settings has been shown to be limited. The effectiveness has been shown to be much better in confinement settings if managed properly.

Environmental management is also a consideration. Things like dragging and spreading out manure pats so they dry out may prove to be beneficial. Removal of rotting feed and manure (areas where bale rings or feeding has occurred for example) has huge value in dealing with flies.

In most cases a multifaceted approach is needed to accomplish good fly control. However the effort needed will be recognized through improved pasture utilization as well as benefits in weaning weights, reproductive performance, and health issues if done appropriately.



Youth Tractor & Farm Safety Certification Program

By Michael Cruse, Extension Educator for Fillmore and Houston Counties

The University of Minnesota Extension is offering the Youth Tractor & Farm Safety Certification Program. Upon successfully completion, 14 and 15 year old youth may legally operate farm tractors and powered machinery for hire which they otherwise would not be allowed to operate under the U.S. Department of Labor's Hazardous Occupations Order in Agriculture. For program details, contact Michael Cruse, 507-765-3896 or email: mjcruse@umn.edu



The Mission of the MN GLCA is to preserve, enhance and expand the quality and quantity of grazing lands in Minnesota, and to enhance the profitability of the businesses that depend on them through education, technical assistance and partnerships.



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University of Minnesota Extension
Fillmore County
902 Houston Street NW, #3
Preston MN 55965
Address service requested