

As we near the end of July, temperatures outside continue to rise. Although many of you may be busy in hay fields or with other various outdoor tasks, a large number of you have already begun spending less time working outside in an effort to stay cool. As you work on keeping yourself cool, it is important to think of ways to keep your cattle cool as well. This week we want to discuss the dangers of heat stress in cattle and provide some ideas of ways to keep your cattle cool and comfortable this summer.

Similar to its effect on humans, heat stress in cattle can result in suppressed production and health. In fact, some studies find that heat stress in cattle can lead to reduced feed intake, reduced weight gain, decreased breeding efficiency, and even death. As producers who understand this information, we should be even more vigilant in our quest to prevent heat stress from taking over in our cattle operations. Perhaps the first step in this is to have an understanding of the cattle that are most susceptible to heat stress. Studies show that the following cattle types are most prone to becoming heat stressed: heavy/overweight, dark hided, those with previous health problems, cattle in confinement, and cattle that are very old or very young. If your cattle fall into any of these categories, it is especially important to implement practices that aid in reducing the amount of heat stress that those cattle experience.

There are some key things that can be done to prevent the toll that heat stress may take on a cattle operation. Just like in people, heat stress in cattle is best avoided when fresh water, shade, and air movement are present, and when overworking is avoided. Do your cattle have access to a water source that provides plenty of cool, fresh, clean water for the herd? This is essential, as it ensures that the cattle stay hydrated and maintain a normal internal body temperature. How much shade is available for the cattle to utilize, and is there enough for every animal? This is especially important in rotational grazing scenarios where shade availability varies from pasture to pasture. Make sure that you provide plenty of space for the cattle to go to a shady area that has a breeze and good ventilation. You should also be aware of the time of day you are handling your cattle. Cattle are less likely to become heat stressed when they are handled early in the day before it gets too hot. Additionally, try to avoid calving in July and August if possible. Not only does this increase stress in the cows, it creates extra stress in the calves that are born during the hottest time of year. Lastly, provide a good fly control for the cattle. Eliminating the stress that flies create will help the cattle be more relaxed and comfortable, which directly affects their productivity.

Heat stress management is not something that should be considered “optional”. With the health risks and negative effects on production that are linked to heat stress, producers should be doing all they can to prevent heat stress from affecting their cattle. If you have any questions about the prevention, or detection, of heat stress, please contact us.

Thanks,
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