

This week we will discuss the importance of internal parasite control in beef cattle. If not closely managed, internal parasites can cause numerous production losses for a cattle producer. These losses may be reflected in the reduction of milk production, weaning weights, pregnancy rates, feed intake, and immune suppression- just to name a few. In order to adequately and economically control internal parasites in your herd, it is best to first become familiar with the natural enemies of parasites.

Four of the natural enemies of parasites are extreme heat and cold, host immune systems, and dry environments. This means that worm larvae has a difficult time surviving on the ground in cases of extreme hot or cold temperatures. Also, parasites are more prone to invade and overtake the young, the old, and the diseased cattle (cattle with weaker immune systems) of a herd. Lastly, dry environments are not as conducive to perpetuating the overall life cycle of internal parasites (round worms and flukes). This is why internal parasites are not as big of a problem in West Texas as opposed to East Texas. Having a general understanding of the life cycle of the nematode may also aid in developing a plan to control nematodes in the cowherd. Nematodes first make themselves known when infected cattle pass eggs in their manure. In favorable weather conditions the eggs will hatch and develop into infective larvae within fourteen days. These larvae then move from the manure pile and up the grass blades, where they reside until they are eaten as the cows graze. Two to four weeks after they are eaten the larvae mature into egg-laying adults, and the cycle continues unless something is done.

Using the information above, a producer may develop an efficient and cost-friendly method to control parasites in his herd. In many instances, this may be done by simply implementing a rotational grazing program. Pasture management, specifically rotational grazing, is beneficial to the health of the pasture, and is one of the most economical ways to prevent internal parasite infestation. By keeping the life cycle of the nematode in mind, a producer may strategically rotate his cows from one pasture to the next- efficiently avoiding infective larvae, thus preventing his herd from becoming infected.

Only about 25% of having a good parasite control regimen depends on the type of dewormer used. The remaining 75% relies on other factors such as a good management program. It is important to learn the behavioral patterns of the nematode so that a proper course of preventative action may take place. This preventative plan will work to protect against parasitic infestations, and will help your cattle be as productive as possible, increasing the profitability of your operation.

For more information about internal parasite control, please contact us or visit:

http://www.caes.uga.edu/Publications/pubDetail.cfm?pk_id=6196