

One of the most efficient and economical ways to increase pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed is to enforce the use of a fly control. However, as with most management decisions, deciding when to begin implementation is just as important as deciding which method to use.

Although the warm spring weather has brought with it many flies, producers should note that using a fly control upon first sight of flies on their cows is not the most effective way to control flies. In fact, studies show that treated fly infestations of less than 200 flies per cow will not provide an economic return. Further, unnecessary use of insecticides may spread the development of resistant fly populations. This number of 200 flies per cow may be used as a benchmark when deciding the appropriate time to use a fly control. Once a cow or calf has approximately 200 flies on it, something should then be done for fly control. Another method to use may be to simply plan to implement a fly control regimen that lasts the duration of the most economically important segment of fly season (June through September).

Because there is more than one species of fly, it is important to identify the fly that is most established in your cowherd in order to adequately control their existence. The fly most commonly associated with cattle is the horn fly. This fly is known for sucking the animal's blood, and often stays on the back/shoulder area of the cow, but may gravitate to the belly on hot days. The horn fly has been described as the "most costly fly", as it has the potential to reduce gains by 10-15 pounds per week if it is not properly controlled.

There are several types of fly control/prevention available in the forms of fly tags, back rub, pour-on, and even mineral and blocks. However of these, the arguably "best" method to use is fly tags. Not only are fly tags relatively easy to apply, they are very economical, and conveniently last for several months, so only one application per fly season is needed. Rotating between the various methods of prevention may be necessary to prevent fly resistance.

Proper fly control is important for many reasons. Not only is it healthy for cattle, as it reduces amount of blood loss due to biting flies, it also has a direct impact on calf weaning weights. Without adequate fly control, the ability to gain weight will be hindered, resulting in lower weaning weights. Cows will also experience weight loss if proper fly control is not used. Weight loss in a lactating cow may cause further problems for the producer, as maintaining her desired body condition score will be more difficult and costly while she is losing weight. This leads the producer farther from the ultimate goal of "increasing pounds of calf produced per cow exposed, and minimizing cow cost per year", both of which are important when maximizing profitability of the cattle operation.

For more information about fly control, or to purchase products to properly control the flies in your herd, please contact us.