A well known phrase “out of sight, out of mind” represents the naiveté that all humans possess- if something is not in plain sight, it is often easily forgotten or dismissed as “unimportant”. This is also true of cattle producers, and often applies to areas that are actually extremely important, such as drought, nutrition, and health management. Parasitism is also an issue in the cattle industry that is likely not given adequate attention until it has already taken a negative toll on the animal. This week we will discuss the importance of controlling internal parasitism in cattle, and how failure to do so will have a negative impact on the productivity of your operation.

Cattle serve as hosts for a variety of parasites. However, the internal parasitic nematodes present the greatest threat to the health and performance of cattle. If they are not controlled, these parasites can irritate and even damage the linings of the intestine, causing digestive problems. This results in reduced feed intake and efficiency, which limits the amount of weight that the animal will gain, and ultimately the amount of money the animal will sell for. Failure to control internal parasites has also been shown to delay puberty and decrease fertility in replacement heifers. Because parasitism can so negatively affect an operation, it is wise to do what you can to lessen the impact it may have in your herd. The first step in doing this is to understand the life cycle of the nematode.

Infected cattle pass eggs in their manure, and in fourteen days those eggs hatch and develop into infective larvae. The larvae then move from the manure pile and up the blades of grass, where they remain until they are consumed as the cattle graze. Two to four weeks after being eaten the larvae mature into egg-laying adults, and the cycle continues. Nematodes thrive in mild, wet weather, similar to that which we have experienced this week. Therefore, special care should be taken when these conditions exist. Further, parasites are prone to invade and overtake cattle with weak immune systems, most specifically young, diseased, or very old cattle. Calves and yearlings are more susceptible than adult cattle, as the worms are able to propagate more in yearlings. It is best to treat cattle for parasite prevention in a way that interrupts the life cycle of the nematode. Because yearlings are so susceptible, it is best to use a dewormer every 90 days in stocker operations.

Though out of sight, internal parasites should not be out of the minds of cattle producers. Rather, we should be ever aware of their presence and the potential harm that they can cause in an operation. Next week we will continue this discussion and present methods to help control the impact that parasites may have in your operation. Please contact us, or visit http://extension.uga.edu/publications/files/pdf/B%201086_2.PDF for more on this topic.

Prices for feeder steers medium and large 1 sold through the Oklahoma National Stockyards on Tuesday, November 4, 2014 were as follows: 476lb- $304.86, 564lb- $279.08, 676lb- $246.44, and 729lb- $239.20. The price for January 2015 750lb feeder steers on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange was $230.15 at closing Tuesday, November 4, 2014.

Thanks,
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