

FALL DEWORMING CONSIDERATIONS

As part of the routine of working cattle in the fall, most producers will deworm their cattle. This is an excellent idea for many reasons, some of which we will discuss in this column. Additionally, I will talk about the type of products available and some of the considerations that are important for decision making about parasite control.

How do parasites damage cattle?

There are many different types of parasites and they all inflict damage in their own unique way. There are intestinal parasites that “steal” nutrients from their host’s intestinal tract. There are lungworms that damage the respiratory tract of cattle. Liver flukes damage the liver tissue and gut of cattle and make them susceptible to the fatal bacterial disease known as Redwater. Another problem liver flukes are associated with is decreased fertility. Studies have shown decreased pregnancy rates in replacement heifers and increased age to puberty in heifers infected with liver flukes. Thus, flukes can cause losses in a number of ways: (1) direct damage to the liver, with weight loss and diarrhea, (2) death loss due to Redwater secondary to liver damage of migrating flukes, and (3) decreased reproductive performance. Lice and other external parasites suck blood from the cattle and cause skin irritation. Another damaging aspect of parasite infestation is their effect on the immune system. Parasites decrease the immune response of cattle. This has two important results: (1) the parasitized cattle do not have as much resistance to infection, and (2) they do not respond as well to vaccines. In short, parasites cost you money in terms of decreased production and decreased health.

When is the best time to deworm?

The simple answer is whenever the cattle are going to go onto “new” pasture or range. “New” means the cattle have not grazed there during the last 4 to 12 months. The parasite eggs do not remain infective for long extended periods of time (particularly over summer or over winter—too hot or too cold for the eggs to survive). Therefore, if the cattle are going onto “new” pasture and you deworm them (kill “all” the existing parasites) the cattle will not be contaminating the new fields with parasite eggs. For many producers this translates into the fall and spring of the year. The bottom line is to deworm when the cattle are worked in the spring and the fall and just prior to the time they are put onto “clean” pasture or range. If you deworm the cattle and simply put them back on pastures they have been on for the last several weeks, the cattle will quickly become re-infested.

Do the dewormers kill all the parasites?

The simple answer is no for most of the products. However, there are broad-spectrum products that do a very good job on many groups of parasites. The ivermectins (Ivomec®),

Cydectin®, Dectomax®, etc) kill a large number of parasite species; other products (Levamisole®, Safeguard®, etc) are more focused on internal parasites.

What about liver flukes?

Currently, there are only two drugs available that are effective against liver flukes in cattle. Both work best against the adult flukes, but there is some effect on the migrating juvenile flukes. Clorsulon is effective only against liver flukes and it is sold alone as Curatrem® or in combination with ivermectin as Ivomec® Plus. Thus, Curatrem® can be used to kill the flukes or Ivomec® Plus can be used to kill the flukes plus the internal parasites (worms) and external parasites (sucking lice). Additionally, albendazole (Valbazen®) has activity against flukes and internal parasites.

What about the generic ivermectin products?

There are a number of ivermectin products that have been approved for many years and the patents have expired. Thus, there are generic ivermectin products that are now available commercially. Unfortunately, the chemical composition of these generic products does not have to be identical to the original patented products. Thus, often the effectiveness of the generic products is not identical to the original. It is my opinion that the generics do not possess the same potency as the original formulations and may not be as effective. Before using any generic dewormer for cattle, you should discuss this choice with your veterinarian.

Are the pour-on products better than the injectable products?

Not necessarily. If lice control is a major consideration for your treatment program the pour-ons can have advantages. However, if fluke control is important, then the oral Curatrem® or Valbazen® products or Ivomec Plus® injectable will need to be used.

Be sure to visit with your veterinarian regarding the best dewormer products and the best times of the year to use them on your herd. Remember, the best timing and products may be different for your herd than for your neighbor's herd. Seek some good advice and do what is best for your operation. Be sure to read and follow all the label directions including withdrawal times and safety precautions.

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