

Fly Control on Cattle

By Marty Morgan, Wise County Agent

Well them danged ole Biting flies are carriers of such diseases as anaplasmosis and bovine leukosis virus. Face flies can spread *Moraxella bovis*, which causes pinkeye from animal to animal. The economic loss from each horn fly biting an animal 30 times/day can also be substantial. But flies have adapted to the environment for many, many years; realistically, there is zero chance that we'll completely win the battle, however as a producer we can lessen flies' impact on our herds.

IGR or Larvicide Feed a larvicide or an insect growth regulator(IGR) like Altosid® (labeled for horn flies) or Rabon™ (labeled for horn, face, house- and stable flies) to cows, starting 30 days before flies typically emerge. Continue until 30 days after a killing frost. Most companies that make mineral also make one with an IGR in it and this is a great way to get the product in the cattle. Yes it cost more than regular mineral but does it work, or at least work efficiently. Some cows and calves just won't eat mineral and that's a fact, so does that mean you will have fly's that hatch out in their manure, Yes. So you are never going to eliminate the fly problem but you can manage it to where it doesn't negatively affect cattle health and weight gain on your calves. ClariFly® is also an option, but is mainly used for confinement cattle. If an adjacent property also has cattle, the owners of those cattle also need to feed the product to their cattle or you might inherit some of the neighbor's flies. Horn flies don't travel long distances, but face flies may travel 1-2 miles.

Fly tags. Newer-generation fly tags that contain a higher concentration of insecticide are quite helpful in controlling fly populations. I would suggest rotating fly tags each year between Abamectin(XP-820), then a pyrethroid tag(Python Magnum), then an organophosphate tag(Warrior) to prevent resistance. Follow label directions on the number of tags/cow(2 is better than 1). The three I mentioned all can be used with the Y-Tex tagger and they all contain a 20% piperonyl butoxide which provides a slow release formula to increase potency. Many tags require two tags/adult animal, and one tag/calf for optimum control. I say put two tags in all of them. They say the key to using tags is to wait until you have 200 flies/cow to place the tags and if you apply the tags too early, you'll have decreased efficacy. But in the real world we have to do it at Spring working(branding time) no matter what the fly count may be. And be sure to remove the tags in the fall when you wean calves, in order to prevent the release of minute amounts of insecticide that can lead to resistance issues. When you run your

cattle through the chute to give their annual vaccinations, wormers, mouth them, preg check em, brand em or whatever you should be doing, stick a couple of fly tags in them. Same for calves when you castrate, brand, dehorn, implant, in the chute, use a calf table or drag them.

Pour-ons. Use a pour-on at the same time you fly-tag the cows. If it's spring turnout time, you can use a product that also kills internal parasites as these products also have efficacy against horn flies. Later in the year, use products only labeled for flies and/or lice. Using pour-on dewormers many times throughout the year could lead to internal parasite resistance issues.

Dust bags/cattle rubs. The advantage of a dust bag or rub is that, if placed at a site where all cattle must use it, it can provide very economical control of face and horn flies. Proper placement and keeping it charged with insecticide are the keys. This works great on a smaller herd but what about a group of several hundred head of cattle, yeah not so good.

Sprays. Timely spraying of cattle throughout the year can be effective in reducing the fly population, but can be time-consuming if cattle are grazing an extensive area and down right unhandy. And it's always hot and rough on the cattle and hired hands.

There are many products on the market for fly control and sometimes we get overwhelmed about what is best and what to use. Heck we even get confused by all the mudslinging about different products and whether they actually work. Some swear by a product while others cuss it, but you know there are lots of variables involved such as timing, weather, correct application of and shortchanging the product dosage etc.... Just use some common sense and do what you have to in battling the flies. I used all five of these strategies on my operations when needed, and had real good luck with fly control most years. Yes there would always be that one year every now and then that for some unknown reason, it seemed like nothing worked. Using just one strategy of the five likely won't give you the results you anticipate. A multifaceted approach is best for attaining your goal of "controlling" flies. But remember, you can't totally eliminate fly problems, but you can lessen their negative impact.

You know if Moses would have swatted those two flies going on the Ark we wouldn't have a fly problem now would we!!!