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Livestock Fly Control Management

Flies and fly control in livestock is a buzzing topic (bad pun intended) each summer through fall. The three main fly species affecting livestock are: stable fly, horn fly, and face fly. With all the discussion of New World Screwworm (NWS) in the news of late, it seems prudent to discuss judicious fly control measures. Appropriate use of fly control measures will be important to have effective defense against NWS, should it rear its ugly face in Kansas, but beyond that it makes good management sense to avoid potential resistance.

Several methods can be used to aid in fly control, including; dust bags, pour-ons, injectables, fly tags, back rubbers, feed ingredients such as insect growth regulators (IGR) and some natural products like garlic and essential oils, insecticide strips placed on mineral feeders and/or ear tags are all tools. Each fly control method has advantages and disadvantages which should be considered.

Dust bags and back rubbers (oilers) are good fly control methods, but livestock must be forced to use them. A common approach is to place them near mineral tubs, water tanks or gateways to aid in use. Sprays and pour-ons are another effective method to control flies, but they must be reapplied frequently and varied by product. Oral products are also an effective fly control method; however, consistent intake is critical to maintain control. Flies can travel between ranches, and this may minimize effectiveness if neighbors are not using IGR. Don't forget that wildlife can serve as a refugia for flies as well.

Fly tags can be an effective control method. There are three main active ingredients for fly tags: pyrethroids, organophosphates, and avermectins. It is generally recommended that the active ingredient of the fly tag should be alternated, within a prescribed plan, to aid in minimizing resistance. Fly tags should be applied as late as possible to aid fly control throughout the summer months.

Use of garlic, essential oils and other natural products has gained attention within the last decade. Research results vary, but there is some indication that this could be an alternative to conventional fly control methods and aid in reducing insecticide resistance.

Several fly control methods are available with advantages and disadvantages to each. Economics and feasibility of use for the operations must be considered. Different operations may require varied management tools. For example, feedlots versus pasture operations may need vastly different fly management approaches. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to fly control, and in some instances, multiple tools may need to be used to achieve desired control.

When considering fly control management options, make sure to read product labels carefully and follow them exactly! Some insecticides are only labeled for certain fly species. You should never use products off-label, unless directed through extra-label use by a veterinarian. Keeping every tool available as a viable option is critical and this will only be able to happen if fly control products are used judiciously according to the label. To learn more visit: <https://entomology.k-state.edu/extension/human-and-animal-health/livestock-pests.html>