

Organic approach to controlling ticks in cattle

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ABSTRACT

Cattle farmers are constantly plagued with the problem of ticks which can cause severe diseases in cattle and irritate them. Farmers frequently resort to re-treatment with a tick killing chemical (acaricide). Treatment can be effective if applied and selected appropriately, but, as with any treatment, resistance can occur making chemical applications less effective over time. Regular inspection, veterinary diagnosis, responsible product use, new animal care and written treatment records are key components to a sustainable plan. This article outlines some more practical suggestions for the farmer to make to their herd.

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Introduction

Regularly inspect cattle to detect changes in numbers of ticks. Check the ears, neck, udder, groin and around the tail for ticks that may not be seen on a first pass. Note the animals with the most infested areas and when the infestation worsens. The observations will assist a veterinarian to determine if the animal requires treatment and to determine the efficacy of prior treatment.

Control of ticks is also part of watchfulness regarding disease. Fever, weakness, decreased appetite or sudden drop in milk yield should alert a veterinarian to a cow that is not well. Those signs could have a number of causes; neither tick counting nor tick removal can be used to diagnose a tick-borne disease. FAO recommends proper diagnosis for guiding the treatment, and an effective control strategy [1].

Apply acaricides correctly

Seek advice from a veterinarian or animal health professional regarding the use of a registered acaricide appropriate for the animals and the location. Always read the product label. Check the dilution, method of application, frequency of treatment, handling precautions and required withdrawal periods for milk and meat. If applied in small amounts or if part of the body is left uncovered, the product's effectiveness might be decreased. Excessive use of product can result in unnecessary hazards.

Never use chemicals together or randomly change from one product to another. If the treatment was done right, but the ticks still survived, report the name of the product, the dilution and the time of application to the veterinarian. If ticks persist may be due to reinfestation, application problem, resistant ticks. The cause should be evaluated prior to the next treatment decision. FAO not only lists acaricide resistance as a factor to consider when using integrated tick management, but also notes that this factor is believed to be a significant obstacle to chemical application alone [2].

Watch for animals entering the herd

Do a preliminary assessment of purchased or returned cattle prior to introducing them to the herd. Ask vet if they require tick treatment and separation. Even if cattle are treated for ticks recently, an animal coming into a farm area can introduce them into the farm.

Keep cattle housing and resting areas in good condition to allow for safe inspection and treatment of cattle. If herds are using common grazing area, discuss co-ordinating control activities with neighbouring farmers and local veterinary personnel. If heavily infested animals are in the vicinity then a plan for one herd could be jeopardized. An integrated management plan also includes the need for good nutrition and overall herd health [3].

Keep useful records

Each treatment can be recorded on a notebook. Record the date, number of animals treated, brand of product, dilution / concentration, applied by and effect at next inspection. Note any negative reaction and date of withdrawal from milk/meat. If control is difficult, present these notes to the veterinarian. Records can help detect a recurring issue and prevent needless reapplication.

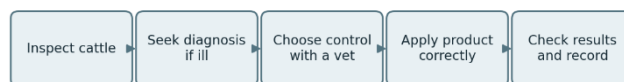


Fig.1: An inspection and treatment cycle for cattle tick control

Conclusion

Spraying for ticks when they are found is not sufficient to achieve long term control. Regularly checking cattle and getting a diagnosis when they are sick and using acaricides as directed by the veterinarians and observing if the treatment is effective can help the farmers make better decisions. These actions become a real herd plan and contribute to the conservation of the usefulness of tick control products through a written record.

References

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