

Ask the Vet: How do I control pinkeye in my cattle?

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Pinkeye can be very significant in cattle. It is a disease known to be caused by the bacteria *Moraxella bovis*, but other infectious agents may also play a role. Typically, pinkeye affects calves more so than cows, and beef animals on pasture more frequently than dairy animals. However, affected cows and bulls may have a shortened useful lifespan in the herd. It can also reduce weight gain in calves significantly and therefore be quite costly.

The first sign of pinkeye is usually a watery eye that may start to get some white or blue in the area that is usually black. As it progresses, the eye can ulcerate, become painful, and can eventually cause blindness. Recently I attended a continuing education seminar to learn more about pinkeye, but unfortunately there are more questions than answers when it comes to this disease. *Moraxella bovis* is the main bacterial cause, but several other bacteria may also be a factor, though the research has not proven this yet. Flies are supposedly needed to transmit the disease between animals, yet outbreaks have occurred in herds without a significant fly problem. It is accepted that there needs to be an insult to the eye, whether by flies, tall grass or weeds, UV radiation from sunlight, dust, or some other factor, and there needs to be bacteria infecting the eye after the insult. Some years we see very little pinkeye while other years people battle it all summer. Often one herd is plagued with pinkeye in a large number of their animals while other herds in the area experience none. There seem to be many factors that we simply do not understand that contribute to the disease.

Okay, so how to I prevent or control pinkeye in my cattle? There seems to be no silver bullet that will work in all cases. Prevention is certainly much better than trying to treat after an outbreak has started. Commercially made or autogenous (custom-made) vaccines seem to reduce the incidence of disease. Fly control using fly tags, dust bags, or pour-ons can certainly be of benefit. Pastures with tall, course grass or thistles may benefit from mowing. Once cases have been identified, early treatment is important to reduce the chance of blindness and limit the spread to other animals. We will typically inject a combination of antibiotics under the eyelid, give a shot of antibiotics in the neck, and in severe cases, stitch the third eyelid across to act as a natural patch to promote healing. Antibiotics such as tetracycline (LA200, 300ProLA) or Nuflor seem to be most effective in treatment.

If you have any questions about pinkeye or would like to set up a program for prevention, please let us know. We would be glad to work with you to limit this disease in your animals.