

Summer Fly Control

The later summer months are often the time when livestock around the farm get the least attention, but that's not strictly true. Cattle at grass in July and August will certainly be attracting the interest of the local fly population! In this month's livestock nutrition article, David Thornton from Rumenco discusses the importance of effective fly control.

Flies and midges that affect livestock are not only a nuisance and irritation to the animal, they can also transmit diseases. And with the emergence of bluetongue in recent years, we have become only too aware of the potential threat from these air borne vectors.

As the weather warms up, there are two main groups of flies which cause problems for cattle producers: flies which bite and feed on blood; and flies which feed on the secretions from the eyes, nose, udder and the sweat on the animal's coat and skin.

Within the two groups there are a number of different types of flies, some of which transmit disease, and others which are just a plain nuisance, but still distract the cow from feeding.

Control of all flies is important, but tackling those that transmit disease should be the top priority. The face fly is one of the most prolific and prevalent species. Known to transmit New Forest Eye disease, the face fly is active from late spring until early autumn and has several breeding cycles each summer. Similar in appearance to the house fly, it lays its eggs in fresh dung and adult flies emerge just seven to 20 days later.

The face fly tends to be more prevalent in the south and feeds on eye and udder secretions, as well as sweat from the body. It does not have a powerful bite, but does have minute teeth, which cause lesions in the eye. It also carries *Moraxella bovis*, the organism which causes New Forest Eye."

The head fly is also a nasty piece of work. Identified as the culprit that transmits summer mastitis, the head fly only has one breeding cycle per year and adult flies can emerge in large swarms. They are widespread in the UK, particularly in the north of the country, and cause intense irritation to the animal when feeding en masse.

The head fly lays its eggs in soil, manure and a variety of decaying vegetable matter and because they only have one breeding cycle, controlling them early in the season will reap dividends later in the summer months.

Other fly species, whilst not necessarily transmitting serious diseases, still create significant problems. Stable flies, for example, deliver a nasty bite and have three or more breeding cycles a year causing them to be active well into December if the weather stays mild. They particularly like buildings and can be a real problem in the milking parlour if they find their way in on the cows.

Control of all these flies during the season, and other relevant species such as sweat flies, horse flies, black flies, midges and the common clegg, really is vital. Eradication is impossible, but effective control should be the aim of every farmer and will not only help herd health this season, it will also reduce potential fly populations for next year.

Understanding how your own farm appeals to flies is an important step forward in better fly control. In fact, knowing where and when flies are breeding and then taking action to restrict the potential farm fly population is just as important as controlling flies on the animals. Flies breed in dung and vegetable matter, and near water, so it is important to ensure their proliferation opportunities are as limited as possible by eliminating breeding hotspots around the farm – or keeping livestock well away from water – and good hygiene.

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In a box:

Garlic as a fly repellent

Special nutrition supplements can help keep livestock free from flies. A number of studies have shown that the oil fraction of garlic can be effective against a wide range of insects. After ingestion, garlic creates an invisible odour barrier around animals. In addition, garlic has documented activity as an antibiotic and antiviral agent, helping to further protect livestock.

Two new products from Rumenco can help control the summer fly threat to livestock. Supalyx Garlic and Rumevite Garlic have both been formulated as summer grazing supplements, but also incorporate the sought after fly repellent benefits of this valuable member of the onion family.

After a few days, cattle offered these supplements will start to emit the strong garlic compounds through their skin. The strong smell can confuse flies and make it harder for them to seek out their next blood meal!

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[Picture of David Thornton]:

David Thornton has been with Rumenco for 28 years. He is a respected nutritionist and has helped many beef, dairy and sheep producers maximise the value of home grown forages through cost-effective supplementary feeding of Rumevite feedblocks, Supalyx and Lifeline buckets and the wider range of Rumenco feed products.

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