

# Proper Rotation, Timing and Management Make Fly Control in Cattle Simple and Effective

**Once the weather starts warming over 70° F, the eternal battle with flies begins. Face and horn flies cause cattle the most stress and disease. These flies can never be completely eliminated, but developing a proper fly control plan can reduce the impact they have on your herd.**

## Flies Take a Bite Out of Your Bottom Line

Face flies are spreaders of *Moraxella bovis*, the bacteria that causes pinkeye. Pinkeye can cost as much as \$337 in market value per animal.

Horn flies have an even greater impact. These blood-sucking flies gather on the base of horns, withers, back, and belly. These pests can feed as many as 20 to 30 times a day, causing irritation, disease transmission, and reduced average daily gain (ADG).

In fact, annual losses from horn flies cost the cattle industry an estimated \$1.75 billion (2021 adjusted for inflation).

## Fly Control Game Plan - 4 Steps to Success

According to Dr. Harold Newcomb, Merck Animal Health Technical Services Veterinarian, there are four main components to a successful fly control plan:

1. Feed additives that are oral larvicides and insect growth inhibitors (IGR)
2. Pour-on treatments
3. Insecticidal ear tags
4. Dust bags, back rubbers, or oilers

To ensure proper use, it is recommended that producers consult their local veterinarian for assistance in the diagnosis, treatment, and control of ectoparasites such as flies, chewing lice, and mites.

“The economic threshold to begin treatment is 200 flies per animal,” said Dr. Newcomb. “We understand producers aren’t going to go out and count flies, but once you see your animals switching their tails around, you know it’s time to start. The goal is to control flies in

a sustainable way by using the least amount of product possible that still does the job.”

Producers should simultaneously apply pour-on products and ear tags with different active ingredients to reduce animal stress and knock down fly populations quickly, providing four to five months of fly control. Dr. Newcomb recommends that dust bags or back rubbers be installed as forced-use applications; otherwise, effectiveness can be reduced up to 50%.

## Rotation at the Right Time to Prevent Resistance

Read product labels carefully to identify the active ingredients and rotate products within the following chemical classes:

- Organophosphates, such as malathion, phosmet, and pirimiphos.
- Pyrethrins/Pyrethroids, such as deltamethrin, flumethrin, and permethrin.
- Macrocyclic lactones (avermectins and milbemycins), such as ivermectin, moxidectin, and milbemycin oxime.

“The gold standard would be annual rotation of active ingredients covering all three chemical classes applied at the right time,” said Dr. Newcomb. “If a producer uses combination ear tags with two active ingredients and a pour-on from different chemical classes, those cattle will experience immediate relief. Avoid using the same chemical class over and over again because that will lead to resistance and reduced fly control. Also, remember to remove ear tags in the fall to reduce chemical residue, which contributes to resistance.”

**According to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, producers can increase their net return by \$8 for each \$1 spent on proper fly control. It may take a little more planning to get the right mix of fly control products and modes of action, but the benefits to the comfort, productivity, and profitability of your cattle operation will be well worth it.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Hoelscher, Compendium, April 2000.

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