

# ***COW/CALF CORNER***

## ***The Newsletter***

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## **Warm, Wet Weather Equals Parasite Problems**

by Dave Sparks, DVM

Late spring and early summer bring temperatures that are ideal for internal parasite reproduction. When conditions are as wet as they have been this year, the problem will be even further amplified. Our primary goal this time of year is to keep parasite contamination of the pastures as minimal as possible for young cattle until the hot dry days of late summer can come to our aid.

To properly manage parasites you must have a basic understanding of their life cycle. Luckily, although exact times may differ slightly, all cattle round worms develop through a very similar cycle. The circle starts with adult worms in the animal's digestive tract laying eggs that are then passed in the manure. At proper temperatures, the eggs hatch into larvae that crawl away from the manure pat and undergo changes to reach the infective larvae stage. The infective larvae climb up vegetation where they are ingested as the animal grazes. They are limited, however in the climb. The vegetation must be wet and the larvae can only climb a few inches. In fact, over 80% of the larvae are found in the first two inches of vegetation height. Avoiding grazing pastures short during early summer is a big factor in avoiding heavy parasite infestation. Once the larvae are in the digestive tract, they undergo further changes to reach the adult form. They then start to produce eggs and the cycle begins anew. How fast and how efficiently the proliferation develops depends on the environmental conditions. Under warm, wet conditions the entire cycle can happen in a matter of a few weeks, with each adult shedding thousands of eggs.

It usually is not economically feasible to deworm cows for the sake of their own performance, but keep in mind that they contribute much more manure than their calves. Therefore, they are the major source of pasture contamination. Deworming cows in the late spring or early summer will help to keep the pastures "parasite safe" for the youngsters grazing with them.

Calves are not as capable of limiting parasite loads as their mothers, because they have not had the opportunity for their immune system to develop a response over several summers. Also, their growth efficiency is the major factor affecting profitability. As a general rule, calves will start to consume a significant amount of forage at about 2 months of age or 200 lbs. of body weight. They start to pick up infective larvae at that time and will be shedding eggs about 4 weeks later. Multiple dewormings, about 4 weeks apart, will quite often be profitable until the weather turns hot and dry in the middle of summer.

Signs of excessive parasitism are rough hair coat, slow growth rates, pot bellies, and swelling under the jaws. Unfortunately, by the time you observe these signs, the economic damage to your operation has already been done.

A conversation with your local veterinarian will help you decide which product and what schedule is most suitable for your operation. With the dry conditions of the last few years parasites haven't been as big a problem as usual, but this year, management to reduce parasitism has the potential to be a major economic factor

## **What to Do With the Bull After the Breeding Season**

by Glenn Selk

Maintaining a 60 to 75 day breeding and calving season can be one of the most important management tools for cow calf producers. A uniform, heavier, and more valuable calf crop is one key reason for keeping the breeding season short. Plus, more efficient cow supplementation and cow herd health programs are a product of a short breeding season.

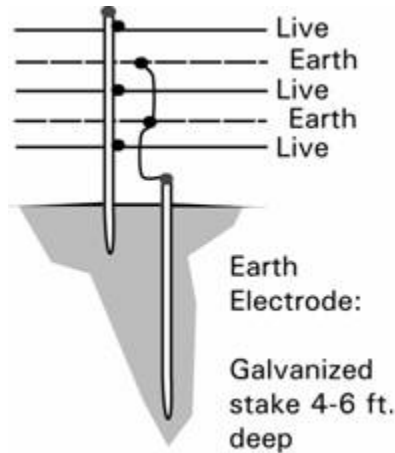
However, many small producers lose all of these money-making advantages, just because they do not have a pen or trap that will hold the bull away from cows and heifers for 9 to 10 months of the year. A Southeastern United States beef cattle specialist shared the method of fencing that they use to separate bulls from their cows.

They use a minimum of 2 acres per bull for their bull pasture. Well-fertilized introduced pastures (such as bermudagrass with adequate rainfall) in Eastern Oklahoma can stand this stocking density. However, native grass situations will require more acreages per bull unless the producer wants to feed a great deal of hay and supplement during much of the year.

They use a five strand, high tensile fence with the strands spaced at 10 inches apart. High tensile wire is a heavy gauge, smooth wire that can be made as a permanent system with in-line wire stretchers. The first strand is 10 inches above the ground. The end result is a fence that is 50 inches tall.

The fence, of course, must be electrically charged. A GOOD high voltage, low amperage fence energizer or charger provides the energy source. The Southeastern design uses the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th wire as charged wires, with the first and the 4th wire attached to grounds. The grounds will be most effective if they are set deep into the soil. This will allow for good "grounding" even when summer droughts cause top soil to become quite dry. Different designs may fit different situations. Some designs electrify the first wire (from the bottom) and make the second wire a

ground. See diagram below. Talking to a commercial representative from a reputable fencing supply company can be very helpful.



It is a good idea to have a bull pasture that is somewhat isolated. Bulls kept away from cows will remain quieter and will fight less. A pasture with adequate area also will encourage exercise and will reduce confrontations between bulls.

Being able to keep the bull away from the cows for 9 to 10 months of the year is a critical step to a more efficiently managed, profitable cow calf enterprise.

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