

Prime Cuts: Lice Suck

Just when we get relief from summer flies, we run into a winter problem. Lice.

Lice spread by direct contact, herd-mates in close quarters and mothers to calves. Lice do not live long when separated from their host. While lice can infest cattle year-round, numbers are usually lower in summer due to winter coats shedding and the elevated temperatures associated with the summer sun. The thick winter hair coat provides the perfect environment for lice to reproduce. Their lifecycle is 20 – 30 days with all stages occurring on the host animal. Adult female lice lay their eggs attaching them to the hair shaft. Eggs hatch within 5 – 14 days. The emerging nymphs look like small adults and will undergo 3 molts within a week. They will begin laying their own eggs about 2 weeks after that.

There are two types of lice that target cattle, chewing and sucking lice. Of the two, chewing lice are the most common; however, sucking lice infestations do the most damage.

Summer provides some relief from lice as they do not tolerate heat well. Lice can handle temperatures up to about 104°F before they perish. Come spring, lice will either die off or move to cooler parts of the host. Typically, we begin to see die off begin around March when the days get longer, and the sunlight becomes more intense. Relying on the change of seasons should not be our approach to lice control. There are more strategies available to us to pursue. First, a solid nutrition program is crucial. Healthy, well-fed cattle are more resistant to lice. Pour-on insecticides are also available and can be very effective. Ivermectin pour-on formulas are effective against both chewing and biting lice (injectable is not). Pyrethroid pour-ons are also effective against both types. Products such as avermectins, moxidectin, and eprinomectin are mostly effective against sucking lice. When using a pour-on, it is crucial that the product makes it down to the skin

and doesn't simply sit on top of the haircoat. Many products rely on skin oils to spread the insecticide over the body. If the product is sitting on the haircoat it cannot spread, nor is it even reaching where the lice are located.

Signs of Lice:

1. Patchy haircoats from rubbing/itching
2. Injured skin from rubbing/itching
3. Part hair along the back and neck chewing lice will appear brown and sucking lice will appear blueish
4. Check for eggs – tiny white, yellow, or black specks attached to the hair shaft

Lice treatments should ideally be done in fall prior to cattle being moved into closer quarters. If lice recur later in winter, retreatment is indicated. These treatments often also provide control for other external parasites (such as ticks), and some products control internal parasites/worms as well. Timing is key for lice control. Treating too early (August/September) offers more time for lice populations to rebuild. Treating on time (October/November) is more effective; however, all cattle should be treated twice for maximum protection.

Without a second treatment (given about 3 weeks after the first treatment), residual lice can repopulate. Also, treatments are only effective against the

adult louse, the eggs will remain unharmed. Once they hatch, they can quickly reproduce and spread without intervention. Ensure all animals are treated and at the maximum level. Any untreated or undertreated animals will become the breeding grounds for reinfestation. In addition to pour-on treatments, backrubbers and dust bags can be used for self-treatment of animals.

Young animals and older, undernourished cattle tend to have the heaviest lice populations. Younger animals usually develop some resistance after their initial exposure. However, some animals never develop this and end up being carrier animals that need to be culled from the herd.

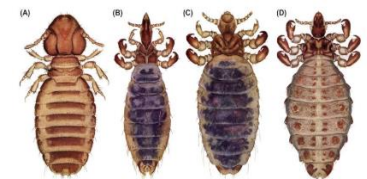


Figure 1: The 4 main types of lice in cattle (A - chewing types; B-D sucking types) . (A) Cattle biting louse; (B) Longnosed cattle louse; (C) Little blue cattle louse; (D) Shortnosed cattle louse.

Source: <https://www.mwiah.com/our-insights/lice-control-in-cattle?category=Cattle%20producers>