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BEEF CATTLE STRESSES CAUSED BY FORAGES- WHAT I HAVE SEEN AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

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Pasture Bloat

Pasture bloat is primarily a disease we see when cattle are grazing pastures of high percentage legume content. Sometimes this is referred to as “frothy” bloat due to the fact a large amount of foam is produced and the animal has difficulty eructating due to this foam. Alfalfa and the clovers are the legumes that cause bloat, where birdsfoot trefoil does not cause bloat.

The most important fact about bloat is that prevention is where you should focus your attention because treatment can many times be too late.

Prevention of bloat

1. Use poloxalene (Bloat-guard→) for 5 – 7 days before cattle are turned out to legume pasture.
2. It is best to use poloxalene in a daily feed to insure uniform intake, but availability is a problem. This is why the blocks are the most commonly used form of the preventative product.
3. Fill cattle with dry hay before turn-out onto legume pasture.
4. Turn cattle out after midday when pasture is dry (no dew or excess moisture).
5. Turn cattle out and leave them. Do not pull them in and out daily. Cattle will “learn” that they will be moved to the legume pasture and wait to eat until moved.
6. Continue using poloxalene while grazing legumes.
7. Interseed pure legume pastures with an appropriate grass to dilute the legume’s bloat-causing effect.

Be sure to observe cattle frequently the first few days on new legume pasture. If cattle with bloat are treated quickly by passing a stomach tube and giving oral poloxalene, treatment is usually successful.

Grass Tetany (Hypomagnesemic Tetany)

Risk Factors:

- Pasture heavily fertilized with potash (Potassium)
- Pasture heavily fertilized with nitrogen
- Early spring pasture
- Pasture near 100% grass
- Cereal grain pastures
- Older animals more at risk
- Cows just pre-partum until 2 months postpartum of grass tetany

Prevention:

- Don't fertilize early spring pasture with N or K
- Daily consumption of Mg (very unlikely with free choice mineral)
- Place numerous mineral feeders in pasture
- Graze "low risk" animals (steers, young heifers, cows with calves over 4 months of age) on "high risk" pastures early in grazing season
- Add legumes to the pasture
- Cull tetany-prone animals
- Add dry hay to diet
- Add Mg to water (Magnesium sulfate – Epsom salts)