The Watering Hole

By Del Hall

THE LIVESTOCK NOSE PUMP; This is a pump that has a shallow reservoir that is filled with water when the pump is activated. The reservoir is approximately 6 inches wide, 16 inches long, and 4 inches deep. The reservoir gets deeper as the plunger is pushed toward the back. To activate the pump the animal pushes against a flat plunger. The plunger is over the water in the reservoir and all the animal wants is the water, but to get to the water the plunger has to be pushed out of the way. During this process of pushing the plunger out of the way fresh water is pumped into the reservoir. When the animal gets a drink and lets off pressure the plunger returns and pumps additional water into the reservoir. Then the animal starts the process all over again.

The process of learning how to pump or push the plunger to get water is very interesting. A cow will learn to do this very fast. First the pump must be solidly mounted, because during the learning process the cow will aggressively push from all angles trying to get to the water. Next the reservoir is filled with water by pumping the plunger by hand. Then you get out of the way. You may need to pump water into the reservoir two or three times to get them started.

There has been and still is a lot of talk about using a nose pump instead of a watering tank as the water supply source for your livestock. The nose pump is a good livestock watering system. The nose pump can be used to water cows, horses, and calves weighting at least 400 lbs. Smaller calves can use this system if a small shallow tank is placed

under the pump to collect overrun water. This overrun water can then be used by a calf, smaller that 400 lbs. The overrun water comes when the cow pumps the nose pump and extra water that cannot be held in the nose pump reservoir runs over the reservoir into the small shallow tank.

There are several companies manufacturing nose pumps. You can get the pump in cast iron and cast aluminum. Some pumps come with three bolt holes for holding the pump in place, one in front and two in back. Some come with two bolt holes up front and two in back. I have not seen where one brand had an advantage over another brand other than the aluminum models are lighter to handle. Manufacturers have a little different instruction with their pumps. Some companies say it is possible to deliver water to 300 ft. based on how much of the distance is vertical lift. Some say with a vertical lift of 25 ft. you can pull water 150 ft. I think both of these are close to the maximum. The farther the water is pumped the harder the pump works. The nose pump is a diaphragm pump just like the old pitcher pump that use to be on the back porch (if you're my age) or on your grandparent's back porch if you're a little younger. The nose pump sells between $300 and $500 dollars. It usually will come with a check valve and strainer; both of these are needed.

One nose pump can supply water for up to forty head of cows. The nose pump can be portable or permanently mounted. I have seen the nose pump mounted on an old pallet, then taken from paddock to paddock. The pumps can be placed in a row using two, three, or more nose pumps. There must be adequate distance between each pump so as not to crowd the livestock. Where more than one pump is used you can use one supply line and manifold the other from the main line. The main line would have to be sized accordingly to handle the series of nose pumps. All lines going to the nose pump have to be non-collapsible.

The installation of the nose pump is fairly simple. It can be placed almost at ground level or above the ground two or three feet. The supply line has to be protected from the livestock. I have not seen a nose pump installed where it can be used in freezing weather but there may be a way. The nose pump as stated earlier has to be mounted solidly. It is also a good idea to place filter fabric and stone around the base of the nose pump, to keep from making a muddy mess.

Timing for training livestock on how to use the nose pump is important. Don't wait until it is 95 degrees before you start training. You will have to

make sure there isn’t another water source available during the training period.

Do livestock prefer a nose pump to a tank? I don’t know about their preference. But I did observe a set of heifers at Purdue Feldun farm stopping at two nose pumps for their water when a tank was only 400 feet farther. Every heifer stopped for water at the nose pumps and did not go on to the other tank.