1-1-1960

Cattle lice : spray now for prevention

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A LTHOUGH lice infestation can occur in any season of the year, the heaviest infestations are found during the winter. This build up of lice infestation normally starts in the autumn but if the cattle are treated by spraying at this period, the majority of the lice are killed and the build up is prevented. Thus the old saying “Prevention is better than cure” certainly applies with regard to cattle lice.

Beef and dairy cattle of all ages are liable to lice infestation and these parasites can be responsible for serious financial losses as their presence leads to retarded growth rates in young stock and reduced milk yields in milking cows. Cases seen in this State and as can be seen from the illustrations, both biting and sucking lice are represented. These lice can cause the following symptoms.

In heavily lice-infested animals which are constantly rubbing and scratching have even been seen of infertility in severely-infested bulls. This is easily understood when it is realised that lice-infested animals spend most of the time, normally devoted to feeding and rumination, in rubbing and scratching to allay the irritation caused by parasites.

Four of the six species of lice recognised as affecting cattle in Australia have been there is usually a marked loss of hair and the coat becomes rough and shaggy. In very bad cases the hairs of the coat become matted. The skin becomes dry and scaly so that large scabs or crusts may form, resembling the lesions of mange.

Lousy animals are restless, do not feed well and their reduced condition may make them susceptible to other diseases.
Lice infestation causes lower milk production in dairy cattle and leads to retarded weight gains, particularly in young stock. In the case of calves, lousiness leads to much licking of the coat, and since the hair is loose, hairballs form readily and frequently lead to internal disorders.

The constant drawing-off of blood and tissue fluids by sucking species of lice can lead to severe anaemia, and deaths from this cause may result when infestations are particularly heavy. Under the conditions experienced in the South-West of this State the lice populations commence to build in early winter when the pastures are low in nutritional value and when young cattle in particular find it difficult to obtain sufficient nourishment to keep them in a healthy condition.

To avoid these serious effects of lice infestation, it is important that control be instigated by spraying all cattle thoroughly in autumn—THAT IS NOW.

The most effective sprays available are dieldrin and B.H.C. preparations and these should be applied to all the skin surfaces, particular attention being paid to the under side of the animals. It is preferable to repeat treatment in 14 days to kill any lice which hatch out from the eggs on the skin and in the hair.

In conclusion, I would like to warn you against the economic loss which can occur due to lice infestation of your cattle during the winter months, and to reiterate that with little trouble or cost this loss can be prevented by action—NOW.

Fig. 2.—The Long-Nosed Sucking Louse (After Kuth)

Fig. 3.—The Biting Louse of Cattle (After Helmsing)

Fig. 4.—The Tubercle-Bearing Louse or Little Blue Sucking Louse.