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Lice on Beef Cattle

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Lice cause losses in all types of beef cattle operations. Some animals that develop extremely large lice populations may abort their calf or die from anemia caused by blood loss but the major loss results from poor feed conversion.

In cow-calf operations, lousy cattle will produce less milk and will wean lighter calves. Cattle feeders will find lousy cattle require more feed for each pound gained. Louse-infested cattle appear unthrifty and have dry looking skin. They also damage fences, corrals and feeder bunks by rubbing on them to relieve the irritation caused by lice feeding. Lice are primarily a wintertime problem because sunshine, rain, self-grooming and short summer hair coat make poor conditions for their development.

Cattle are the only host of cattle lice. Usually 1 or 2% of the cattle in a herd are carriers that will harbor high numbers of lice year around. Bulls are often carriers since they have a denser coat and cannot self-groom as easily as the other cattle. Lice spread by contact from carriers to other animals in the herd. Cattle lice spend their entire life on the animal and will live only a few days off the host if removed. Lice can pass from egg to adult in 3 to 4 weeks. Eggs that fall off the host will not hatch unless the weather is hot and then the young must find a host within 2 to 3 days or they will die.

Each time cattle are handled they can be examined for lice in a few seconds. Part the hair with your fingertips and examine the animal in several places including the neck, withers, brisket, shoulders, midback, tailhead and behind the rounds.

Idaho has 4 species of lice that infest cattle. Three of these species feed by piercing the skin and sucking blood. The **shortnosed cattle louse** is normally found as a pest of adult animals. The **longnosed cattle louse** infests calves most heavily, but is often found on mature animals in low numbers. The **little blue cattle louse** is found on all ages of cattle. The fourth species, the **cattle biting louse,** feeds on the scales of the skin and causes irritation. It is reddish colored instead of blue like the bloodsucking lice and it is usually found at the base of the tail or withers of cattle of all ages.

Chemical Control

Use any of the chemicals in the accompanying table to control lice.

Insecticide	Method of application*	Days to slaughter
Ciodrin	S, D	0
Ciovap	S	0
CoRal	S, Dp, D	0
Delnav	S, Dp, B	0
Dursban	P	21
GX 118	S, Dp, P	21
GX 130	P	21
Korlan	S, P, B	0 to 14
Lindane	S, Dp, B	30 to 60
Lysoff	P	21 to 35
Malathion	S, D, B	0
Methoxychlor	S, Dp, D	0
Neguvon	P	21
Prolate	S, Dp, P	21
Rabon	S, D	0
Ravap	S, D	0
Ruelene	S, P	7
Spotton	P	45
Tiguvon	P	35 to 45
Toxaphene	S, Dp, D, B	28 to 30
Warbex	P	35

*Application methods
B = Backrubber M = Mist spray
D = Dust P = Pour-on
Dp = Dip S = Spray

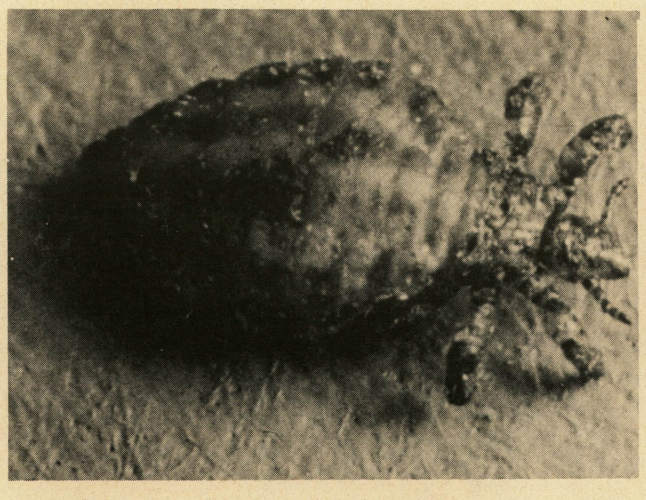

Fig. 1 Adult shortnosed cattle louse *(Haematopinus curysternus).*

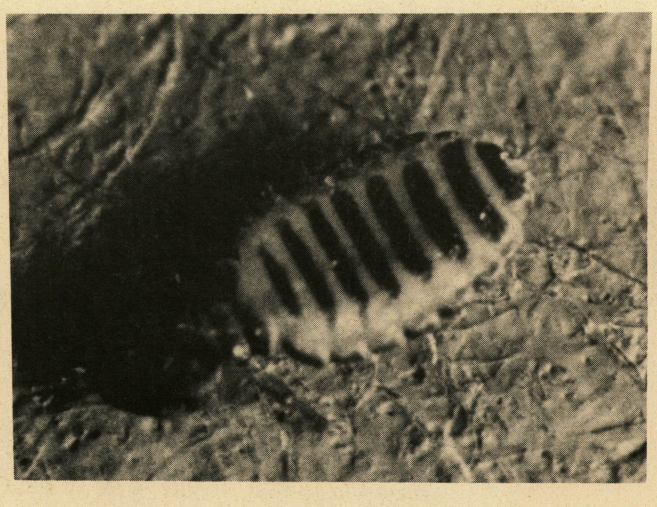

Fig. 2. Adult cattle biting louse *(Bovicola bovis).*

Only about 5% of the cattle in a herd benefit from louse control. Herds routinely treated for cattle grubs, hornflies, ticks or faceflies may not develop lice infestations which require treatment. If grubby cattle are to be treated for lice, use a systemic insecticide after the first frost in the fall. If this can't be done, wait until late January to treat to prevent anaphylactic shock to the animals which results from dying grubs present in their bodies. If treatment for lice is needed in late fall or early winter, use a nonsystemic insecticide. Systemics will not kill lice that are not feeding or eggs of lice. A second treatment may be needed in herds with large infestations.

Sanitation

Following simple sanitation practices will help you limit the spread of lice in your cattle. Isolate newly purchased animals and examine them. If they have lice, treat them before you move them into the herd. If bedding, feeder bunks, sheds or trucks have been contacted by lousy cattle, keep other cattle away from them for 2 days in winter or 10 days in summer, or sanitize them before reuse.

All insecticides are poisons. Read the label on the package and follow precautions carefully. Avoid contaminating the skin, eyes and clothing with any pesticide. To protect pastured animals, feed and food crops in neighboring fields, avoid excessive drift. Do not contaminate milk, utensils or feed. To protect fish and wildlife, keep pesticides out of ponds and streams. Keep pesticides away from children and domestic animals and safely dispose of used containers.

Warning

The recommendations in this publication are based on the best information currently available for each chemical listed. If recommendations are followed carefully, residues should not exceed the tolerance established for any particular chemical. To avoid excessive residues, follow recommendations carefully with respect to dosage levels, number of applications and minimum interval between applications. The cattleman is responsible for residues.

Brand names have been used for convenience only.
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