

Pests Fly Away with Your Money

By Curt Olson

Horn flies are more than a nuisance. These little blood suckers are literally everywhere in the United States. USDA puts the economic cost of the flies at \$700 million a year, according to Dr. Jason Cleere of Texas A&M University.

Flies cause loss of weight gain, less effective use of forage and then there is a cost to control them.

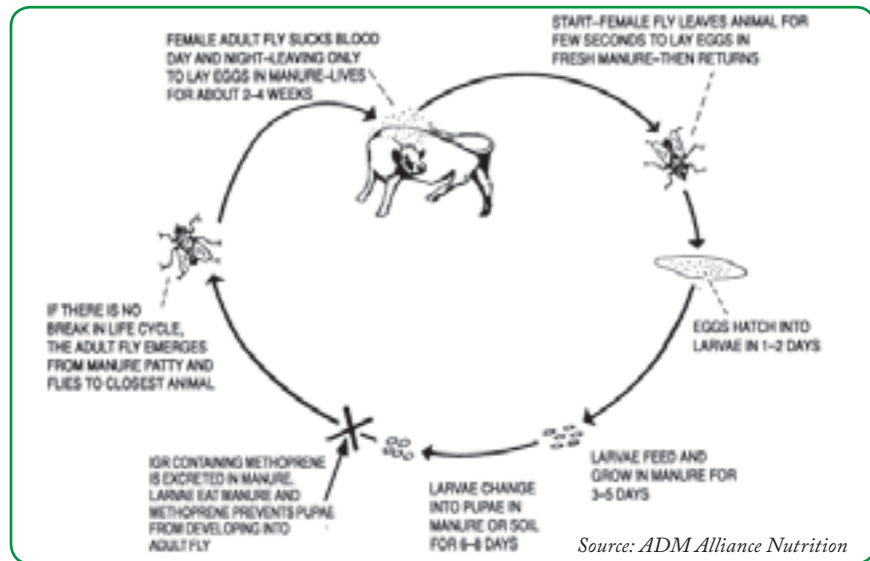
“They feed almost exclusively on cattle,” says Dr. Ralph Williams on his YouTube video. He is an Extension livestock entomologist with Purdue University. “The adult flies are going to stay right on the animal at all times. Only the females will leave to lay eggs in very fresh cattle manure then get right back on the animals. They lay about 400 eggs in a lifetime at 20 to 24 at a time.”

The life cycle is completed in eight to 45 days, depending on temperature and humidity, according to North Carolina State Extension. With such a short life cycle, it may be possible to complete as many as a dozen generations during the warm months.

As few as 200 flies per animal is considered the point where there are enough to cause an economic loss. Williams says in Indiana a typical count is 1,000 to 4,000 flies per head. In Oklahoma, he has seen counts as high as 10,000.

Cleere says a way to estimate how many you have is to look at the palm of your hand. Figure that area holds 25 to 50 flies. If you have four or five patches of flies that size on your cattle, some form of control probably is needed.

Williams says flies can cause as much as a 7.7% loss in feed efficiency. Cleere says on a cow/calf operation, milk production can decrease as much as 20%. Weaning weight can be affected by 10 to 20 pounds



if no control is used. In a stocker operation, the difference could be 10 to 25 pounds over 100 days.

Depending on where you live, you may have one or two peak seasons for flies. Northern areas like Indiana are likely to have just one population peak in mid-summer. Warmer climates may have two peaks, early and late summer.

“When we’re talking 1,000 to 4,000 flies per animal, it is very justifiable to go ahead and initiate a control program,” Williams says.

There are a lot of options for control programs: insecticide sprays, dusts, pour-ons, oilers, dust bags, ear tags, oral larvicides in minerals and blocks and controlled release boluses, says North Carolina. The key is to find what works best on your ranch.

There are three classes of drugs for treatment, Cleere says. He suggests producers talk with their local vet to get an opinion on what would work best in individual situations.

Experts advise that the best fly control program may be an integrated one. That way the flies never develop resistance to any one treatment.

An integrated fly control program uses two (or more) products that

complement each other. Producers should consider rotating the products used each year to guard against developing resistance. Consider using sprays, dusts, pour-ons, oral larvicides, etc. in the early part of the fly season, then putting slow release insecticide ear tags (containing a different family of insecticides than in the products used earlier) in later. This will extend the effectiveness of the ear tags. Two tags should be applied per animal to ensure that a lethal dose of insecticide is delivered.

Cleere says that using a pour-on product will give you an effective, fairly immediate knock down of the fly population. After that, the insecticide ear tags should work for the next three to five months. He also recommends producers remove them at the end of the season to prevent resistance buildup, and use a single chemistry in the ear tags for the same reason.

For more information, go to cattlementocattlemen.org. Click on archives and select the June 17, 2008, show. To see Dr. Williams’ video, go to: <http://purduephil.wordpress.com/2009/03/24/control-of-horn-flies-and-stable-flies-in-beef-herds/>