



## Beat the Bloat

by Del Deterling

There's no magic cure for cattle bloat, but the right management can take the air out of this health hazard.

The bad news about bloat is there are no preventive vaccines or medical treatments. The good news is there are management tools that can help decrease bloat or prevent it altogether.

Bill Pinchak, a Texas beef cattle nutritionist, says there are two especially vulnerable times for wheat pasture bloat—fall and again in spring. Both can be times of active growth for plants.

“Most dangerous is after two or three warm days followed by an overcast day or two,” Pinchak explains. The plant is trying to become more photosynthetically active, then suddenly it is delayed. This causes an accumulation of soluble proteins in the forage that sets up conditions in the animal's digestive system for bloat to occur.

What causes bloat? Slime in the rumen captures gases usually belched by the animal. Foam forms, and pressure increases on the animal's diaphragm, causing discomfort and the inability to chew its cud. In severe cases, this bloat can cause cardiac or pulmonary arrest.

**CUT NITROGEN.** Research shows an increase in the frequency of bloat as the amount of applied pre-plant nitrogen increases. Work with the landowner to reduce nitrogen amounts.

## **INCLUDE FEED ADDITIVES**

Some feed additives can actually help prevent bloat. These include blocks containing poloxalene, minerals or supplements that contain an ionophore (Bovatec or Rumensin) and perhaps liquid products with high vegetable oil content. To use them effectively, animals should be adapted to them well ahead of time.

Pinchak suggests exposing cattle to bloat blocks and minerals with ionophores when they are first brought in for preconditioning or to be straightened out on grass. An added benefit, he says, is that ionophores actually improve daily gains of cattle regardless of bloat. There is no improvement in animal performance from poloxalene blocks.

There is also a marked decrease in bloat when feeding corn oil. In laboratory experiments using liquid non-molasses products with a fat content as high as 10% (from corn oil), foam production and strength were markedly reduced. Pinchak doesn't have enough data to say how these products affect animal performance.

## **APPLY A SURFACTANT**

Some producers apply a surfactant such as soap to the herd's drinking water. The surfactant breaks down the tension of the suspension of the gas. This is only practical if you have a piped water tank-based system.

## **LIMIT GRAZING**

Limiting the intake of the potentially noxious forage, or feeding hay, works for cow/calf operations. However, it's not effective for stockers where the name of the game is rate of gain.

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