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For more information contact: Wendie Powell
Livestock Production Agent, Wildcat Extension District
wendiepowell@ksu.edu, (620) 784-5337

Ticks and Their Control on Livestock

Ticks transmit many microbial disease agents to livestock and companion animals. They can be debilitating and sometimes fatal to the host. All stages of ticks are exclusively parasitic. Ticks will take three bloodmeals throughout development from three different hosts. They have remarkably long lives with many surviving for a year or more without feeding.

The American dog tick is a major pest of people and domestic animals and is a carrier of Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Adults are most abundant in late spring and early summer.

The Rocky Mountain wood tick attacks livestock and wildlife. They are the primary carrier of Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Colorado tick fever virus.

The Lone star tick is one of the most notorious tick species across the US. All stages of the tick attack companion animals, livestock, wildlife, and humans. Deer are the primary hosts for adults. It takes two years to complete development from egg to reproductive adult. Much of this time is spent off the animal host, sheltered in leaf litter, mostly in shrubby areas.

The Gulf Coast tick attacks a wide range of birds and mammals, but the adults feed mostly on ruminants. Gulf Coast ticks feed mainly on the head and ears and can cause severe injury to the skin, rendering the hide useless from bites and secondary infections.

Spinose ear ticks frequently infest livestock, especially cattle and horses. While adults do not feed, the young feed in their hosts' ears causing injury to the auditory canal and secondary infections.

The Asian longhorn tick, newly discovered in the continental US, can lead to reduced production and even death by anemia due to their ability to reproduce without a male.

Historically, ticks and their diseases have been controlled by acaricides, but slowly, many ticks are becoming resistant to the commonly used pesticides. Vaccines have been shown to be effective in other countries but are not yet usable in the US. Early removal of attached ticks is important in minimizing the risk of contracting tick-borne diseases.

Prescribed burning, as a pasture management tool, provides another option, eliminating ticks of all stages not on the host by destroying their hiding spots. Ticks need cover to prevent drying out from heat. Prescribed burns are carried out to improve a number of rangeland conditions such as weed suppression and improve forage quality.

Early season tick counts measured April to June at the K-State Beef Stocker Unit have shown burns will significantly impact tick populations, particularly if the burn is carried out in the spring, before tick emergence after overwintering. This study also found that ticks do not travel far once detached from the host, so shrubby areas will lead to local pockets with higher tick densities.

Control these blood suckers with approved pesticides, always following label directions. Use sprays, ear tags, pour-ons, dust and backrubs responsibly, limiting resistance development.

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