KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension Wildcat District

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New World Screwworm, A Twisted Pest

Huge news in the animal science and biosecurity world! The New World Screwworm has crossed the border into the United States. The USDA has been monitoring this situation very closely and has been preparing for it for many months.

The New World Screwworm causes damage in the larval stage by infesting open wounds (even wounds as small as a tick bite) and mucosal membranes of living, warm-blooded animals. After feeding for 5 to 7 days on the host and inflicting pain on the host, the larvae will drop off the host into the soil to pupate. After at least seven days, the adult fly will emerge. The fly is quite distinctive, with orange eyes and a blue-teal metallic colored body. These flies hang out in shady, cool areas, such as under trees. They generally do not swarm around houses or barns. After mating, the female fly will lay 200-300 eggs in the next unsuspecting host.

There are a few pieces of good news about this gory pest: it is treatable, it won't over-winter in Kansas, and it's not a food safety concern. A number of insecticides are commercially available to stop the spread; however, any screwworm activity detected must be reported to the Kansas Department of Agriculture. As this situation has been monitored for years with the expectation that the United States would be infected, there are already strategies in place to protect our industries. Sterile male flies are being reared in facilities in preparation for being released to mate with wild females. These sterile males will outnumber the wild males, leading to females laying non-viable eggs. Additionally, areas that have confirmed cases are under strict transportation protocols, preventing animals that may be infected from moving to new areas. Since the larvae feed only on living tissue, we do not need to worry about the safety of our fresh meat supply.

The New World Screwworm is endemic in the tropical and semitropical regions of South America and the Caribbean, and has moved north through migration and animal movement. Due to the cold temperatures of our winters in Kansas, the fly will not overwinter here. Researchers know this because of the previous invasions we have dealt with in America. The population was completely eradicated in the United States in the 1960s through the release of sterile male flies.

While our livestock industry has evolved significantly in the past 50 years, and wildlife populations are very different, animal health officials are confident they can slow the progression of this problem. Producers are asked to report all screwworm activity found in live tissue to officials for verification that the problem is not New World Screwworm. Producers

should also maintain good animal husbandry practices by monitoring livestock and providing care for injuries.

For more information on livestock biosecurity practices, please contact Wendie Powell, Livestock Production Agent, (620) 378-2167, wendiepowell@ksu.edu.

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