

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Understanding Hardware Disease”

Cattle can be much like toddlers. You have to watch them closely to make sure they don't put non-food objects into their mouths to avoid a hazard. Much of that has to do with making sure those hazards aren't left out so they don't end up in mouths. That leads us to the issue of hardware disease. This happens when cattle put metal or sharp objects in their mouth, swallow it and then it gets into one of their stomach compartments where it can puncture a hole and move into other parts of the animal's body. Some of these items could include wires, nuts, bolts, and metal shavings from worn or broken equipment. Sometimes these objects can get in to our cattle feed sources like hay bales, or silage through the harvesting and ensiling process.

When the object moves out of the stomach it is carrying the bacteria that was in the digestive tract with it and that can lead to infections. Oftentimes the body develops abscesses to wall off the disease, but sometimes that wire can get into the sac surrounding the heart. Cattle with heart trouble will stand with their elbows out and show signs of labored breathing. Animals that show these symptoms need to be evaluated quickly by your veterinarian.

Hardware disease can be hard to detect, and animals who are classified as 'ain't doing right' (ADR) are often times suspect and evaluated for hardware first. The treatment options are limited. However, one way to try to keep the foreign objects from moving where they shouldn't go is to deposit a magnet down the cow's throat that will settle in the reticulum. The reason behind this is that the metal will stick to the magnet making it less likely to migrate. Obviously, the best thing to do is keep animals from eating these metal objects in the first place. One way to do this is to strategically place magnets in the mill or feeder wagon that will collect these metal objects before they end up in the feed bunk.

Information comes from K-State University Beef Cattle Institute veterinarians, Dr. Brian Lubbers, Dr. Brad White, and Dr. Bob Larson.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.