

Knock 'em Down- Controlling Fly Populations

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Summer months are around the corner and with the warm days comes flies, flies and more flies. Not only are high fly populations on farms an annoyance to workers, but they can also have negative impacts on cattle health and productivity.

Common flies found on dairies include house flies, face flies, stable flies and horn flies. All flies pass through four life stages (egg, larva, pupa and adult). The entire life cycle is approximately 30 days however under ideal conditions can be as short as 15 days. During this period females can lay up to 1000 eggs.

House flies have a specific mouthpart designed to feed on liquid secretions such as cow manure. They can easily carry pathogens such as Salmonella Dublin and transmit disease between animals.

Face flies are anatomically like house flies, however, target you guessed it the face of the cow commonly feeding on eye and nose secretions.

Stable flies and horn flies are biting flies feeding on blood meals. They cause significant discomfort for cattle and can lower milk production by 15-30% and contribute to various diseases such as mastitis.

Not only will cows re-direct energy from milk production to fight off high fly burdens, their eating and lying time is affected impacting overall health and productivity. Disease challenges such as infectious bovine keratoconjunctivitis (pink eye) can be transmitted from cow to cow by face flies. This is a painful eye condition that results in high production losses and increased culling.

Understanding which type of fly(s) you are dealing with is important in choosing strategies to manage fly populations. All flies prefer wet, warm organic matter to lay their eggs in. Stable flies and house flies are typically found in confined areas and face flies and horn flies are typically found on pasture.

Various control methods can be used to target different life stages of the fly and manage fly populations on your farm.

Cleaning and sanitation:

There is no shortage of breeding sites for flies on dairy farms. Flies reproduce in moist manure or other wet decaying organic matter. Focusing on the removal of manure through regular manure scraping and keeping stalls and pens dry will help reduce fly populations. Ensuring there is no silage seepage, decaying hay bales and/or manure piles directly surrounding your barns is important. Providing proper drainage in barnyards with the use of grading and gravel will help reduce areas of stagnant water.

Premise Treatments:

Fly Baits are designed to attract flies to specific areas where these are applied.

Residual sprays are applied to walls, ceilings, partitions, etc. Designed to be applied to areas in the barn in which flies commonly land on. Long term residual sprays are also available which provides longer lasting effects.

Fogging treatments are a great method for targeting heavy fly populations on farm. They act immediately reducing large numbers at once, however do not typically have lasting effects.

Sticky traps and/or fly traps can be an effective tool in addition to other control measures. Particularly in areas where other methods may not be appropriate.

Livestock Treatments:

Pour-on treatments are applied to the animal directly. Different treatments are available with various spectrums of activity and residual activity.

Ear Tags are typically more adopted for use in beef cattle particularly those on pasture. Applied in the spring prior to pasture turnout with efficacy lasting 4-5 months. Typically, not approved for use in lactating dairy cattle.

The individual success of each of these control measures may vary between farm to farm depending on fly pressures. With heavy infestations, more than one method may be required to be used at once to get an initial control of the population followed by repeat treatments or the selection of a method with residual activity to maintain low levels. Regardless of what method is chosen, it is important to remember that no method will be successful if efficient cleaning and sanitizing isn't carried out. The removal of organic matter will greatly reduce areas for egg laying which will help improve success of the fly control method utilized. Always select control measures approved for use in dairy facilities and for use on lactating animals. Be diligent in the handling of the products to protect your family and staff and to ensure there is no contamination of the bulk milk tank.