

News Column

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CATTLE HEAT STRESS

Last week was brutal!

If you've ever been in the livestock business, you know that a certain amount of death loss is inevitable. Yet, you never get used to it, and you never become immune to the feeling of helplessness when a weather event causes higher than normal death loss.

High daytime temperatures and high humidity, coupled with high nighttime temperatures, created conditions that led to cattle mortalities due to heat stress. High nighttime temperatures were a big factor contributing to the mortalities.

Cattle accumulate heat during the day and normally dissipate that heat overnight. As long as we have a cooling time overnight, cattle can mostly withstand the heat. Unfortunately, we didn't get that overnight cooling period last week.

Some of the things the experts recommend to help cattle deal with heat include always providing plenty of clean fresh water, providing some type of shade, and removing anything that might be blocking a breeze, like hay bales or weeds. Bedding with straw or corn stalks is an option that can lower the temperature of the surface on which the cattle are resting.

Sprinklers can also be run overnight to cool the pen floor. Wetting the cattle during the heat of the day is not recommended because that can increase the humidity and make conditions even worse.

Producers who lost livestock last week need to contact the Farm Service Agency to

inquire about disaster assistance through the Livestock Indemnity Program. The Livestock Indemnity Program was a part of the 2018 Farm Bill, the program under which we are still operating.

While the FSA Office will be the folks to tell you the specific details of the program, I can assure you that keeping good records and documenting losses will be important. A daily log of losses and photographs with a date stamp on them would be a good place to start. Having a veterinarian verify the cause of the loss may also be appropriate.

The fact sheet FSA has on their website says, “LIP payments for owners are based on national payment rates that are 75 percent of the market value of the applicable livestock as determined by the USDA’s Secretary of Agriculture.” It won’t cover the whole loss, but it will help.

If I’m reading the fact sheet correctly, it looks like the payment rate is the same for all cattle over 800 pounds. If that is correct, then the payment won’t even come close to being 75% of the actual value of a feedlot steer that is ready for market.

As you probably know, cattle closer to market are the most likely to be affected by heat stress. They are fatter and retain heat better than do thinner cattle. Retaining heat is a good thing in the winter, but a bad thing in the summer. So, those fat cattle that are market ready are the most likely to be stressed and die.

The Livestock Indemnity Program is something producers should keep in the back of their minds, even if they weren’t affected by this year’s heat event. Losses covered by the program could be due to other weather events, such as hail, lightning, a tornado, or a winter storm.

The LIP program can also cover losses due to a disease outbreak or a predator attack (if

the predator is one that has been reintroduced by the federal government). The disease list includes cyanobacteria, so you might want to keep that in mind too. Cyanobacteria is what we often call blue-green algae, a problem we sometimes have in ponds during the heat of summer.

If you think you have an eligible loss, contact the FSA Office. They are the folks who can help you through the claims process.

If you have other questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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