

Fact sheet

Turning off cattle to pasture following extended supplementary feeding



This fact sheet provides best practice information for cattle producers when turning off cattle to pasture after long periods of drought and supplementary feeding.

In this situation, producers need to consider the increased risk of tick fever and tick infestation, buffalo fly, three-day sickness, internal parasite burdens in weaners and clostridial infection. Producers should also be alerted to toxic plants and nutrient deficiency in waterlogged pasture.

Cattle should also be introduced to pasture slowly to allow the rumen to adjust and for animals to avoid developing scours.

Herd health and welfare

Tick fever and biting insects

Cattle with tick fever (*Babesiosis*, *Anaplasmosis* and *Theileriosis*) and tick infestation (*Boophilus microplus*) tend to have a lack of appetite and depression (which presents itself as listlessness and slow movement). Anaemia later develops with signs of weakness and dehydration and can lead to death if not identified early.

If caught early, cattle already with tick fever or tick infestation are easily treatable with veterinary medicines. As a preventative measure, cattle should be given an insecticide or the Tick Fever Vaccine. Acaricide resistance is an ongoing challenge so awareness of the efficacy of the available products is vital to ensure maximum effectiveness of the treatment.

Buffalo fly

The buffalo fly (*Haematobia irritans exigua*) is a blood feeding ectoparasite that, when present in great numbers, results in similar symptoms to tick fever. The reproduction of buffalo fly is greatest in hot, humid weather. An integrated buffalo fly control program using non-chemical control methods, in conjunction with strategic chemical treatment, is recommended to combat resistance to chemicals and minimise chemical residue risks.

More information

MLA's Recommendations for integrated buffalo fly control publication: mla.com.au/buffalo-fly

Three-day sickness

Ephemeral fever or three-day sickness causes a short period of fever and affects growth and reproductive performance. Affected cattle are likely to reduce feed intake and have muscular stiffness which reduces growth performance and milk production. Cows are also prone to abortion and bull semen quality and fertility is impacted for up to eight weeks post infection.

Once recovered, animals are immune, however there is a vaccination protocol available to minimise impacts of the virus.

More information

MLA's three-day sickness webpage: mla.com.au/three-day-sickness

Queensland Government's bovine ephemeral fever webpage: business.qld.gov.au and search 'bovine ephemeral'

Clostridial infection

Clostridial organisms are found in the soil and can survive for long periods until conditions are favourable. Wounds (for example from dehorning), lush pastures, changes to diet and phosphorus deficiency are some of the risk factors for clostridial infection. Unvaccinated animals are at the highest risk of infection. Prevention of clostridial infection is through vaccination (5-in-1 vaccine) and good animal husbandry and grazing practices such as P supplementation to prevent pica and botulism.

More information

More Beef from Pastures 'Herd health and welfare' module provides information on vaccination strategies: mbfp.mla.com.au/herd-health-welfare

Developed with



Gastrointestinal worms

Moist conditions following rainfall (and floods) promotes the hatching of worm eggs and survival of larvae on pasture. Signs of gastrointestinal worm infestation in cattle include scours, pale gums and membranes around the eyes and weight loss. Adult stock should have sufficient immunity to be able to cope with a moderate level of infestation. Young stock, however, are likely to show signs of disease and loss of production. Grazing management is very important, ensuring young stock are held in pastures with the lowest contamination. If restocking, quarantining new stock to reduce the risk of introducing resistant worms onto the property is essential.

MLA's Cattle Parasite Atlas can assist with identifying parasites for each climatic and geographic region of Australia and provides a program of treatment and best practice for parasite control.

Producers should consult their veterinarian to formally identify the parasites present in their herd.

More information

MLA's Gastrointestinal worms best practice information: mla.com.au/gastrointestinal-worms

MLA's Cattle Parasite Atlas: mla.com.au/cattle-parasite-atlas

Nutrition

Toxic plants

The toxicity of plants can change depending on prevailing seasonal conditions. Drought conditions and heavy predation by pests can cause toxins in a plant to concentrate.

Accelerated growth following rainfall increases the abundance of the plants which can become a concern for hungry livestock that may consume large quantities of the plants. It is also a risk for new stock who have not been exposed to certain types of plants and therefore have no tolerance to the toxins present.

Perennial ryegrass toxicosis can occur following heavy rainfall after periods of dry conditions. MLA's Perennial ryegrass toxicosis Tips & Tools (see below) provides more information on the causes, preventative risk management plans, reducing and eliminating perennial ryegrass toxicosis and the management of affected stock.

More information

More Beef from Pastures 'Herd health and welfare' module also provides a list of publications available on toxic plants and weeds: mbfp.mla.com.au/herd-health-welfare-toxic

MLA's Perennial ryegrass toxicosis Tips & Tools: mla.com.au/perennial-ryegrass-toxicosis

Nutrient deficiency

Cattle need nutrients for their growth and development and they obtain most of their requirements from pasture. Waterlogged pasture can be nutrient deficient which can affect cattle performance.

Phosphorus is naturally deficient in northern Australia under normal climatic conditions. Supplementation may be necessary to ensure good liveweight gains and reduced mortality. The required daily intake of lick to ensure sufficient P intake is shown in Table 1. However, this can be challenging during wet weather.

Table 1: Amount of daily lick intake

Target intakes of P (g/head/day)	%P in lick	Required intake of lick (g/head/day)
Deficient areas		
6	2	300
6	5	120
6	10	60
6	15	43
Acutely deficient areas		
10	5	200
10	10	100
10	15	66

Refer to MLA's *Phosphorous management of beef cattle in northern Australia* publication (see below) for more information on the approximate amounts of supplementary P required to achieve target weight gain.

Producers should also be aware that cattle experiencing a dramatic change in diet (from hay and/or grain onto fresh pasture) can scour due to a change in energy, protein and fibre composition of the diet. Ideally cattle should have access to hay or straw free choice for the first week (at least) after being put onto young and fresh pastures to prevent scouring and slow the rate of flow through the rumen. It takes 3-4 weeks for fibre digesting microbes in the rumen to become adapted to a new forage source.

More information

MLA's *Phosphorous management of beef cattle in northern Australia* publication provides for more information on the approximate amounts of supplementary P required to achieve target weight gain: futurebeef.com.au and search 'Producer phosphorus manual'