

Pinkeye in Cattle, Sheep and Goats

The Pinkeye season is now with us. Last summer was a particularly bad year for this condition, which can be a debilitating and significant cause of losses on many properties in the district. This year may be just as bad.

Clinical Signs

The disease is acute and can spread rapidly. Young stock are more commonly affected, although in sheep and goats, adult animals show more signs.

In cattle, a small ulcer commences at the centre of the eye. The ulcer then becomes surrounded by cloudiness leading to complete opacity of the eye. The eye can then enlarge in size, with a prominent pink or red point. Excessive tearing leads to a stained face in affected animals. In extreme cases the eye will rupture. Affected animals go off feed and lose condition. Milking animals can go dry if severely affected.

In sheep and goats, the eye becomes cloudy, showing a blue haze, but in severe cases can appear angry and red. Rupture rarely occurs.

In resolved cases the eye can remain scarred or have a constant blue haze. Ruptured eyes will be blind.



This photo was taken at Nico Botha's property at Britstown by Ted Scarlet (NSW Agriculture) on his recent visit to South Africa. Look at how well the herd is doing grazing on this type of pasture.

Aetiology

The disease is caused by the bacteria **Moraxella bovis** in cattle, but viruses are thought to play a role. In sheep and goats a combination of bacteria and possibly viruses cause the disease.

Carrier animals exist in any herd or flock, which act as a reservoir for the next season's outbreak.

Conditions which predispose to an outbreak include:

- Dry, dusty conditions

- Tall grasses, especially if they have gone to head.
- Grass seeds can exacerbate an outbreak
- Bright sunlight
- Flies

Treatment

Animals should be treated early for best success. If animals need to be yarded, the yards should be hosed down to prevent dusty conditions. Three types of treatment are available.

1. **Pinkeye powders and sprays** – these need to be applied regularly (up to 3 times daily) for best effect (eg. Terramycin Pinkeye Aerosol).
2. **Eye ointments** - in early cases one treatment will cure most cases. Treatments can be repeated after 48 hours. Orbenin Eye ointment can be used in this way but must be used under Veterinary supervision. Ointments are much more effective than powders or sprays.

If powders, sprays or ointments are used, the eye should be examined initially for the presence of foreign bodies such as grass seeds. Treatments will not work if these remain in the eye. Eye patches or removing the animals from sunlight will help recovery.

3. **Veterinary treatment** – in severe cases veterinary attention should be sought to save the eye.

Control

1. Yard animals only when necessary. Hose down yards before bringing animals in.
2. Isolate affected animals from the main group.
3. Maintain surveillance of the animal group; to detect early cases.
4. Fly control may limit spread of the disease.
5. Animals with pigmented eyes appear to have fewer problems. Genetic selection may play a role.
6. Vaccine may be available in the future as a control measure.

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