

## OSU EXTENSION NEWS

## Cattle eye health and snake tips

Any cattleman who hasn't had a serious episode of eye problems in his cattle can put it on the list of things to look forward to. Pinkeye is currently being reported all over Pittsburg County. Pinkeye can affect any aged cattle, but is a much greater problem in young cattle, because they haven't yet had the opportunity to develop immune system resistance to it. Although cases can occur any time of year, it is more prevalent in the summer because that is the time of greatest irritation and the time for the presence of vectors. Although pinkeye is never fatal, it results in very significant economic losses due to costs of treatment, poor performance, and in some cases decreased value of blind calves.

The infection is primarily due to the bacteria *Moraxella bovis*, but other bacteria can also be involved. Physical irritation is important as it

sets up an environment in the eye for the organism to thrive. Sources of irritation include UV light, dust, plant or hay materials, and flies. Flies are a two edged sword because they not only contribute to the irritation of the eye, but also serve as vectors to carry the infection from one animal to another.

The course of the problem is fairly rapid. Within two or three days from the onset, an opaque area is noticed on the surface of the eye and the tissues around the eye become reddened and swollen. The eye weeps or tears excessively and one or both eyes may be involved. If untreated, the condition can last for four to eight weeks. Eventually resolution comes in one of three forms. Most animals will eventually heal with no permanent damage, but after severe economic loss. Some animals will heal, but with varying degrees of white scarring on the cornea. In some cases the cornea ruptures, resulting



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in a cone shaped bulging of the eye structure and permanent blindness.

Treatment is usually effective and dramatic. A subcutaneous injection of long lasting oxytetracycline at the labeled dose, repeated in 48 to 72 hours will clear the infection and eliminate the carrier stage, thus reducing the spread to other animals. A good mineral program that includes tetracycline is also an important part of pinkeye prevention.

There is no silver bullet for pinkeye. No single management practice

will eliminate the concern. Instead, control depends on understanding the several factors involved, such as bacteria, vectors, irritants and immunity.

**SNAKES!**

Southeastern Oklahoma abounds with flowers, lush green lawns, vegetable gardens...and snakes. This area is home to many types of harmless, even helpful snakes. We also have our share of the venomous varieties: copperheads, cottonmouths (water moccasins), and rattlesnakes. As we tend our gardens and lawns, we need to remind ourselves to be on the lookout for snakes. Let's go over some quick tips to avoid snakebites.

**Tips to avoid snakebites:**

- Wear boots or high-top leather shoes when working in the garden, yard or woods.
- Wear leather or heavy canvas gloves when weeding, moving firewood or similar chores.
- Do not reach your hands into an

area that you cannot see.

- Be aware of potential hiding places when hiking, camping, gardening or working in the yard.
- If you see a snake, just leave it alone! Often snakebites occur because someone tried to kill a snake, or pestered it to see what it would do.
- Don't handle recently killed snakes. Bites have occurred due to reflexes that were still present in the snake.

Remember, even the bite of a non-venomous snake can cause a severe infection or an allergic reaction. If a snake bite does occur seek medical assistance immediately.

Contrary to the popular statement "The only good snake is a dead snake," they do help maintain the balance of nature. Without snakes we would soon be overrun with rodents. Still, don't let a chance encounter ruin your enjoyment of the great outdoors.