

OSU NEWS

Working cattle in summertime heat

Understanding and avoiding heat stress in cattle can be a valuable management tool for summertime in Oklahoma.

According to the latest Oklahoma Climatological Survey most areas of Oklahoma have 10 or more days each year above 100 degrees and 70 or more days with high temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. This means that most cow/calf operations will be working cattle on days when heat stress to cattle is possible. Cattle have an upper critical temperature approximately 20 degrees cooler than humans. When humans are uncomfortable at 80 degrees and feel hot at 90 degrees, cattle may well be in the danger zone for extreme heat stress. Humidity is an additional stressor that intensifies the heat by making body heat dissipation more difficult.

The signs of overheating

may develop suddenly and depend upon the environmental conditions and the health of the cattle exposed to the heat. Panting often occurs in overheated cattle along with other visible signs such as restlessness, excitement and spasms of certain muscles. A protruding tongue may be covered with saliva, and frothy mucus discharged at the nostrils.

Overheating in cattle can be prevented under most management conditions. If management practices calls for cattle to be gathered and put through a working chute for immunizations, implanting or other operations, then a few common sense rules should be followed.

1) During hot weather, cattle should be worked before 8:00 am, if possible. Certainly all cattle working must be complete by about 10:00am.

2) Cattle that must be handled during hot weather



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should spend less than 30 minutes in the working facility.

3) Make every effort to see that cool, fresh water is available to cattle in close confined areas for any length of time. During hot weather conditions cattle will drink more than 1% of their body weight per hour.

4) Shade and free air circulation should be provided if at all possible.

For more information on heat management for cattle, contact your local OSU Extension Office