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Kansas Farm Bureau....Insight

Greg Doering, Kansas Farm Bureau

Out to pasture

The middle of May was usually the quietest time on the ranch when I was growing up. With the cattle just turned out to pasture and hay season still weeks away, the tasks didn't seem to carry much urgency. There's never a shortage of things to be done, but priorities change when cows aren't calving or waiting for their breakfast to be delivered.

It was a season defined by upkeep rather than urgency. We'd spend time fixing fence, patching weak spots in the corral or painting. We'd make a dent in the backlog of maintenance items, but I'm convinced fencing wears out faster than it can be fixed and paint seems to start fading while it's still in the can.

Occasional and odd chores also occupied our time during this quiet season, and a couple stand out most notably because they were worse than fixing fence. One year we brushed on several five-gallon buckets worth of sealer for the asphalt driveway. Another year we spent two days hoisting buckets of silt out of the spring that delivered water to the house.

Maintenance tasks during this clam period also extended to pastures. We'd haul rock to create crossings in ditches, clean debris around outflow pipes in ponds and hunt for things that didn't belong like cedar trees and musk thistles, which are considered nuisances or invasive plants because cattle won't eat them and they grow faster than the native grasses, disrupting the natural habitat.

Small cedars are difficult to spot this time of year as the blend in with the tender shoots of prairie grasses, but

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they're not impossible. Whenever I took the four-wheeler out through a pasture, I always carried a pair of long-handled clippers. They made easy work of the small cedars.

The thistles were far easier to spot as the stems bolted several feet above the short spring growth. They also helpfully announced their presence with a bright purple bloom, which was easy on the eyes and full of risk. Each flower could produce hundreds of seeds capable of surviving a decade or longer in the soil.

Thinning thistles was considerably more work than chopping cedars. The first order of business was donning leather gloves to guard against the spiny leaves, then with hand shears I'd clip the blossoms off into an empty feed sack. Then out came the spade, which was used to slice through the taproot. The goal was to get at least two inches below ground level, but the rocky terrain where the weeds readily sprouted didn't always allow for that.

One benefit of being out in the pasture alongside the cattle, aside from preserving the prairie, was stumbling on a patch of wild strawberries just as they were ripening. Finding a cluster of the plants bearing small red orbs made the work more worthwhile.

It's been a long time since I've gone hunting for a wild strawberry patch, but I can still taste the sweetness of those berries and appreciate the slower pace that came when the cattle were out to pasture. The slower, quieter place allowed everything room to breath just a little easier.

Answers from Post Rock Extension

By Blaire Todd, K-State Research and Extension-Post Rock District,
Livestock Production Agent

Prepare Today to Combat Lameness this Grazing Season

Dry conditions that the central and southern plains have been experiencing may lead to increased foot issues. Several issues could be the culprit of cattle lameness, and we will review some of the common causes, including the key differences between clinical signs. It is a good idea to contact your local veterinarian to create a treatment plan for these conditions prior to the grazing season. Footrot is a common disease process that occurs in pastured as well as confined cattle. Footrot is a bacterial infection beneath the skin of the foot that causes obvious lameness even early in the disease process. Upon closer inspection, producers will notice a crack in the skin between the hooves and a foul, pungent odor. Swelling usually starts below the dewclaws on the back of the hoof. As the clinical signs progress, the symmetric swelling will move up the leg and even, in some cases, separate the toes. It is always important to closely inspect symmetric swelling cases. Wire, bale wrap, or other foreign bodies can wrap around and entrap the lower foot, causing very similar symptoms to footrot. If the swelling has a well-demarcated line horizontally across the foot, further investigation is warranted. The entrapping foreign body must be removed. The bacteria that cause footrot are normally found in the environment and in the digestive tract of cattle. These pathogens simply need a breakdown or opening in the skin barrier to invade. Producers often think about footrot when the environment is extremely wet. However, chapping and cracked skin between the hooves of cattle often occur during continuously dry conditions. This dry scenario can be true of the upper Great Plains during the cold winter months or drought-filled summers in the South. Other environmental factors affecting the skin integrity can be short abrasive stubble, thorns, rocky or rough ground surface, or even standing in ponds for a long period of time. Thankfully, there are several approved injectable antibiotics available, and treatment is typically very rewarding when treated in the early stages of the disease. With delayed or late treatment of cases, however, deeper structures of the foot (tendons, joints, and even bone) may become involved. Delayed treatment often requires extended therapy and leads to increased cull rates from the herd. It is important to work with your veterinarian to have a chosen treatment plan as well as follow up. Typical footrot cases begin to show improvement or even resolution within 3 or so days. If improvement hasn't occurred, either a deeper infection has occurred, or another cause could be the culprit.

Single-sided or asymmetric swelling of the foot often indicates a more serious condition in cattle. This type of clinical sign is often the result of deep struc-

tural issues. Puncture wounds, sole abscesses, stone bruises, or chronic infections can cause joint, bone, or tendon infections. Single or multiple joint swelling with lameness can also be observed. In calves, this is often the result of septic arthritis. This is a bacterial infection of the joints. It is not uncommon to see this condition a week to 10 days following a bout of respiratory disease with some pathogens as well. Even with appropriate treatment, the inflammation in the joint often takes several weeks to resorb back into the body. Joint swelling in mature animals can also occur. Many times, this is a result of an orthopedic breakdown. Torn cruciate ligaments in the stifles of breeding bulls, or hock damage from riding activity, are examples of these conditions.

Obvious lameness to one or more limbs with no noticeable swelling can often be challenging to diagnose appropriately. One of these conditions is called Hairy Heel Warts, also known as Digital Dermatitis, or Strawberry Footrot. These animals often display obvious lameness and will attempt to walk on the "tippy toe" of the foot. Upon closer observation, you will notice wart-like growths or bright red scab lesions below the dewclaws and above the heel bulbs of the foot. Topical treatment with an astringent or antibacterial solution is warranted for this condition. The last condition we see more commonly in newly arrived stocker calves is called toe tip necrosis (toe abscesses). These animals often appear with shifting lameness of the back legs. They will usually stand in strange orientations to protect and relieve pressure on the damaged toe. Treatment of these consists of picking up the feet and using hoof testers to confirm the condition. Then the toes are slightly opened with hoof nippers to release the pressure, followed by an injectable antimicrobial treatment. Without opening the toes, healing will not occur. Lameness can be challenging to diagnose in field situations, but understanding the subtle differences will help with proper and timely treatment. Visit with your veterinarian about any non-responsive lameness issues. Further diagnostics and treatment may be indicated.

Thanks to K-State Beef Veterinarian, A.J. Tarpoff, for information on causes of lameness for this grazing season. For further information, contact me at any Post Rock Extension District Offices in Beloit, Lincoln, Mankato, Osborne, or Smith Center.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Blaire may be contacted at blairet@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit 738-3597, Smith Center, 282-6823, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, or Osborne 346-2521. Join us on Facebook at "Post Rock Extension" and remember our website is www.postrock.k-state.edu.

Midway District Wheat Plot Tours

Midway Extension District will be hosting wheat variety plot tours on Wednesday, May 21st; the Lorraine plot tour starts at 11:30 am, and the plot is located SW of Lorraine on Ave W between 7 & 8th rd; a light tailgate lunch will be available after the tour. The Russell plot tour starts at 5:30 pm and is located east of the high school football field along N Copeland Street, with a light tailgate meal after the tour.

Topics covered during the plot tours include 2024 growing conditions, wheat variety selection, new varieties, and wheat disease updates emphasizing the wheat streak mosaic virus; why was it so prevalent this year? Speakers coming will be Romulo Lollato, K-State Research and Extension wheat specialist; Kelsey Anderson Onofre, K-State Research and Extension wheat plant pathologist; Allan Fritz, K-State Wheat Breeder, and Craig Dinkel Midway District crop production agent. RSVPs appreciated for meal count; contact Craig Dinkel, Midway Extension District crop production agent call at our offices in Ellsworth at 785-472-4442, Russell at 785-483-3157, or email cadinkel@ksu.edu

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