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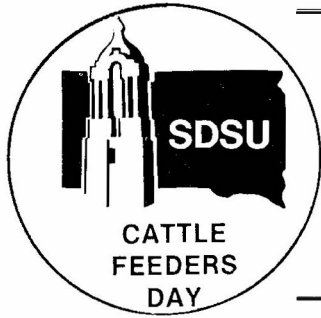
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SCABIES: RE-EMERGING AS A MAJOR CATTLE HEALTH PROBLEM

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Scabies is a contagious skin disease of cattle caused by tiny parasitic mites that pierce the animal's skin to feed. Discharge from the mite wound oozes onto the surface of the skin to form scabs or crusts.

Cattle with scabies lick, rub, and scratch themselves to relieve intense itching. They lose weight and condition and may be more susceptible to complications such as pneumonia due to lowered vitality.

Scabies was a major problem in the early days of open range grazing of cattle. A vigorous State-Federal program to eradicate the disease brought the condition under control. In 1968, only four cases were reported in the entire United States. During 1978, over 200 cases were diagnosed and premises were quarantined.

During the winter of 1977-78, South Dakota quarantined fourteen infected herds and subsequently dipped them twice to release the quarantine.

So far this year, the number of cases in South Dakota is more than double that of the same date last year causing concern about the future impact of the problem.

Spread of Cattle Scabies

Direct contact is the most common means of spreading scabies from one animal to another. Scabies-causing mites are also transmitted by infested pens, barns, blankets, brushes, and similar equipment. Often they are unintentionally spread when affected animals are sold or exchanged.

Ordinarily, scabies does not spread from one species of animal to another species. For example, cattle scabies does not spread to sheep.

Cattle do not develop an immunity to scabies. Most animals--whether or not they have already had scabies--readily develop the disease when exposed to scabies mites.

Signs of Scabies

A "scabby" appearance is the best known sign of scabies. Typical lesions are hard, thick, and gray in color. In advanced cases, scabs may cover large areas of the animal's body.

It is difficult to detect the disease in its early stages before the mites are well established. Affected cattle may seem restless; their hair may be disturbed from increased licking and rubbing. These may be the only signs of scabies until the scabs form.

Affected animals lose hair from scabby areas, and the skin thickens and hardens. Milk production drops. Severely affected cattle stop eating and lose weight or gain less; if not treated, they may die.

How Scabies Develop

Scabies may occur at any time of the year. Because the mites are most active in fall and winter, scabies is sometimes mistaken for a cold weather disease.

In summer, when the mites are less active, scabs often disappear. Scabby cattle may appear "cured." The improvement, however, is only temporary. If the disease is not detected and treated during the summer, scabs will come back with the return of cold weather.

Scabs normally begin to form 15 to 45 days after the mites get on the host animal. If the mites are not killed, they may spread and form scabs over the entire body of the animal.

Observing Cattle for Scabies

Make a practice of observing cattle regularly for signs of scabies. Select a location where you can watch the animals without disturbing them.

If you notice restlessness, scratching, rubbing, lesions, or other signs of scabies, examine animals individually. Isolate cattle that have scabies. Consult your veterinarian or a State or Federal disease-control official promptly for expert inspection, diagnosis, and advice.

Watch for constant tail switching, licking, rubbing against objects, scratching, scabby sores, and hair patches on fences.

If Scabies Mites Are Found:

1. Your premises will be quarantined.
2. All infested and exposed cattle must be dipped in USDA-permitted pesticide under supervision. In South Dakota, only Toxaphene is recognized by the Livestock Sanitary Board.
3. Infested cattle must be dipped twice at 14-day intervals before interstate shipments are allowed.
4. Exposed cattle can move interstate for any purpose after proper treatment. Authorized inspectors who certify animals can advise owners about such interstate shipments.
5. All grounds, barns, corrals, and other areas used by affected cattle must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Spray all exposed surfaces of buildings with a recommended dip or disinfectant.