

FEEDLOT HEAT STRESS CHECKLIST

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This NebGuide presents recommendations designed to help feedlots manage cattle during times of heat stress.

CATTLE DO NOT HANDLE HEAT STRESS AS WELL AS HUMANS:

The thermocomfort zone varies greatly for beef cattle. Young animals have a narrow comfort zone between 45 and 80 F°. The comfort zone of feedlot cattle and mature cows will range from subzero temperatures in the winter to around 75 F° in the summer, depending on body condition, hair coat length and plane of nutrition. This wide comfort zone allows cattle to thrive under diverse climatic conditions with little or no need for shelter or protection. However, unlike humans, which can be reasonably comfortable when exposed to normal summer temperatures, feedlot cattle have difficulty coping with temperatures above 90 F°. This is particularly true when humidity is high or windspeed is low, especially when cattle have had little or no chance to adapt to excessive heat loads.

EVALUATE THE POTENTIAL FOR A HEAT STRESS EMERGENCY TO DEVELOP:

Managing heat stress in cattle starts by evaluating the potential for a heat stress emergency to develop at your operation. To the extent possible, anticipate the crisis so you can get maximum benefit from your plan. Evaluate the previous history of heat stress events or the potential for a heat stress event to occur at your location.

Key elements to be included in your evaluation are:

1. The normal annual rainfall in your area. High rainfall areas are more susceptible to having high humidity.
2. Precipitation above normal, particularly if wet weather continues into the summer months.
3. Long-term weather forecast of hotter than normal conditions, which should signal early activation of a heat stress management plan.
4. Obstruction to airflow in cattle pens. Wind breaks and other airflow obstructions will create calm airflow up to 10 feet downwind for every one foot in height. A windbreak 10 feet high will obstruct airflow 100 feet downwind.
5. Availability of water for watering cattle, and wetting down cattle or pen, so animals on average can easily consume one to two gallons of water per hour, under normal environmental conditions. Watering space and water flow to watering troughs should also be evaluated to ensure cattle are protected from dehydration.

DEVELOPING A HEAT STRESS MANAGEMENT PLAN.

Below are listed some ideas for your plan. The first items listed are more easily accomplished and may significantly improve the performance of cattle during times of heat stress. They should always be done when the possibility exists of heat stress reaching the upper critical limits of cattle.

Have ample water available.

At temperatures above 80 degrees, cattle may need in excess of two gallons of water per hour per 100 pounds of body weight. Consuming water is the quickest and most efficient method to reduce

body temperature. Water prevents dehydration and allows heat to be dissipated through evaporative cooling (sweating) and urination. Put out extra watering tanks if needed; this should be done in advance of anticipated need so animals become used to multiple water sources. Providing up to three inches of linear space per animal can be lifesaving in feedyards and ensure that all cattle can get water when needed. Having ample linear space for cattle to drink and stay cool also can be important in maintaining cattle. Add additional water tank space, so that cattle have access to at least five gallons per hour. Keeping waterers clean should encourage water consumption. Weekly scheduled waterer cleaning also improves the likelihood of finding any malfunctioning waterer.

Avoid handling cattle if possible.

Processing cattle can elevate body temperature one-half to three and one-half degrees F, depending on cattle temperature and processing time. During heat stress periods, if cattle must be handled, work them in the early morning (prior to 8 am and absolutely not after 10 am) and in a shaded facility if possible. While it may seem to make sense to work cattle after sun down, wait until the cattle have had at least six hour of night cooling before working. Dissipation of body heat is needed at night and allows cattle to deal more effectively with heat stress during the day. Work with the packers to schedule shipping cattle at night or at least early morning. Try to start loading early enough so that all cattle can arrive before 7 am. Most packers have sprinklers and can keep the cattle comfortable. If cattle arrive with body temperature elevated above what would normally be expected carcass defects such as dark cutters may be more common.

Cattle that must be handled during hot days should spend no more than 30 minutes in the handling facility (processing or hospital area), i.e. only put 30 minutes worth of cattle in the tub, snake, etc. Avoiding cattle bunching is equally important. Most cattle working facilities have very poor wind movement causing cattle to gain body heat while they are in these areas. A 30-minute time limit minimizes the heat gain and allows the body core temperature to return to normal quicker, so the feedlot animal can deal successfully with heat stress. Arrange to have shade and sprinklers in those areas. Tubing (one-half to three-fourth inch) equipped with spray nozzles (one nozzle per five animals) placed overhead will improve the cooling in handling and holding areas.

Change your feeding patterns and consider backing off the energy.

Shifting the feeding schedule toward evening deliveries may help hold cattle on feed and even out the consumption patterns. Delivering 70 percent or more of the daily scheduled feed two to four hours after the peak ambient temperature of the day has been reached may decrease the roller coaster intake patterns often observed. Moving to a late day feeding schedule may also minimize the sub-clinical acidosis that is thought to contribute to the problems seen in time of heat stress. Lowering the energy level has been controversial but research indicates that lowering the energy content of the diet or using a storm ration may lower the heat load on the cattle.

The following items may be more difficult to accomplish, requiring more intense prior planning, labor and materials to implement. The key is to know where your potential problem areas are and focus your efforts on critical areas first.

Assess water supply and delivery capacity. Under heat stress conditions, the system needs to deliver a minimum of 1.1% of body weight per hour; for a 1000 lb animal, this means 11 lb/hr, or about 1 1/3 gal/hr. Ideally, a water system should be capable of delivering within a 4-hour period, the amount of water required for an entire day's needs. This can be calculated from line diameter and line pressure. These calculations should always be performed before installing new watering systems. Check flow rates on automatic water tanks in existing facilities. The gallons per minute a waterer can deliver can be estimated by using a rubber tube to divert from the waterer-input orifice

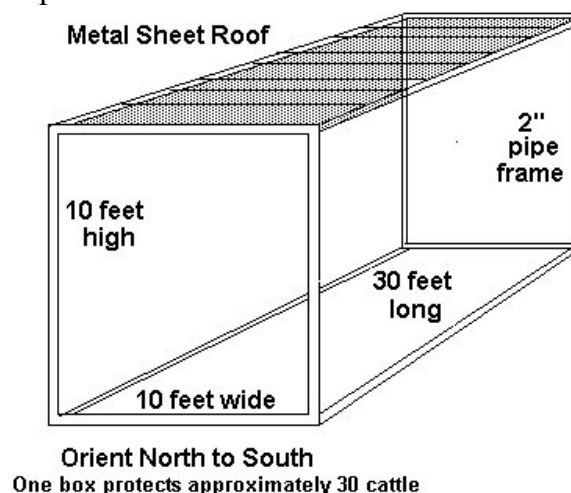
(controlled by the float) into a bucket. Divert the water for 30 seconds and estimate the gallons that would have been delivered per minute. If deficiencies are identified in total supply or delivery at peak demand periods, additional supply and/or waterers must be added when temperatures are in the critical range. Alternatively, the cattle can be spread out to more pens so that the existing water supply can better serve critical needs.

Make arrangements for emergency water. Contact the local fire department or cooperative to access equipment that can deliver emergency water. Make sure livestock drinking water is safe and palatable. Large volume sprinklers can be installed if water supply is adequate. Sprinklers can effectively keep cattle below their upper critical temperature by increasing evaporative cooling and lowering ground temperature. Coverage of ten to fifteen square feet per head should be adequate. Remember, water requirements can easily double when wetting pens and sprinkling cattle. Plan accordingly.

Move cattle away from wind breaks. Windbreaks can be beneficial in the winter, but a detriment in the summer. Identify feedlot areas having limited air movement. If possible, consider abandoning these pens during critical heat stress. At least avoid feeding cattle in these pens that are projected to finish in summer or early fall.

Improve airflow in pens. Identify heavy, finished cattle and newly arrived high-risk cattle in the feedlot and give these pens special attention in regard to airflow. Cut tall vegetation 150 feet back from the perimeter of the pens. If possible, you may consider moving these cattle to shaded pens or pens with better wind flow. Consider building earth mounds in feedlot pens. Mounds help prevent cattle from bunching and will usually enhance cattle exposure to air movement.

Provide shade. Shade reduces exposure to solar radiation, thereby reducing heat load on the animal; they do not affect air temperature. Major design considerations for shade structures are: orientation, space, height and roof construction. The most effective orientation is east-west to keep ground under shade cool; however, a north-south orientation will minimize mud build-up under the shade. With east-west orientation, a higher percentage of shadow lies under the shade structure than when a north-south orientation is used. The shade structure should provide approximately 20-40 sq. ft. of floor space per



feedlot animal recognizing that few production benefits will be realized if animals are overcrowded. For emergency situations to reduce mortality risks, 15-25 ft²/head can be beneficial. Shade height should be in the range of 7 to 14 ft. keeping in mind that the higher the shade, the greater the air movement under the shade. To enhance natural ventilation in shade structures, the selected site should have minimal trees, other buildings, or obstructions within at least 50 feet of all sides. Various types of roofing materials can be used for shade structures. The most effective in terms of reducing heat load is a reflective roof such as white-painted galvanized or aluminum metal. Slats, plastic or other shade materials with less than total shading capabilities are less effective. Shade structures need to be designed to handle winter snow loads to minimize maintenance and upkeep. Although solely on the basis of performance, the benefits of shade seldom justify and wind potential mortality losses suggest consideration as a form of insurance with any performance benefits as a bonus.

Control biting flies. Stable flies cause cattle to bunch and disrupt animal cooling. Removing weeds and brush within 150 feet of pens and spraying the shaded areas of building with a residual insecticide will help control stable flies. Minimizing shallow pools of water or muddy areas around the feedlot will aid in eliminating breeding areas for flies.

LOOK FOR THE CLUES TO AN IMPENDING HEAT STRESS CRISIS:

First Clue: Predicted hot weather following precipitation. It is the combined temperature and humidity that determines the severity of heat stress. Days in the high 80's or 90's (F°) following a precipitation event can be extremely stressful, especially if the wind speed is below 5 miles per hour for extended periods of the day.

Second Clue: Monitor the upper critical temperature-humidity limits of cattle. Consider this limit has been reached when the Temperature-Humidity Index reaches 80 (see the THI chart included).

Third Clue: Evening weather forecast for overnight temperatures to remain above 73 F°. A potential heat stress crisis situation exists for cattle when there is little or no night cooling. Watch for days following nights in which the ambient temperatures do not drop below 70 F°. Feedlot losses have been commonly reported when 3 or more consecutive days with Temperature-Humidity Index values above 80 have been tied together with nights in which the temperature stayed above 70 F°.

Fourth Clue: Observing cattle will tell you when they are becoming uncomfortable from heat. The cattle will start to move ... walk around the pen looking for an area of the pen that is more comfortable. They will start to slobber and their respiratory rate will increase above 75 breaths per minute. They will begin to elevate their head to make it easier to breathe. They will position their body to minimize their exposure to the sun, generally facing the sun.

Activate emergency plans when temperatures combined with humidity are forecast to be in the critical range for livestock. During a heat wave, the first calm wind day can be lethal to cattle. If your resources are limited, focus on managing heat stress for those cattle that may be most susceptible to heat stress. These include cattle with dark hides, cattle close to being finished, newly arrived high stress cattle, and cattle suffering from illness or recovering from illness.

REMEMBER HUMANS SAFETY:

Maintaining feedlot personnel health during a heat crisis is critical. Without optimum output from personnel, the checklist items can't be accomplished. These recommendations are for personnel doing reasonably strenuous outdoor work when temperatures are in the critical range.

Minimize strenuous work during hotter times of the day or at least alternate between hard and light work. If personnel must do hard work, take a break each hour by spending 10-20 minutes of each hour doing less strenuous work, preferably in the shade.

Force water consumption. Drink one to two quarts of water per hour.

A buddy system should be used to make sure adequate water is consumed, workload alternates between strenuous work with periods of light work, and early signs of heat exhaustion are detected. Signs of heat exhaustion include mood changes, emotional responses, and confusion.

If a person gets overheated, he or she should not return to strenuous work that day. Inside work or taking the rest of the day off is advisable. Failure to do this may result in the person developing heat stroke.

HEAT STRESS MANAGEMENT REVIEW:

Post the THI table; in hot weather, evaluate the weather forecast against the THI table every evening and morning.

Start emergency measures when a sequence of hot days occur with little or no night cooling (temperatures stay above 70).

Schedule cattle handling between midnight and 8 am. Never handle after 10 am.

Insure cattle have adequate water and watering space in an emergency.

Evaluate water flow-rate and place extra waterers in each pen if needed.

Improve airflow by reducing or eliminating tall vegetation in and around the feedlot. Abandon pens with wind "dead spots".

Place shade and/or sprinklers in problem pens and consider installing in all pens.

Shift daily feed delivery schedule toward evening feeding.

Reformulate ration to lower the energy content by five to seven percent or lower total feed intake to minimize overall metabolic heat load.

Temperature Humidity Index (THI)

Relative Humidity

		30%	35%	40%	45%	50%	55%	60%	65%	70%	75%	80%	85%
T	100°	84	85	86	87	88	90	91	92	93	94	95	97
E	98°	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	93	94	95
M	96°	81	82	83	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93
P	94°	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91
E	92°	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	85	86	87	88	89
R	90°	78	79	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	86	87
A	88°	76	77	78	79	80	81	81	82	83	84	85	86
T	86°	75	76	77	78	78	79	80	81	81	82	83	84
U	84°	74	75	75	76	77	78	78	79	80	80	81	82
R	82°	73	73	74	75	75	76	77	77	78	79	79	80
E	80°	72	72	73	73	74	75	75	76	76	77	78	78
	78°	70	71	71	72	73	73	74	74	75	75	76	76
	76°	69	70	70	71	71	72	72	73	73	74	72	75

$$THI = T_{dbf} - (0.55 - (0.55 \times (RH / 100))) \times (T_{dbf} - 58)$$

Normal <74

Alert 75-78

Danger 79-83

Emergency >84