

Weekly Radio Ag Report

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Hot weather in the summertime isn't really news, but the last several days have bordered on extreme, at least in terms of what we are used to here in Lassen County. Such weather can be an issue for livestock health and well-being so let's touch on a few important points on managing livestock through hot weather. We'll talk mainly about cattle, but in general this applies to all types of livestock.

How hot is too hot? Anytime temperatures push into the 90's the potential for heat stress occurs and when it tops 100 the likelihood increases even more. However we have two factors that are heavily in our favor in Lassen County.... one is low humidity (at least most of the time) and two, even in very hot weather we get significant night-time cooling which gives animals a chance to recover from the day time heat. These are both important factors in how cattle can deal with heat.

Shade does make a difference particularly with black-hided cattle. Studies show that black cows do absorb more heat directly from the sun than do light colored cattle – enough to raise their core body temperature by two degrees. So for confined or feedlot cattle, providing them with artificial shade in summer months is often a good idea, and is a common practice in commercial feedlots. The vast majority of cattle in our area are out on range or pasture, and these cattle are very adept at seeking out locations that provide the best shade and often a slight breeze as well.

As far as management ideas, pretty much a no-brainer, but oh so critical is providing plenty of fresh water and if that water is relatively cool so much the better. Also, if at all possible, avoid working cattle during extremely hot weather – it may be better to put off such work or if absolutely necessary begin just as early as daylight allows. Any type of physical activity or stress increases body temperature of all mammals and during extremely hot weather that is what we want to avoid. If you have to move or handle cattle, early morning is preferable to evening because evening is when cattle are just beginning to recover from the hot afternoon.

One last point...heavy fed steers that are at a finished, market-ready body condition are high risks for heat stress...so heads-up 4-H and FFA members and make sure to keep those market animals cool!

We'll see you next week with another Ag Report.