

Winter Health Care

By **Walter Makombe**, a Technical Personal in Animal Nutrition and Veterinary Health.

The winter season brings with it effects of cold dry weather which can lead to detrimental loss in cattle production if not well managed. This article highlights issues to look out for in cattle health during winter so as to reduce disease incidence and unnecessary loss in profits.

By early winter, hay and other grasses will have lost green fibre which leads to a **vitamin ADE3 deficiency**. This affects the immune system leading to eye diseases such as **keratitis and bone deficiencies**. Injectable Vit ADE (Vitol ADE3) supplementation improves the response of stock to vaccines. It is important to note that, thin animals do not always fully respond to immunisations. Supplementary injections are usually done every 60 to 90 days in winter.

Since the carrying capacity of the natural veld deteriorates during drought and cold conditions, **protein supplementary feeding** is essential to maintain body condition score and support breeding cows and heifers at calving. Ensure that cows are on a rising plan of nutrition as most foetal growth occurs during this time. This is also critical for successful rebreeding results. Cattle will also browse on trees and bushes which often leads to release of tannins by the browsed plants leading to gut irritation, sickness and death. As a remedy, farmers can use Browse Plus which is a specialised formula designed as a drinking water / infeed additive, which enhances the animal digestive processes and results in more efficient nutrient utilisation. Browse Plus is included in some blocks supplemented in areas where quality and quantity of forage is limited but browse is available. Incorporation of poultry litter as a protein source in supplementary feed and/or veld grass is very common with

most farmers. Poultry litter can be a source of botulism infection in large and small ruminants. Vaccinate all stock against botulism before the winter (even if litter is not fed) as **phosphorus deficiency** in winter can induce cattle to eat bones lying in the veld which are a source of botulism infection. A daily maximum of 1kg/animal of litter is recommended. When vaccinating take note that; vaccination doses should be according to drug label in consultation with a veterinarian; vaccines must be kept at low temperatures of 2-7 °C; not to vaccinate just before or after transporting, dipping, castration or dehorning as stress can neutralise vaccine functions.

Although anthrax can infect livestock throughout the year most outbreaks have occurred in the early winter as water levels in dams subside therefore vaccinate against anthrax well before the winter especially in the lowveld of Zimbabwe.

Pregnancy check cows and cull those that are open or late, have bad feet or udder, a poor temperament, cancer eye or poor joints. Pregnancy testing in cattle should be conducted by a veterinarian who will then review for current disease situation and threats, cull infertile cows/heifers and check bulls for fertility and breeding soundness before breeding. Dry, pregnant cows in good condition during the early part of gestation can be maintained on lower quality feed. Weigh calves after they are approximately 205 days old to help make culling decisions and select replacement heifers. A herd record-keeping program assists in identifying superior cows and replacement females.

Depending on tick species, infestation prevalence on the host is low in winter hence dipping is usually done fortnightly. A very useful tip is to avoid dipping calves to control blue tick for up to 4-6 months of age during these cooler months as 4-5 months old calves are resistant to red water and gall sickness. Exposure during this period will induce a resistance to these two tick-borne diseases. **Tactical dipping** in winter reduces larval and nymphal numbers of brown ear tick thereby reducing challenge by adult ticks of theileriosis mainly in summer.

Internal parasite control is key every seasonal change. In winter, treat cattle with a long acting flukicide such as Fluconix which also controls wireworm and an anthelmintic such as Intersectin. Thereafter it is unnecessary to deworm cattle until warmer temperatures occur.

Winter management must start in autumn, this means carefully assessing body condition on your herd and developing a plan to provide sufficient nutrition to allow it to maintain moderate-to-good condition through the winter.



Tactical winter dipping @ Panganayi Boran Stud.

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