Cattle Deaths Reported

Cattle mortality across the state has increased in the past few weeks, according to Dr. Steven S. Nicholson, veterinarian with the LSU Cooperative Extension Service.

Veterinarians are reporting blackleg, anaplasmosis, pulmonary emphysema and pneumonia as the major problems, he says.

Blackleg, a common fatal infectious disease of young cattle, strikes suddenly, producing areas of gas gangrene in large muscles. It is prevented by vaccination at 3 to 6 months of age.

Anaplasmosis, transmitted primarily by large biting flies, has always been a serious economic threat to Louisiana cattlemen. Many cattle are carriers of the disease, which causes severe anemia in mature animals, Nicholson says. Dairymen, unlike beef producers, cannot use antibiotics on a herd basis to stop new cases during the incubation phase. Treatment of individual sick cows is now always successful because the anemia is often well advanced by the time the cow shows signs of illness.

A vaccine is available for anaplasmosis, although infection and development of the carrier state can still occur. The vaccine is made from the blood of infected cattle. Its major drawback is it may stimulate production of antibodies against certain blood types, which can lead to death of calves born to vaccinated cows.

Pulmonary emphysema, caused by cattle eating toxic amounts of perilla mint, has increased considerably as hot, dry weather has reduced pastures to drought-like conditions in some areas. Perilla mint is a square-stemmed shade loving plant with oval-shaped leaves that are light green to drak purple in color, and has an unusual odor.

Calf pneumonia has caused much concern to some cattlemen. Time and labor involved in nursing beef calves on pasture is a real problem. Treatment of the entire group of calves may be necessary to bring an outbreak under control.

It is essential that cattlemen obtain prompt veterinary medical help for sick animals, as well as for prompt carcass examination of animals found dead or dying, Nicholson concludes.