Rutherford County
FROM THE GROUND UP
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Higher Temps & Humidity Require Extra Care

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Just a quick walk outside the door, and we are reminded of Tennessee's heat and humidity this time of year. Our discomfort is also a reminder to consider things we can do to help our cattle manage the heat. We all know that the higher the humidity, the hotter we feel—regardless of temperature. Cattle experience discomfort 20 degrees earlier than we because they cannot sweat effectively and rely on respiration to cool themselves. Compounding this is the rumen activity, which in itself generates heat. Bottom line is, if we're hot, our cattle are hottest.

Cattle's poor ability to sweat combined with soaring temperatures make them hotter as the day progresses. Cooler nights provide the opportunity to cool themselves and recover from the days heat. Unfortunately, it is common for temps to remain warm and muggy during the night this time of year—and this means that cattle are unable to decrease the heat load effectively. In other words, they are unable to "cool off." This means that the heat load can increase from day to day, literally compounding the effects of the daily heat. In other words, cattle start the day hotter than they started the previous day.

We can't change the weather, but we can provide measures that can help our animals cope with the temperatures.

1. PROVIDE SHADE. Shade is a necessity. If there aren't trees, provide temporary shade through the use of shade cloth or other items you may have on hand. Sometimes even parking machinery can provide shade as the sun moves. Be creative. And there needs to be enough area of shade so that hot animals aren't bunching closely together, trying to reach the shade.
2. AIR FLOW. We can't make the wind blow, but we can provide a large shaded area so cattle aren't bunching together. And if you have a way to make the air move, make it move.
3. Plenty of clean drinking water—emphasis on plenty and clean. Cattle may drink one percent of their body weight per hour when heat stressed. The cooler the water, the less they have to drink because of water's cooling effect. A 20 to 25 degree decrease in water temperature (from 95 to 70 degrees for example) will decrease cattle water requirements a whopping 2.5 times! Shading the water if possible—or anything else you can do to keep it cooler—will help them drink less and help them manage the heat more effectively.
4. Control flies because cattle tend to bunch together in an effort to escape the flies. Bunching makes cattle hotter.

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5. Avoid working and/or moving cattle in the heat if at all possible. If absolutely necessary, plan for this in the coolest part of the day and move cattle slowly and easily.

Finally, know the signs of heat stress. Watch out for lethargy, slobbering and/or panting with open mouths, cattle grouping together. The grouping together doesn't make sense to us because we understand it will make them hotter. However, cattle bunch together when stressed-- even if it makes them hotter. Hot cattle are stressed cattle.

If these signs of heat stress are observed, effort should be made to cool them quickly. Water can be sprayed on them, increase air flow, provide additional shade—all provided as quickly as possible.

For more information, please call your local Rutherford County UT/TSU Extension office at 615-898-7710 or visit our website at rutherford.tennessee.edu.