



A NEWSLETTER OF DAKOTALAND FEEDS

Bloat Control

The last several weeks have been challenging for feeding cattle. With the cold weather and calves just coming on feed, calves have had huge intakes. Add to that our short days, and that can add up to problems such as bloat.

Bloats have been common this Fall, and a variety of things occurred together to make that more of an issue.

Some contributing factors include: the calves have been very aggressive eaters, our dry hay is ending up with really small particle size, and the short days are potentially causing the bunks to be empty for too long.

Much of the hay is ending up with a really small particle size after going through the grinder. Even if it has been the same-sized screen on the grinder that you have used in the past, some of the dry hay is ending up smaller than we really wanted it to be. The small particle size means we don't have the physically effective fiber we want and normally have. The longer stem particles help slow fermentation in the rumen which helps us keep a more consistent rumen environment that is not as prone to bloating. Most of the rations that bloating calves have been on have been high roughage starter or backgrounding rations. The problem is not the amount of roughage, it is the rate of digestion of the roughage that is contributing to the issue. Smaller particles are digested faster whether it is roughage or grain. The roughage is supposed to help us slow fermentation but if we don't have any particles longer than about 3" we aren't going to get the desired effect. Even a small amount of high quality alfalfa that is finely ground can cause bloat. Using a larger screen at grinding in that case is preferable. Changing screens doesn't happen all the time and so making sure quantities in the ration allow it to hold together and watching moisture in the ration becomes more important. Keep your forages in separate piles at grinding time whenever possible so we can adjust if necessary.

Feeding once a day is a common practice and normally can be done without a problem. However, right now when the calves have big appetites and we are having trouble keeping them full and satisfied, we are going to need to **switch to twice a day for a while to help prevent those bloats from happening**. If you check the bunks before dark when you are feeding once per day in the morning, there is still a chance that the bunks could be empty for more than 12 hours. That is too long for the bunk to be empty. I know we normally try to be disciplined as we bring cattle up on intakes but you also can't underfeed for a long period of time and expect them not to bloat. Their rate of consumption is going to mean an increased rate of fermentation which can result in bloats.

Pay attention to the mixing time after you load your last ingredient. Typically, at least 4 minutes after the last ingredient is added is recommended. If your equipment is worn, it can take longer. Depending on the mix, it might warrant a longer mix time. Order of ingredients in a mixer could be a potential problem spot. With horizontal mixers, we typically want the grain and liquid or supplement added first and then add your other roughage and ingredients. With vertical mixers, it can be trickier because if you add your grain and supplement first, it might take a while to get that moved up into the mix. If you add it last, particularly with liquid, you are likely going to have a hard time getting it distributed evenly through the mix. If you can see a difference in how the ration looks from the beginning to the end of the bunk, we need to adjust something in our mixing order or mixing time. The pounds it takes to fill a mixer will be very different depending on the bulk and density of the ration. Starters are typically very forage heavy meaning you can't get as many pounds in the mixer before it is full. Overfilling the wagon is also a culprit of mixing problems. Almost any wagon can do a good job if we don't overfill it. But, when we overfill it, that creates 'dead' areas in the mixer where certain ingredients aren't pulled into the majority of the feed.

Once you have cattle start bloating, it is often difficult to stop. Part of the reason for this is the fact that the microbial population of the rumen shifts after bloat resulting in a rumen population more acclimated to produce the

In a Nutshell

- **Particle size can be a contributor to bloat**
- **Feeding twice per day can reduce incidence of bloat**
- **Pay attention to mixing time and mixing order**
- **Don't overfill your mixer wagon**
- **Respiratory disease can occasionally cause bloat**
- **Increasing Rumensin® can often help control bloat**

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mucin that helps stabilize a frothy bloat. Inadequate saliva production is also part of the problem. When cattle charge the bunk and eat too fast, there is less saliva produced. The saliva contains enzymes that help destabilize the foam in the rumen so **a reduction in saliva is not desirable.**

Animal factors are another piece of the puzzle. **Respiratory disease can sometimes be involved in causing bloats.** If the lymph nodes in the throat are swollen, it can result in the cattle physically not being able to belch. In that case, talk with your vet about treatment of respiratory disease. Using a pulse dose of Aureomycin® may be warranted. Sometimes nerve damage can cause cattle to be chronic bloaters. If the nerve controlling the rumen is damaged and not sending the signal to contract, then the animal becomes a chronic bloater and having a hole in the side is about the only way to fix that.

One thing we can do in the event of bloat is to **increase the level of Rumensin®** we are feeding the cattle. By increasing the concentration of Rumensin® in the ration, we help to level off the intakes of the cattle and keep them eating more consistently. Make sure you talk to your feed consultant about how much you should increase. We can also watch for moisture in the ration and make sure that it is wet enough to hold together and prevent sorting.

Watching particle size on roughage, feeding twice per day, looking at mix order and timing, and feeding the correct amount of supplement can help avoid bloating calves. If you have concerns, talk to your Dakotaland Feeds consultant about what adjustments would be best for your operation.

Roxanne Knock, PhD

Timely Tips

- Remember to **HEAT TAPE** lines on liquid systems - this keeps the line fluid.
- Get **30-13 tubs, 38 Hi E tubs, or Accuration tubs or blocks** for grazing corn stalk residue.
- **Implant calves during backgrounding** to get the best gain and efficiency.
- **Inventory your projected feed resources** and project your Winter feed needs so you can plan accordingly.
- **Pregnancy check cows** and decide on a strategy to sell or feed them - implant them if you decide to fatten them.

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