

Managing Heat Stress in Livestock
By: Clinton Laflin
Greenwood County Extension Agent

June has arrived and with it summer heat and humidity. Heat stress is something that impacts humans, livestock and other animals. Please remember to monitor yourself and our livestock for signs of heat stress. Heat stress cost's the U.S. beef industry an estimated \$370 million in cattle losses each year.

Cattle prefer ambient temperatures of 55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit and do not handle humidity well. Cattle do not have a great number of sweat glands so they can't dissipate heat as effectively as other animals. Signs of heat stress include panting, an increase in standing, or cattle bunching together. Here are a couple things to remember in managing heat stress.

1. Water availability is a critical factor at all times of the year, but especially in hot weather as water requirements increase. Please make sure your stock has access to good water at all times.

KSU Beef Systems Specialist Dr. Justin Waggoner indicates that cattle often consume one to two gallons of water per 100 pounds of bodyweight. Determining the amount of water cows will voluntarily consume is difficult and is influenced by several factors including ambient temperature, moisture and salt content of the diet, body weight, and lactation.

2. Handling: Receive, ship or move cattle only during the coolest parts of the day, preferably before 10 a.m.

3. Feeding: Modify feeding times. Feed 70 percent of the animals' ration as late in the evening as possible, which puts the peak heat of digestion overnight when temperatures are likely cooler. Decrease feeding during the day.

4. Managing heat: Split cattle between pens or reduce stocking density. Maximize airflow by removing obstructions around facilities, including weeds. If feasible, install shade structures, which can reduce solar radiation and reduce the temperature on the pen's floor.

Another tool to help you manage heat stress is the [Kansas Mesonet](#). The Kansas Mesonet, housed at Kansas State University, is a network of observation towers located across the state that updates climate information every hour. Kansas Mesonet provides a current animal comfort index, and a 7-day forecast of the animal comfort index at all Mesonet stations.

If you have questions regarding heat stress management and strategies give me a call. My office number is 620-583-7455, or email me at cllaflin@ksu.edu.