

Estimated reading time: 9 minute(s)

Pinkeye disease in cattle and its origin

Oftentimes we hear what condition is this “*bluish cloud like appearance in cattle eyes?*”. Well, this “*bluish cloud like appearance in cattle eyes*” is known as *Infectious Bovine Keratoconjunctivitis* (IBK) and commonly known as **Pinkeye disease**.

Infectious Bovine Keratoconjunctivitis is caused by *Moraxella bovis* bacterium that **infects the eye by producing a toxin**.

Whittier et al. (2005) illustrates that **the Pinkeye disease is a common disease in cattle and is highly contagious as it causes inflammation of the cornea and conjunctiva which are part of the eye**. Furthermore, the disease (IBK) gradually **develops into an ulcer** which looks like a depression in the cornea.

Studies have shown that animals with less pigmentation around the eye are highly susceptible to Pinkeye disease in comparison to those with darker eye pigmentation (Cobb et al., 1976). **Cattle farmers are quite familiar with this condition**.



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How does Pinkeye disease in cattle spread?

- **Face flies are disease carriers** and feed around the eyes and nostrils of cattle which causes irritation to the eyes, hence the spread of the disease from one animal to the other.
- **Irritation caused by tall grasses or thistles** during grazing, dusty areas as well as exposure to Ultra Violet sunlight.

When does it occur?

- Common **during summer** months

What are the four stages of Pinkeye disease?

Firstly

- In stage one the animal has teary eye(s) which are sensitive to light and subsequently followed by frequent blinking.
- The eye membrane becomes red and swollen.
- Cattle will seek for shady places as their eyes are irritated.
- An ulcer develops in the middle of the cornea which develops a greyish to **bluish cloud like** appearance, as most farmers would describe Pinkeye disease.

Secondly

- In stage two the ulcer spreads across the cornea and blood vessels move into the ulcer and inflammation subsequently increases.
- Excruciating pain as seen in cattle isolating themselves from the rest of the herd and hence, reduction in feed intake.

Thirdly

- In stage three the eye becomes red as blood vessels continue to grow across the cornea.
- The inner eye fills with **fibrin**, a pus like substance that gives the eye a yellow appearance instead of the normal brown appearance.

Lastly

- In stage four the ulcer extends completely throughout the cornea.
- Such that if it persists untreated or noticed it can result in partial to complete blindness of one or both eyes.

Negative effects of Pinkeye disease

- Results in **poor feed** and water intake.
- **Results in poor weight gain** which has a negative impact on beef farming profits and subsequently affects the beef industry as a whole.
- May result in **partial or complete blindness** if not treated.

Common Treatments

- Use of **eye ointments** then cover the infected eye with an eye-patches
- **Antibiotics** such as Oxy-tetracycline

How to prevent pinkeye disease in cattle

- **Isolation of animals suspected to have Pinkeye infection** immediately to suppress the spread of the disease
- Use of **fly traps** to control fly populations

Conclusion

Pinkeye disease results in losses if uncontrolled especially under poor herd management hence, farmers ought to take cognizance of this eye condition which may gradually lead to blindness.

References

Cobb, A. B., Frahm, R. R., & Mizell, R. H. (1976). [Effect of pinkeye on weaning weight of beef calves. Oklahoma State University Res. Rpt. MP-96, 61.](#)

Whittier, W. D., Currin, J. F., & Currin, N. (2005). Pinkeye in Beef Cattle.

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