

# Reducing cattle tick treatments by strategically utilising feedpads

Management strategies to assist cattle tick control are commonly practiced in the beef industry but most dairy farmers cannot utilise paddock spelling and rotation to aid in tick control. A recent SDP survey considered the possibility of strategically utilising feed pads to assist in controlling tick numbers on dairy farms.

Cattle ticks grow slowly then engorge rapidly one day and drop off the cattle early the next morning. Housing the cattle on an environment that is very hostile to the engorged ticks at this time will mean that these engorged ticks will perish and will not lay eggs for the next generation of ticks.

Cattle permanently on a tick hostile environment should not have any ticks and a small trial done in 1994 demonstrated that ticks do not survive in normal feedlot conditions. Cattle infested with ticks were introduced to a feedlot and the female cattle ticks engorged and dropped off the cattle but did not survive to reinfest the cattle or subsequent cattle in that pen. But most farmers do not want their dairy cattle under feedlot conditions for long periods of time but maybe the strategic use of feedlot conditions could be useful in greatly reducing tick numbers.

A survey was conducted to examine dairy farmers using feedpads at night in cattle tick areas and comparing their tick treatment needs with other farmers in the district or with their previous tick control requirement. Each of these comparisons was considered as a separate case study and results of five of these case studies from various areas in Queensland are presented here.

This was not a designed trial but a brief investigation to see if there may be some useful information for the industry. The expected result was that farms that provided a hostile environment for the ticks when the engorged female ticks were dropping off the cattle early in the morning should have the least problem with ticks.

## **Case study 1.**

This farmer used a feedpad every night throughout the year but the feedpad was open to a large tropical pasture paddock and the cows were never confined. As the cows were not usually hungry after the night feed on the feedpad, most stayed on the denuded area around the feedpad until the morning milking.

The milkers were not treated during the season and this is compared to the heifers not using a feedpad that were treated 3-4 times. This result could also be compared to past years when the milkers were often dipped. The dry times may have some effect but the result appears very promising.

This farmer was compared to a nearby farm that also used a feedpad but only occasionally. This comparison farm has plenty of ticks and treated the milkers, dry cows and heifers five times though the season. This was reported as a normal number of treatments for this farm. Young cattle housed in the small paddocks (with no grass) around the dairy did not get ticks.

## **Case study 2.**

This farmer used a feedpad every night throughout the year and kept the cattle in the feedpad area 24 hours a day during the summer. The cattle did have access to a lounging area but this area did not have any pasture and there was no grass along the fence lines.

The milkers, dry cows and heifers did not get treated for ticks under this system. Beef cattle on this farm were kept in separate paddocks with separate facilities and became heavily ticked during the season. Four treatments were applied to the beef cattle this season and this was considered normal for the beef herd. These were *Bos indicus* cattle and should be more tick resistant than the milking herd of Friesians.

This farmer was compared to a nearby farm who was also a semi feedpad user where the milkers were fed every night on a feedpad in a grassy paddock. The milkers were not treated this season and the heifers were only treated once.

## **Case study 3.**

This farmer used feedpads but they were open to other areas. The feedpads were used after the evening milking and after both milkings for the fresh cows. The milkers have hardly been treated for years. The heifers get treated about 3 times/year and the dry cattle about 2 times/year.

The comparison farmer also used a feedpad but mostly during the day. The milkers did get treated once but there have not been many ticks on the milkers in the last few years as they spend more time in the yards. Many come back to the feedpad at night to finish the silage and then remain there until the morning milking. The heifers and dry cows get more ticks and were treated 2 times/year and spend most of their time grazing.

#### **Case study 4.**

This farmer used a feedpad every day and the feedpad area was fenced off and no pasture was in the feedpad area. Night use of the feedpad was variable. Cows were treated 3-4 times and the heifers and dry cows were treated 3-4 times. The heifers and dry cows did not have access to any feedpad.

The young heifers were in a total feedpad situation and did not get ticks.

#### **Case study 5.**

This farmer fed the cows every night on the feedpad but the feedpad was part of a 20 ha paddock. The cows were treated 4 times and the heifers and dry cows were also treated 4 times during the season and both groups were in separate paddocks.

The comparison farmer used a feedpad every day but the cattle spent the nights in night paddocks after an evening feed. The cows were treated twice last season.

#### **Summary**

It appears that feedpads could be used to help control cattle tick numbers. The cattle need to be confined to an area when most of the engorged ticks detach during the early morning period and this area needs to be where most detached ticks become squashed. The best example is total tick reduction in total feedlot conditions.

*Source: Dairyinfo.biz 2013*