Moos News

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"Producers and veterinarians can agree that a strong relationship is critical for success in animal health and when done right, can be rewarding for all involved."



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Screwworm

A New Threat From An Old Parasite



From The Desk Of Dr. Jeff Sommer

A few producers have been asking lately about screwworm that they've been hearing on the news. So, it seemed appropriate to give a brief update on this potentially concerning situation.

Screwworm is a parasitic fly thought to be eradicated in North America since the 1960's but has re-emerged with recent cases in Texas and New Mexico. The New World screwworm fly in the Western Hemisphere and its Old World cousin in Africa and Asia are unusual among flies, because when they lay eggs in the open sores or wounds of animals its larvae (maggots) eat or feed off live flesh and fluids instead of dead material. It gets its name from the maggots habit of burrowing or screwing into a wound, causing severe and even deadly damage. Any warm-blooded animal including wildlife, pets and occasionally even humans can be infested. The deadly fly has been spreading up from Panama and into Mexico in late 2024 and early this year the screwworm was discovered in several cattle and a dog in Texas, potentially threatening the nearly $113 Billion US cattle industry. Texas is home to $17 Billion of the US cattle making it the industry's number one State. Texas has declared a state of disaster after the latest new case discovered. Early in June the CFIA announced it was temporarily closing the border to any Texas livestock (including horses) to prevent the parasites spread into Canada. Animals that originate from, or were present in the state of Texas within 21 days prior to border crossing will not be accepted. Since Mexico has reported cases of New World Screwworm as well, currently Canada does not allow importation of cattle, bison, sheep, goats, deer, swine, and horses from Mexico. While the fly cannot survive our colder climate for the long-term establishment of the fly in Canada, they can survive shorter periods of time in the summer months.



Currently there are no reported cases of screwworm in Canada and it has never been detected in animals in Canada, but animal owners and vets are encouraged to monitor for signs of screwworm infestation in livestock and or pets if travelling to Texas or affected countries. Clinical signs of infestation may include behavioural signs such as excessive licking or scratching at an infested wound, wounds (cuts, surgical sites, bite wounds) that grow rapidly and fail to heal, have a discharge or foul odour, and demonstrate visible larvae. Although primarily an animal health concern, there have been reported human cases in Mexico and South America.

Back to My Roots

Earlier in June, I had the opportunity to visit my old vet school, Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) in Saskatoon to attend my 25th graduation reunion. It was my first time back at the college since graduation, so it was a great experience to see both what was the same and what had changed over the last 25 years. There were still a few profs and field service vets around from my 4 years there, a little greyer and longer in the tooth than I remembered, although the same could be said for me. Myself and a small group of classmates were given a tour of the school and shown some of the lecture rooms and facilities we spent time in over our 4 years in school, as well as new teaching labs, MRI, linear accelerator for cancer research and treatment and lots of other advancements in teaching with life like models for diagnostic and treatment techniques that can be harder to practice and get the opportunity to learn on live patients. It was definitely a neat experience and I've included several pictures for illustration.





Shortly after my weekend trip to Saskatoon, I travelled further west to Alberta to visit family, as many of you may know I grew up out there. While there, we took in the Ponoka Stampede which I used to attend when I was younger. There is just something about watching chuckwagons, calf roping, bull riding steer wrestling, barrel racing and bareback and saddle bronc riding that brought a smile to my face all day long. I got to share with my kids who have never been to a real rodeo, that several of the saddle bronc riders were the children of their famous bronc riding fathers that I got to know while working north of Edmonton before moving to Ontario. I even got a chance to do a little trail riding myself in the mountains while we were there, and thankfully these horses seemed happy to have me on their backs and not wanting to send me flying through the air.









