Managing Heat Stress in the Feedlot

Summer heat can reduce intakes and performance if not managed. Extreme heat can kill cattle. Cattle will drink more than twice as much water when its 90°F compared to 70°F.

The National Weather Service uses the following table to determine the heat index:

Factors that increase the risk of death loss from heat stress include:

- Daytime heat indices over 100°F
- Overnight heat indices over 80°F
- Newly arrived cattle
- Cattle being processed

The most valuable cattle (heavy, finished, black) are at the greatest risk of death loss.

Management practices that can reduce heat stress:

- Sprinklers to cool the cattle and pen surfaces
- Fine mist can raise humidity, use coarse drops
- Evaporation is what really cools the cattle
- Provide at least 2” of linear water space/head
- Have additional water tanks available
- Make sure your pump has enough capacity
- 20 ft² of shade or more per head
- East or Southeast facing pens
- Bedding will reduce heat from the pen surfaces
- Don’t let windbreaks disrupt summer breezes

Emergency Actions to reduce death loss from heat stress:

- Apply water to cattle any way that you can
- Apply water to the pen surfaces – they can radiate heat of up to ~150° F to the cattle
- Allow automatic waterers to overflow

- Build mounds high enough so cattle can catch more breeze
- Feed MGA to heifers to reduce activity
- Higher energy rations produce less body heat
- Deliver feed in the evening
- cattle eat in the coolest part of the day
- Don’t receive, load or process cattle during high heat indices
- Sell finished cattle before it gets too hot
- Put additional open water tanks into the pens
- Get cattle under shade if possible, but don’t restrict air movement
- Cold water enemas may help save down cattle