
PASTURE BLOAT—PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

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Bloat is a disease condition where gas gets trapped in the cow's rumen (stomach) and cannot be belched out as normally occurs. This is due to the fact that the gas get trapped in bubbles in the rumen. As the amount of gas in the rumen increases, the cow's abdomen gets larger on the left side behind the last rib and fairly high up on the abdominal wall. Eventually, the pressure in the rumen can get high enough that the cow can suffocate and die. Bloat can be a serious problem but knowledge about its prevention and cure can keep it from becoming an economic disaster.

The forages that have caused most bloat trouble in Tennessee are Ladino and White Dutch Clover. White clover, both the Ladino and White Dutch, spreads by creeping stems (stolens) that root at the nodes. One leaf per node grows from the stolon. Livestock grazing white clover bite off the leaves and part of the leaf stem (petiole), thereby consuming the most nutritious and digestible part of the plant. With red clover and alfalfa, part of the stem is consumed with the leaves and petioles. These legumes also cause bloat but the difference in growth habit is one of the reasons lush white clover pastures are more likely to cause bloat than other legumes.

Steps in preventing bloat include the following:

1. Discuss the situation with your veterinarian or county Extension agricultural agent.
2. Know the conditions when bloat is most likely to occur. These conditions include grazing on rapidly growing, lush pastures, particularly in the spring and fall. It is particularly prevalent on pastures with more than 50% legume and on wheat pastures.
3. If using pastures likely to cause bloat, watch cattle closely and manage to avoid bloat.
4. Do not turn hungry cattle onto legume pastures. Allow them to fill up on alternative pastures or hay.
5. Avoid grazing immature legumes.
6. Consider grazing legumes for limited periods, particularly if there has been a problem with bloat. It is often helpful to graze in the daytime and remove cattle to hay at night or alternate between grazing legume and grass

pastures.

7. Consider strip grazing where animals are forced to eat the whole plant and prevented from selecting legumes and leaving grasses.
8. Cull chronic bloaters.
9. Feed *grass (legume hay might also be a problem)* hay along with pasture if you suspect that bloat will be a problem.
10. Avoid grazing when there is dew or other moisture on legume pastures.
11. Feed a bloat preventative. Poloxalene prevents bloat by reducing foam which traps gases in the rumen. This chemical is sold under various trade names and is available in medicated blocks, as a top-dress feed or in a liquid drench or premix. Another product is also now on the market. It contains polyoxyethylene (23) lauryl ether, a bloat preventative which has been used in Australia and New Zealand for many years. It is fed in a molasses base block. Whatever product is used, follow label directions.
12. Other feed additives, like monensin, have been shown to be helpful in preventing bloat, but are less reliable than products specifically designed for that purpose.

Successful treatment of bloat is possible but should begin as soon as possible after symptoms are observed. Work closely with your veterinarian for best results. Steps in bloat treatment include:

1. Administer a defoaming agent. A pint of vegetable oil, mineral oil or ¼ cup of mild detergent given as a drench is often effective. It is preferable to administer these via a stomach tube, but drenching may work.
2. Administer poloxalene. It is a good idea to have some liquid poloxalene drench on hand for bloat treatment. Follow directions carefully.
3. Tie a 1 ½ inch gag firmly into the animal's mouth as you would place a bit in a horse's mouth. This may induce belching.
4. Call the veterinarian if you have not relieved the symptoms at this time.
5. A stomach tube may relieve bloat if free air is trapped. This method is most often unreliable, and may have to be repeated.
6. If your treatment fails, call your veterinarian who may want to puncture the rumen to let gas out and then close the wound and administer antibiotics.