

CHAPTER 1 SELECTION AND CARE

1.3 CARE OF DRAUGHT CATTLE

1.3.4 HEALTH CARE OF WORKING CATTLE

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INTRODUCTION

If working animals are to grow and work to their full potential they must be healthy. Working animals are likely to resist illness if they are over worked. It is also important that they are given sufficient food and water and provided with a clean, well-ventilated shelter.

The principle health problems requiring treatment in working animals are specific illnesses (due to disease causing organisms), parasites, poisonings and wounds. These health problems vary from place to place, but the local veterinary services should be able to advise on the recommended routine treatments such as for deworming, vaccinations, tick control and cures for illnesses. Local veterinarians may be able to provide the necessary drugs or advise where they may be obtained.

In addition to the local veterinarians, it is sensible to ask advice of local stock owners. In most cases, they can recommend certain management practices (areas to avoid, things to do) or traditional remedies that may help maintain the health of working cattle.

SIGNS OF GOOD HEALTH AND NORMALITY

The stockman who is able to recognize ill-health and abnormal behaviour can often prevent minor problems building up into major ones. As animals are greeted, inspected and groomed the following should be checked, so as to make sure each animal is normal and healthy:

- a healthy animal walks well on sound feet, feeds readily and breathes regularly;
- on raising itself, it stretches its legs and often passes dung which is firm in consistency. Dung piles up (not liquid). Faeces are normal and not discoloured or blood-stained;
- has a pair of clear bright and alert eyes in a clean head;
- has nose and mouth clear and free from discharges, the muzzle is usually cool and moist;
- has a smooth coat and shiny tail and flanks, free of faeces;
- healthy animals tend to flock together, feed together and rest together. They are curious and inquisitive;
- healthy animals have a good appetite, no rapid loss of condition. They have no fresh wounds or swellings, no ticks, no lice;
- a healthy animal has ears alert, moving to and fro, eyes bright and clear.

Time spent watching working animals is time well spent for it assists in developing the ability of the stockman to distinguish the normal from the abnormal.

SIGNS OF ILL-HEALTH

A working animal is likely to be sick if

- it is reluctant to work;
- it is often on its own, or leaves the main group if it is able to do so (although this is normal for cows during labour);
- it refuses to eat. Its eyes may often be dull and watering or even swollen;
- it has diarrhoea or constipation - a dirty tail can be a first sign of digestive upsets;
- it is seen limping, carrying a foot off the ground, or has swelling in the joints;
- it has a dry rough coat or skin;
- it breathes rapidly and often coughs, with running nose. For a rested ox, a breathing rate of over 15 respirations per minute is very high and is indicative of disease.

If a working animal is ill, it must be rested and given food and plenty of water. It should be kept away from other cows. Assistance from a veterinarian should be sought if it does not improve.

INTERNAL PARASITES

Parasites are organisms which live in or on other animals. They obtain food from the host animal without contributing to the animal welfare. Parasites limit the growth of the animal and take nutrition away from the host. They reduce the condition of the animal and can cause death.

The main internal parasites of working animals are round worms that live in the stomachs, lungs and intestines. They also include flat worms such as tapeworms and liver flukes. Working animals eat worm eggs when grazing forage which has been contaminated by manure. It is therefore advisable to keep pasture clear of droppings.

Large numbers of worms reduce the animal's ability to work and can cause death particularly if the animal is underfed and/or overworked. Large numbers of worms make an animal skinny and weak. Other signs of worm infestation include extended belly, pale or yellow gums, a rough coat and dull eyes. Worms can be seen as thin threads in the animals droppings. A vet technician can do a simple test on droppings to find out if an animal has worms. Worms are common and it is a good practice to give all working animals a dewormer once or twice a year. This prevents

worm infestations from becoming life-threatening. It is good practice to deworm all newly introduced animals and all cattle before the rains.

Where a stockman is not sure of which dewormer to give, a local vet should be consulted. Local vets may be able to supply the deworming medicines and give advice on how regularly to give them. One of the best kinds of dewormer contains the drug Mebendazole and may be sold with the names Omnizole, or Valbazen. It is important that the correct dosage is given after first estimating the weight of the animal. Work oxen are often tolerant to worm challenge.

EXTERNAL PARASITES

External parasites of working animals include ticks, lice, mites and flies. They cause discomfort, weight loss and sometimes death. They may carry disease or make the animals more susceptible to disease. Where parasites concentrate include the inside of ears, top of legs and base of tails and the loose folds of skin. Daily brushing and grooming may or will remove most parasites before they cause trouble. Ticks suck blood and may spread disease like East Coast Fever. They can often be picked by hand (burn them afterwards or kill by squashing but never drop them back in the field). Some external parasites can be treated by dusting with an appropriate insecticide powder.

TICK CONTROL

The importance of tick control varies between regions and cattle breeds. It may also depend on season on the year. In most places in Uganda, and particularly for exotic breeds, East Coast Fever is rampant and therefore effective tick control is vital. In each locality, the importance of controlling ticks and other external parasites should be discussed with farmers and the local vet, who should be able to advise on suitable tick control procedures and on which chemicals to use.

LAMENESS/FRACTURES

A lame ox cannot work properly. As soon as you realise that the animal is lame, try to find out the cause. Check which leg is causing the limping and examine it. If the cow bobs its head up and down while moving, it may be lame on the first leg which hits the ground as the head comes up. Look at the underside of the foot for stones, nails or abscesses. Feel the lower leg and pastern for wounds, heat or swelling. If there is a wound inside the hoof, soak the foot in a bucket of clean warm salty water for 15 minutes twice a day. For hot or swollen legs, try to apply cool water as often as possible. Do not make the animal work hard until the limping stops, it will only make matters worse.

If the injury to the working animal is such that it is unlikely to rise on its own within 48 hours then it is better that it is destroyed and the carcass salvaged, to avoid high treatment costs.

DISEASES

Working animals may get a serious INFECTIOUS disease that may require veterinary assistance. A disease is regarded as infectious if it is caused by an organism which may be transferred from one animal to another.

It is important to vaccinate routinely and regularly against CBPP, Anthrax, FMD, Tetanus, Black Leg and Brucellosis. In areas where Trypanosomiasis is a problem, quarterly (prophylaxis) treatment with a suitable drug (eg *Samorin*) may be advisable. Most infectious diseases are treated by vets using antibiotics (eg. *Penicillin*).

FOREIGN BODIES OR HARDWARE DISEASE

Metal objects, specially those with a sharp point such as nails or pieces of barbed wire, are dangerous when swallowed by a cow. Because the cow does not thoroughly masticate her feed before swallowing, these materials are sometimes taken in whilst eating. Cures can be complicated but prevention consists of strict vigilance in picking up all pieces of wire, nails or other metal objects that might get into the feed.

REMEDIES FOR WOUNDS

Minor wounds are fairly common with working animals and may be treated on the farm. Clean the wound thoroughly first with a salt solution (brine) and then adopt one of the following curative measures:

- apply Dettol if wound is fresh or preferably:
- apply an antibiotic spray (eg. *Alamycin*, *Tetracyclin*, *E.S.50*, etc.)
- apply healing oil (which contains an antiseptic). This is cheaper but less effective.

BLOAT

Bloat may occur if cattle are pastured on damp, rapidly growing legume pastures shortly after rain storms have occurred at the end of the dry season. Gas pressure builds up inside the animal on the left side, the animal is in obvious pain, breathes with difficulty and salivates profusely. The pressure has to be released by stabbing with a trochar and canula midway between the line of ribs and point of the hips. All animals should then be dosed with 3 oz of formalin. In the case of any doubt, the nearest local vet should be contacted.