



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Animal Health Section

678

Pinkeye

James J. England, DVM, University of Idaho
and David Thain, DVM, University of Nevada, Reno

Infectious pinkeye, also called infectious keratoconjunctivitis, caused by the bacterium *Moraxella bovis*, occurs commonly in beef cattle during the grazing season. Not every “white or cloudy” eye is infectious pinkeye, but observant cattle producers need to be aware, be watchful, and be ready to act! Rapid recognition, correction, and treatment will avert a costly, time consuming, and potentially blinding outcome.

We all know the pain, tearing, and squinting from a “finger in the eye.” These also are the first signs of a potential pinkeye infection in our cows. While tearing and squinting are actually the first signs of pinkeye, owners may fail to recognize pinkeye until they see a “white” or cloudy eye (Fig. 1). The reason tearing and squinting are so important as a first sign is because unless the surface of the cornea is abnormal, tearing and squinting do not occur.



Fig. 1. Corneal opacity (graying). Yellowing around eyelid indicates tearing. This is either an early lesion or a healed case of pinkeye.

Damage to the cells of the surface of the eye by dust, foreign material, viruses, UV light, or by flies causes inflammation and permits *M. bovis* to infect the eye. The inflammatory response causes corneal opacity, clouding, or whitening of the eye; the inflammation and the infection stimulate the infiltration of blood vessels into the cornea to control the infection and heal the damage. Progression of the inflammation and infection without treatment can lead to ulceration and protrusion of the cornea (Fig. 2). All animals showing tearing and squinting need examination!

Treatment is most effective if initiated as early as possible in the course of the infection/condition. Using a clean latex glove that is moistened with water, cattle



Fig. 2. Corneal ulceration.