

With spring here, flies will soon be bothering cows. Louise Hartley asks vet Charlie Thompson about a new fly control method.

Biological fly control

Biting and nuisance flies around cattle cause serious disruption to normal routines and can spread infectious diseases.

Fly control methods vary greatly on farms and intervention often only starts when flies become too irritating for cows and workers in the parlour.

Charlie Thompson, of Lambert Leonard and May, says: "Judging the economic cost of flies is a hard thing to do, but a milk drop of 10-20 per cent has been documented when the shed is heavily infested with flies.

"This is more likely in warmer European climates where flies can be a huge issue but, in the UK, flies do commonly cause a reduction in feed intake and severe irritation to cows and staff."

Good environmental management is still a mainstay for fly control, says Mr Thompson. This includes frequent mucking out, good drainage, cleaning up spilled feed and maintenance of concrete. However, with the best will in the world, flies cannot be avoided.

Bothered

"There are many traditional pour-on products available based on synthetic pyrethroids which kill adult flies as they feed on animals.

"They are great for newly turned-out heifers which are getting bothered by flies under trees and near watercourses. In this case, pour-on products have a long-acting effect and can be an excellent labour-saving product.

"However, by using a product which kills adult flies on your cattle, you are, in some ways, tackling the problem a bit late."

Other products tackle the fly problem at source, he says, reducing numbers around cattle housing and in the parlour.

"Residual products use pheromones to draw flies in and kill them on contact. They can last up to one month but flies



Charlie Thompson

can become insensitive to the pheromone, meaning effectiveness does wane."

Biological control is a relatively new natural method which works by distributing the fly parasite, pteromalid wasp.

"With 85 per cent of flies on-farm in the 'developing maggot' and 'pupal' stages, the key is to attack the problem at source," says Mr Thompson.

"The tiny parasites, which are proving popular on farms across the country, search out and kill developing flies."

The parasites live around areas where flies reproduce and do not bother cows or humans.

By attacking flies early in their reproductive cycle, it is a more efficient way of reducing fly numbers without using any chemicals, he says.

"As with a lot of control schemes, there is no one simple cure. A combination of fly control options will give the best results."

MORE INFORMATION
Visit www.clovergroup.eu/flycontrol.html

How do pteromalid wasp parasites work?

FEEDING on developing fly larvae, the wasp parasites interrupt the fly breeding cycle, reducing their numbers.

Parasite larvae is spread and subsequently hatches in warm damp areas where flies are reproducing. Within their 10-30 day lifespan, they lay eggs in the developing fly larvae where they grow, producing more wasps.

One bag of the parasites contains about 50,000 larvae,

considered enough to cover 100 milking cows and all the youngstock associated.

Population

Mr Thompson says: "In warm spells, flies will unfortunately still outbreed the wasp parasites at a rate of 3:1, so more parasite larvae must be put out every fortnight to maintain a high enough population.

"It is also much better to be

ahead of the curve of fly numbers and put the parasite larvae out early in fly season to allow an earlier preventative effect.

"At our practice, we found it useful for our vet technicians to visit farms and analyse the most beneficial places for parasite larvae to be dispensed.

"Good areas include muck heaps, around calf sheds, cubicles, box muck, under water troughs, straw yards,

cow tracks, and near cruste over lagoons.

"They must be dispensed areas where they are not go to be completely buried or trampled. As with any produ if it is not correctly used and administered, the full benefit will not be achieved.

"Our vet technicians retur to each farm every two wee to spread the extra larvae throughout fly breeding sea



The wasp parasites do not harm or bother cows or humans.