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If You Lead a Cow to Water, Make Sure it is Safe to Drink

Water is a critical nutrient for cattle but before they drink it, producers need to make sure they are providing a quality water source.

“As with feed ingredients, water must meet the nutritional needs of the animal. With many farm ponds running low, now is a critical time to ensure cattle have an adequate clean water supply,” said Dona Funk, University of Missouri Extension livestock specialist.

The source of water is actually a determining factor to how much water an animal will consume. According to Funk, cattle will actually choose not to wade in mud to get a drink of water.

“Research shows there is an increase in weight gains when steers are allowed to drink well water out of a tank versus drinking from a pond,” said Funk. “It has also been shown that cattle would rather drink pond water that was pumped to a tank rather than drink the same water directly out of the pond. Providing tank water systems with either a well or a pond as the water source can enhance water quality and livestock performance.”

Most water sources are satisfactory for livestock use. However, a poor water source, usually with a high concentration of dissolved salts or heavy algae growth, can result in decreased performance or death.

“Heavy algae growths occur in stagnant or slow-flowing bodies of water. A few species of algae can actually be toxic to cattle so we recommend avoiding stagnant water sources for livestock,” said Funk.

During times of hot weather or drought, livestock producers are reminded that water can be the most important and most inexpensive nutrients given to their cattle.

“By ensuring high quality water from a good water source, we can take a step toward maximizing the return of our livestock enterprises,” said Funk.

For more information, contact any of the MU Extension livestock specialists in southwest Missouri: Eldon Cole in Mt. Vernon, (417) 466-3102; Gary Naylor in Dallas County, (417) 345-7551; and Dona Funk in Cedar County, (417) 276-3313.

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