



Fire Ant Management on Pasture and Rangeland Requires a Tailored Plan

ANTIXX[®] FIRE ANT BAIT

There is no one-size-fits-all plan for economically treating fire ants on agricultural properties.

Most landowners in the southern tier of the U.S. suffer losses from red imported fire ants on their rangeland and pastures¹. From the very real threat of injury to humans and young animals to equipment damage, lost labor and forage degradation, losses can quickly add up.

The problem is, most working properties are too large to treat 100 percent of the land area. So, owners have to take a close look at where their most costly fire ant problems arise and the best way to treat individual locations within the property.

Researchers from Texas AgriLife Extension and the Alabama Cooperative Extension put together a useful worksheet for landowners in a publication titled, "Management of Imported Fire Ants in Cattle Production." The worksheet lists all the categories where a landowner could suffer losses including:

- Around the homestead
- Medical treatment for people and pets
- Electrical and utility equipment damage
- Penned or livestock injuries
- Ruined feed or hay





- Equipment repairs or replacement (such as breakdown of shredder, cutter)
- Hay pasture losses in yield, lost time due to equipment cleaning or repair
- Livestock pasture/rangeland injuries or deaths
- Wildlife predation
- Fishing ponds loss of access

Step 1

Researchers suggest drawing a map of your property, or using an aerial photo, and deciding where fire ant control is most important. For example, houses, feed barns or equipment sheds where there is heavy foot traffic are prime locations for treatment.

Fire ant mounds, which can reach heights of 18 inches in heavy soils, can cause major equipment damage in hayfields and custom cutting crews have been known to charge more for their services if that's a likely problem. Not to mention, hay sold from

quarantined areas is regulated if it's to be shipped out of the area.

Out on the range, newborn livestock and wildlife are susceptible to fire ant attack, particularly in the summer when it's hot and dry, causing the ants to seek out food and moisture. Some producers choose to limit calving, for example, to particular pastures and treat only those pastures to protect the valuable babies born there.

Step 2

Once the decision of where to treat for fire ants is made, the next step is to decide how. That, too, depends on the area being treated. Some products can be used for lawns but not pastures. Others can be used around corrals or sheds but not crop areas. Always check labels and use the appropriate product for every location and scenario.

Products like Antixx® Fire Ant Bait, which have spinosad as the active ingredient, are labeled for broad usage in range and pasture, as well as lawns, gardens, parks, farmsteads, golf courses and playgrounds. Spinosad is naturally derived from soil bacterium so it's gentle on the environment but works quickly and effectively to start killing mounds, including the queen, within 24 hours.

According to research from the University of Tennessee Extension, the most economical treatment for pastures is to broadcast an insecticide-laced bait that will be picked up by foraging worker ants and taken back to their colonies.

After a broadcast treatment, landowners can follow up with

individual mound treatments in areas where tolerance for fire ants is low, like working pens. It's called the "Two Step" method. Generally, a spring and fall broadcast treatment is recommended as weather permits, followed up in a few weeks with the individual mound treatments.

What Not to Do

While a commitment to regular monitoring and treating fire ant populations is necessary to keep them under control, there are a few things landowners need to know not to do. First, don't put out fire ant bait if the ants aren't foraging. Typically, temperatures need to be between 70 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit for that. Once it's seasonally warm enough to treat, avoid dispensing bait during the hot midday or on wet, rainy days. Also, do not disturb the mounds before treatment. That will anger the fire ants and cause the colony to move before they can come into contact with the bait.

Finally, make sure your fire ant bait hasn't gotten old or rancid. Maintain the freshness and attractiveness of the bait by keeping containers tightly sealed and use the product within the season of purchase. Heat and humidity can also cause the bait to degrade. If unsure, put a little bait and a potato chip out around a mound for about 30 minutes to see if the fire ants literally take the bait or not.

More information is available at www.neudorffpro.org/ant-baits.html.

1. *Management of Imported Fire Ants in Cattle Production Systems*, Alabama Cooperative Extension, http://counties.agrilife.org/liberty/files/2015/11/fireantscattle_23.pdf

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