

How farmers can keep their cattle safe, productive

Routine practices such as hoof trimming, vaccination and record-keeping should not be neglected. Keeping simple records of treatments, calving dates and milk production helps farmers detect problems early and plan better.

SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

When the rainy season starts, several farmers breathe a sigh of relief but others hustle to make sure that their livestock including cattle survive due to several challenges which comes with damp.

When the dry season dust settles, pasture turns green and water becomes profuse. Yet, for cattle keepers across the country, the rainy season is not just a blessing it is also a period of hidden dangers that can wipe out herds if farmers are unprepared.

Mr James Mawanda, a farmer from Mpigi-Bujiuko, says from disease outbreaks to flooding, accidents and poor feeding practices, the wet months test the resilience and knowledge of livestock farmers.

"For those who understand the risks and take timely action, however, the rains can be a season of growth and productivity rather than loss," he explains.

Lessons from painful experience

Mr Mawanda says not so long ago, he was challenged by the weather changes and did not have any idea on how to maneuver from one season to another.

"When I had just started farming, I lost three calves and one cow within weeks during the rainy season. I had grass and water in plenty, but the animals kept falling sick. I thought rain meant everything would be fine," he says.

A post-mortem assessment by veterinary officers revealed a combination of problems which in-

clude tick-borne diseases, worms and exposure to cold and damp conditions.

"That is when I realised that rain alone does not take care of cattle but Management does," he says, adding that his story is common across Uganda, where livestock contributes significantly to household incomes, nutrition and cultural identity, especially in rural areas but management still a challenge.

Disease thrives in wet conditions

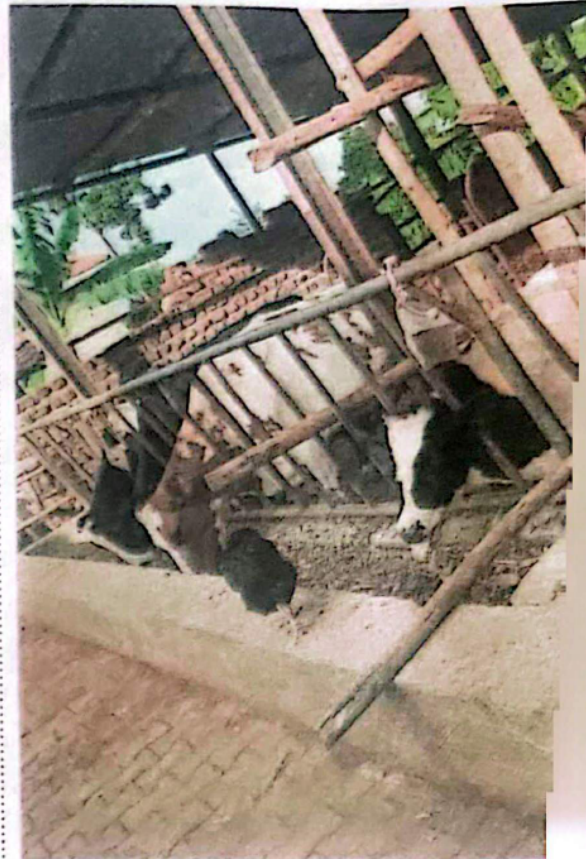
According to veterinary expert Mr Abbey Kafeero, the rainy season creates ideal conditions for parasites and disease-causing organisms.

"Ticks multiply rapidly in moist grasslands, increasing cases of East Coast fever, anaplasmosis and babesiosis. Worm infestations also rise as larvae spread easily in wet soil and pasture. During the rains, farmers must double their vigilance," he says.

Mr Kafeero says if spraying, dipping and deworming are delayed, losses can be devastating. These must be done severally especially when the rainy season is on.

"Standing water around kraals and grazing areas can also spread bacterial infections and diarrhea diseases, particularly among calves," he says, adding that foot rot - a painful condition caused by prolonged exposure to wet and muddy ground - is another common problem that affects mobility and milk production.

"Farmers should maintain regular tick control schedules, ensure timely deworming and seek veterinary attention at the first signs of illness such as fever, loss of appe-



Farmers are encouraged to supplement grazing with banana peels. PHOTO/SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

THE DEAL

Stagnant water around kraals and grazing areas can also spread bacterial infections and diarrhea diseases, particularly among calves. Also, foot rot - a painful condition caused by prolonged exposure to wet and muddy ground - is another common problem that affects mobility and milk production.

tite, limping or sudden drop in milk yield," he advises.

Shelter: the overlooked necessity

While cattle are often perceived as hardy animals, Mr Kafeero says prolonged exposure to rain and cold weakens their immune systems for calves, pregnant cows and sick animals are especially vulnerable.

"A dry resting place is not a luxury but a necessity. Animals that sleep in mud and cold spend more energy trying to keep warm instead of producing milk or gaining weight," he says, adding that simple improvements such as raised floors, proper drainage and roofing made from iron sheets or grass can significantly reduce disease risk.

"Farmers are also encouraged to use dry bedding materials such as straw or sawdust and to regularly clean kraals to prevent the build-up of manure and stagnant water," he says.

Pastures, hidden hunger

One of the biggest misconceptions during the rainy season is

that green grass alone provides, it may not fulfil nutritional needs of dairy cows, pregnant calves.

"Rain fed grass low in essential supplementation appear well fed but deficiencies," Mr

Farmers are to supplement grass with crop residues, stover and barlicks and salt deficiencies to milk yield and "Clean drink important. All tiful during t and contam pose cattle to

Managing fergers

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