

On Fly Control

By Liz Bawden

There's nothing quite like the feeling of crunching on a few flies that flew in your open mouth as you try to express something important to a neighbor. Ahh, it's fly season yet again. The battle has begun.

This year on our farm, we have employed several hundred thousand fly parasites, and we are astonished with how well they are working. The new employees began arriving at our northern New York farm in early May, and a shipment of 40,000 arrives each week thereafter. The parasites arrive in a pupal stage of development in a plastic bag, and you wait until you see 15 or 20 of them have hatched before releasing them around fly breeding grounds. A handful is tossed around each water trough, under the stable cleaner elevator, into the group pens, near the eggdges of manure piles, in the pastures, anyplace where moisture and manure provide a breeding ground for flies.

The fly parasites are actually several species of wasps, about the size of a gnat. The wasps parasitize flies in the pupal stage; they live for 2 weeks to 1 month, and females lay 75 to 100 eggs during this time. They disperse themselves about 150 feet from where they emerged, so getting them close fly breeding areas

is good enough. The parasites only work on flies that breed in manure like the house, horn, and stable flies. Horse flies and deer flies are unaffected since these are semi-aquatic breeders.

Even with all the help from the fly parasites, we still hang the sticky tape in the barn. We have found over the years that the brand "Mr. Sticky" gets the most flies over any other similar product. And we keep a garden sprayer in the barn to use for those days before a rain when the flies come in on the cows from pasture, and are really biting. We have used a rotation of fly spray products over the years, usually we change products each season. We have used Crystal Creek's No-Fly, Pyganic, and Agri-Dynamics' Ecto-Phyte; all of them are good useful products. We just rotated them around in the hope that the flies wouldn't get used to one of them.

Good sanitation practices in the barn will keep your fly population down. Keep gutters cleaned out at least every 7 days (it takes 8 days for a stable fly to go through its cycle from egg to adult). Scrape down those damp corners. We switch our normal calf bedding from chopped hay to wood shavings during the summer, and scrape them out each day.

One of the more controversial fly control methods is having poultry in and around the barn. It works to control flies around the barn. The Muskovy Duck is renowned for its efforts in fly control, eating mostly the adult flies. Chickens tend to eat the larva (maggots) and pupa as they scratch in those corners where the flies breed. ♦



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