



PINK EYE IN ORGANIC CATTLE

Guidance

Pink eye in cattle, medically known as infectious bovine keratoconjunctivitis, is a contagious bacterial infection of the eye. Cattle Pink eye is different from human Pink eye, which, although usually infectious, is not highly contagious. Pink eye in cattle also looks clinically different and is usually much more severe than the disease in humans.

Pink eye in cattle is most commonly caused by a bacterium called *Moraxella bovis*. This microbe uses tiny hair like structures to attach to the white part, or the conjunctiva, of the eye and cause damage. *M. bovis* is spread by flies, which feed on eye secretions and are a constant source of irritation to cattle in the summer months, providing the perfect recipe for eyeball infection. Pink eye most commonly affects beef calves and, in some herds, can greatly affect productivity. For the health and well-being of the animal and the farmer's bottom line, Pink eye should be treated as quickly as possible.

NOP REGULATIONS AND PCO POLICY

The National Organic Program (NOP) regulations require that livestock producers establish and maintain preventive livestock health care practices. When preventive practices and veterinary biologics are inadequate to prevent a sickness, such as pink eye, a producer may administer synthetic medications, provided that such medications are allowed according to the NOP regulations. If allowed medications fail, you must not withhold a medical treatment from a sick animal in an effort to preserve its organic status. All appropriate medications must be used to restore an animal to health when methods acceptable to organic production fail. Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and shall not be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced. §205.238

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

SYMPTOMS OF PINK EYE

Symptoms of pink eye include:

- Excessive tearing
- Frequent blinking or squinting
- Decreased appetite due to eye pain
- Corneal ulceration and cloudiness
- Potential blindness or eye rupture
- Can affect one or both eyes
- Younger cattle typically more susceptible

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The best practice to manage Pink eye is to prevent it from occurring. Pasture management is one component of Pink eye control. Grass that is headed out can irritate eyes, causing them to tear and thus attracting face flies. Keeping pastures trimmed can reduce this irritation.

Controlling face flies is a very important step for preventing the spread of Pink eye. Ecto phyte by Agri-Dynamics, Shoo Fly Spray by Dr. Sarah's Essentials, Evergreen Pyrethrum Concentrate by MGK, and No Fly Repellant, Oil-Based, by Crystal Creek are commonly used for controlling flies.

Vaccination is another way to prevent Pink eye, and vaccines are allowed in organic production (§205.603(a)(4)). Piliguard Pinkeye Triview Vaccine by Intervet/ Merck/Schering-Plough and I-Site XP Pink eye Cattle Vaccine by AgriLabs are two examples of Pink eye vaccines. Consult your herd-health veterinarian about the timing of vaccination and which vaccine to use in your area.

Finally, supplementing feed with kelp or other minerals can strengthen immune systems, which can help prevent cattle from getting Pink eye. Injectable vitamins, such as MultiMin 90 by MultiMin USA, can also keep your herd healthy. Injectable nutritive supplements, including vitamins, nutrients, and electrolytes, are allowed by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian. §205.603(a)(21)

Treatment Practices

The key to treating Pink eye is catching the disease early. If possible, confine any cattle showing symptoms of Pink eye so as to prevent the spread throughout the herd. It is important to protect the eyes from sunlight. Eyepatches, such as Shut Eye for Pink eye by American Animal Health, Inc., are allowed for this use. Allowed Pink eye treatments include raw honey and aloe vera juice applied directly to the eye. Antibiotics are not allowed in organic production, so they cannot be used to treat Pink eye on cows that will be sold, labeled, or represented as organic. However, in cases where the cow does not respond to other treatments, antibiotics or other drugs cannot be withheld to preserve the organic status of an animal that is suffering. Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and shall not be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced.

APPROVED INPUTS

All inputs must be reviewed and approved by PCO prior to use, so be sure to check with us or consult a current PCO Approved Materials List, OMRI, or WSDA list prior to purchasing or using a product. PCO does not endorse any of the products listed in this guidance document. This is not an all-inclusive list and other inputs may be allowed. Please contact PCO if you have any questions on materials or restrictions.

- **Super Wound Spray** by Dr. Paul's Lab
- **Bright Eyes** by Agri-Dynamics

PCO is not endorsing the efficacy of any of the approved treatments, and producers should work with a trained professional to treat any distressed animals.

RESOURCES

- <http://www.beemagazine.com/health/vets-opinion/busting-Pink-eye-in-cattle-0401>
- <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-2689/VTMD-9128web.pdf>
- <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/whatsnew/article.cfm?id=3204>