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Time to Check Cattle for Gulf Coast Ticks

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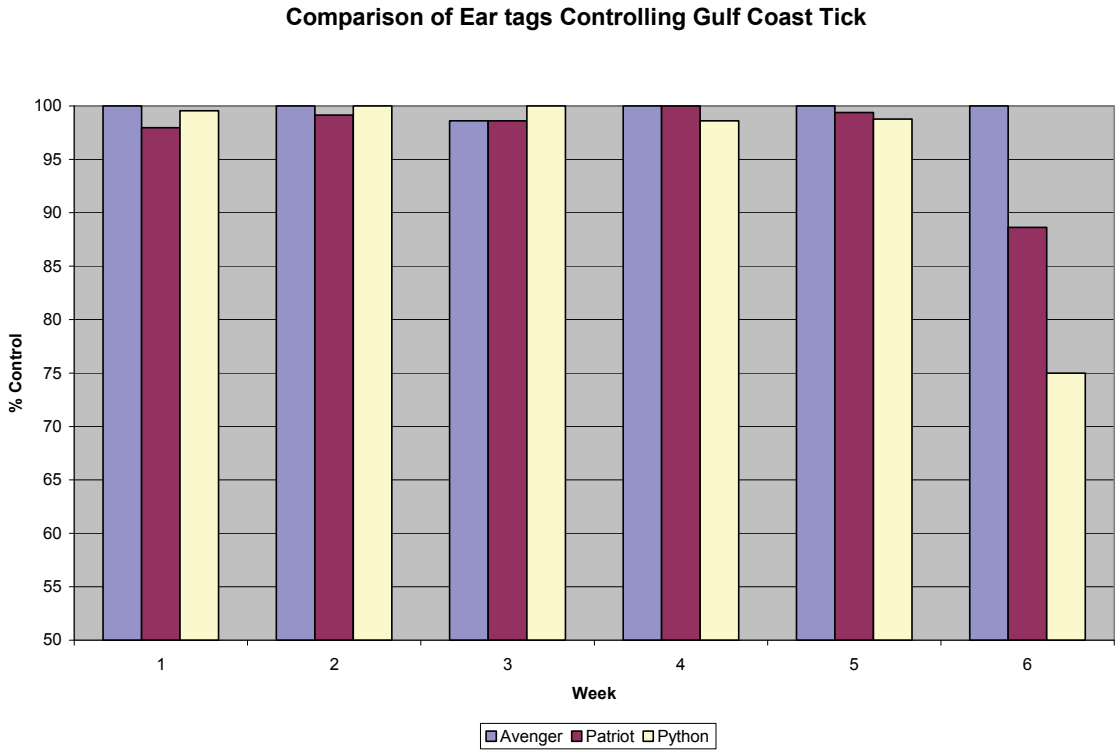
Gulf Coast Ticks

It is time to start checking cattle for Gulf Coast Ticks especially if you have had problems with this tick in the past. Gulf Coast Ticks (*Amblyomma maculatum*) are found in the ears of cattle. Heavy infestations cause the ears to become thickened and curled, causing a condition called "gotch ear." This tick is considered a three-host tick and as larvae and nymphs, they are commonly found on ground-inhabiting birds, such as meadowlarks and bobwhite quail, or small rodents. This tick has become increasingly more abundant in eastern Oklahoma and infestations can be seen on cattle from early April to mid-June. They are reddish brown with pale lines along the back and very similar to but slightly smaller than American Dog Ticks. Gulf Coast Ticks have longer mouthparts than the American Dog Tick. This tick is considered a presumed vector of *Ehrlichia ruminantium*, the rickettsial causative agent of heartwater, an African disease of ruminants that may enter the United States from the Caribbean. This tick has also been documented to cause tick paralysis in cattle. Recently, research has demonstrated that this tick can vector a closely related rickettsial bacterium of the causative agent of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, *Rickettsia parkeri*. In 2004, the first confirmed human infection with *R. parkeri* was reported and has since been detected in Gulf Coast Ticks from Oklahoma.

The most effective means of controlling this tick is to tag your cattle with an insecticide impregnated ear tag. In the spring of 2007 I compared three different ear tags for the control of Gulf Coast Ticks. I tagged the animals in early May and calculated from an untreated control group the percent control that was obtained from each ear tag. The three tags that were compared were Avenger® (KMG Inc.), Patriot® (KMG Inc.), and Python® (Y-Tex Inc.). These tags were specifically selected for the reason of each tag representing a different chemical class.

Avenger® is a chlorinated hydrocarbon, Patriot® is an organophosphate, and Python® is a pyrethroid. Each of these products has different modes of action in how they kill the ticks. Results are presented in the graph with Avenger® represented as the blue bar, Patriot® represented as the red bar, and Python® represented as the cream bar. As you can see all tags performed very well for controlling the ticks through week 5 but Avenger® seem to last through week 6. The study was terminated after week 6 due to no ticks being found on the untreated cattle after this point. It is important to point out that all tags performed at a satisfactory level for the amount of time Gulf Coast Tick would spend on the cattle. Remember to check your cattle for these ticks and if treatment is warranted then tag your cattle with an appropriate ear tag. Also, if you do tag your cattle and horn flies become a problem later you may have to remove the ear tags so insecticide resistance does not build up in the horn fly population.

"Gotch ear" from a Gulf Coast Tick



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