

## Flying Fiends



I hate flies, and chiggers, and ticks, and gnats, and mosquitoes. Mostly I HATE flies. Over the years I have tried nearly every fly repellent, fly trap, fly bait, fly paper, you name it. They all work to some extent but the reality is that cleanliness, and eliminating fly breeding areas is the best way to control the fly population around your barn. FIRST avoid overcrowding. Overcrowding promotes the accumulation of too much manure and dirty bedding for your farm to handle. Making manure piles, especially close to your barn is just setting out a picnic lunch. Manure should be spread to allow for it to dry (flies need a certain amount of moisture for eggs and maggots to survive). The typical life cycle of a stable fly is

about 4 – 6 days from egg to mature fly. So cleaning the barn thoroughly at least once a week goes a long way to breaking that life cycle. AS with controlling any pest breaking the life cycle is KEY to controlling numbers.

Adding other fly control methods to your regular cleaning can keep flies to a very minimum. I really like those stinky fly traps, but you have to use them correctly. The mistake a lot of people make is to hang those traps inside the barn or at the barn entrance. Many people hang them too high. These traps work by luring flies to them. And they do this very well! The instructions say to hang the trap a distance **away** from the barn. So hang them in a place you don't walk through or linger. These traps when they are working at their peak really smell awful, you don't want them nearby anyway! If your barn is reasonably clean the trap will be much more alluring to flies and they will go there instead.

Fly paper will help with those few flies that do decide to hang around your barn. They work by attracting flies by their scent but also by seeming to offer a fine place to light and rest. Ever notice how flies like to gather on hanging cords, string and such? This is part of the allure of fly paper and those nifty fly strings.

Some people have good success with fly predators as part of their fly control program, especially if their neighbors' barns and manure piles are a good distance away. These are tiny (I mean TINY) parasitic wasps that prey on fly pupae. The key here is to avoid using pesticides both chemical and natural (they kill the fly predators too) and to begin using the fly predators very early in the season. They work by flooding the nearby area with a dense population of predators, more than what would be found in the wild. They will only work in a relatively small area as the fly predators are not strong fliers. They must be released in areas where the flies are breeding and pupating. So if your nearby neighbor doesn't do much to control fly breeding grounds on his property, using predators on your property won't do much to control the adult flies on yours.

Years ago Dan and I switched from a sweet goat feed to a pelleted feed. This seemed to attract far fewer flies to both the feed and to the residue left on feeders and bowls. We've all heard the expression, "You can attract more flies with honey than with vinegar," and this is so true with the grain feeds we use for our livestock. Sweet feed with its coating of molasses is irresistible to flies. We also make an effort to keep spilled feed of any kind to a minimum. When the pellets or fines (the powder left from the pellets) is dumped on the ground and gets wet it rapidly ferments and flies find it to be an ideal source of food.