Echos From our Network - Tick Control

L. E. Andrews in Houston, Texas. "It sounds like Mr. Mears in Ecuador has a lot of problems with ticks! I think
the solution is with guinea fowl rather than chickens. They love to eat ticks, as well as beetles, spiders, flies etc.

"A big plus is that they eat snakes. We have a lot of copperheads in this area. A friend bought some land that was infested with copperheads and some rattlesnakes. In 34 years after bringing in some guinea fowl you could not find a snake on the property. They eat the small snakes and gang up on larger ones, pecking them to death. They also eat young mice. They are the best watch dog you can have to alert you of any activity at night.

"I'd recommend raising the young (called keets) in a pen near the feed lot to help them bond to the cattle. Feed
them just a little grain and a lot of ticks (you could hire kids to collect the ticks). When they are mature, they will form teams moving through the fields and feed lot. Feed them only a little bit, at night, in the feedlot with the cattle to encourage them to center around that area."

[Ed. Thanks for the good suggestions. Beware, though, if you have a lot of mulched gardens. Several years ago
ECHO obtained 12 guinea fowl because I read that they would go through gardens eating only insects and leaving plants alone. A week after we turned them loose on the farm I butchered them all. They did not eat the plants, but they were a disaster in our heavily mulched gardens. Their constant scratching quickly dug out some plants and buried others. If we did not use so much mulch they would have become a permanent fixture here.]

Marsha Hanzi, Instituto de Permacultura da Bahia, Brazil. "Regarding ticks on cattle, this is also a serious
problem in the Brazilian altiplano, where it has been successfully kept within limits with the guinea fowl. They have the advantage over the chicken of liking the hot climate and of adapting to the wild. They virtually become wildlife, living and reproducing without human aid.

"Proliferation of ticks is a sign of soil degradation, at least here in Brazil. On our farm we had an outbreak only
when the pasture became old, even though the neighbors farms were always infested. Healthy animals on healthy soil have relatively few ticks. I personally

suspect it has to do with microelements which are often deficient in tropical soils. One homeopathic doctor suggested that adding a little sulfur to the cattle's drinking water helps increase resistance. It seemed to work in our case."

Daniel Priest, Bolivia. "I just received the December EDN and notice that people continue mentioning chickens
for tick control in cattle. Since I have had a little experience with this, I thought I would write.

"First, good 'indicus' (hump on the back) cattle are naturally very resistant. Crossing with European breeds usually gives potential for higher production, but also greatly increases the tick problem. There is a wide variation in degree of tick resistance in those crossbred cattle, so selection can be very effective.

"Several years ago I bought Brown Swiss bulls to cross with Nelore. The bulls, and their progeny, had a very high
capacity for picking up ticks. The cattle would come to loaf in the yard where we also raised chickens. The chickens would pick the cattle clean, even jumping a couple of feet in the air to grab a juicer, and the cattle seemed to enjoy it. A side advantage was the nutrition of the chickens.

"After about three years I started to notice indications of a significant transfer of fertility from the pasture to the
loafing area. Because of this I stopped letting the cattle spend much time in the same area. Now, although the cattle do spend a little time near the chickens, both cattle and chickens seem to have lost the custom. Apparently the two must spend a good bit of time together to get acquainted and start to help each other out

"A practice that is becoming more widely used in Brazil is the feeding of the aerial part of the cassava plant to
cattle. It must be chopped and left for a day before feeding to lower the toxicity. Not only does it contain around 12% crude protein, but it controls ticks, probably due to the small amount of prussic acid remaining even after drying for a day. Although this practice is encouraged by Brazilian researchers, I still wonder if it might not adversely affect the beneficial microorganisms in the rumen as well as the ticks."

 http://edn.link/pdqhtt