

Fall Grazing Danger

It is that time of the year, no it is not time to turn your clocks back yet, but can you turn your cows out on the recently harvested milo field? As with every question comes a lot more questions before the correct answer can be given.

Milo fields can be excellent forage source for stocker cattle or cows this fall. However, milo stocks, sorghum-sudan grass varieties, and even Johnson grass can cause cyanide poisoning.

The plant's maturity level is the key to whether a plant can be toxic to cattle. Prussic acid is very diluted in mature plants and that greatly reduces the risk to your cattle.

When cattle ingest plants containing prussic acid, the hydrogen cyanide poisoning interferes with the cattle's ability to utilize oxygen. The hydrogen cyanide makes it impossible to pull oxygen from the blood into the body's cells. Cattle are being asphyxiated by the poison.

Prevention is the key to avoiding the problem. New growth from milo stalks can be deadly to cattle. Wait at least 7 to 10 days after a killing frost to graze your milo stalks. Have your cattle full with hay before turning out in a milo field. That should help keep them from overconsuming.

Signs of poisoning in cattle include irritation, excitability, labored breathing and salivating. If the poison continues to affect them, the animals will grow weak, start to stagger and eventually will collapse. There are antidotes that work to counteract the poison, but they must be administered very soon. Most infected animals will not make it.

For more information, contact Dale Lanham at the Southwind Extension Office in Yates Center.

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