

BEEF CATTLE MANAGEMENT

Avoiding Wrecks with Your Cattle Heard in Managing for Acorns'

By: Lee Dudley – Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agent Agriculture and Natural Resources Panola County

Area producers and homeowners that receive the monthly electronic newsletter “The Panola Extension” might have already read this article, however I felt that the subject matter was of such importance that it necessitated a reprint for the local newspaper. As seasons transition to cooler temperatures, we can expect to start seeing an increase in green acorns being knocked from the oak trees in area pastures. During a normal summer with adequate rainfall and ample moisture levels, we would not be bothered with this. But in years such as this one, when our standing forage supplies as well as our harvested supplies are well below normal levels, we can expect to see our already hungry cattle start to seek out and consume green acorns. With the consumption of large amounts of acorns, we can expect to see cattle experiencing upset gastrointestinal tracts; developing diarrhea, becoming dehydrated, constipated, and emaciated; ultimately dying.

Acorn poisoning is caused by a chemical called tannins. Poisoning from tannins found in all acorns, generally occurs as they fall from trees in the immature green stage, followed by over consumption by cattle. We can see this occur in our pastures where there is not much grass left nor hay is being fed. Such as the conditions we find ourselves in this year county wide. Sickness in cattle starts 8-14 days after the cattle started eating acorns, with an animals' tolerance level being influenced by the protein content of its diet. Those animals being supplemented with a high protein diet can consume more acorns without having poisoning symptoms.

Those cattle affected by acorn poisoning will have a poor appetite, appear dull, become constipated, suffering extreme weight loss, looking gaunt or “tucked up”. They may also secrete blood in the manure and/or bleed from the nostrils. Profuse diarrhea may follow the constipation. In addition, affected animals will drink large amounts of water and void excessive amounts of clear urine that could also contain blood. When clinical stages persist for three to seven days, many of the affected cattle will go down not being able to rise again. If these animals do not die, it may take as long as two to three weeks before they start to recover. If you are suspecting such a problem, we strongly suggest you contact a veterinarian as soon as possible.

To help correct the deficiencies of a stressed, thin cow heard, it is important to provide plenty of good-quality hay. When feeding hay, consider both the quantity and quality fed, and supplement when needed with the proper amounts of protein and/or energy supplements. Even if the hay is of poor quality, feeding in large enough amounts might provide adequate energy, but the cattle will be deficient in protein. Providing good hay but not enough of it can improve the protein deficiency but still leave the cattle lacking in energy. For those cattle that become severely affected by acorn poisoning, treatment is of little value. However, for those cattle remaining on the “poor” oak tree pastures, provide supplemental feed containing hydrated lime (Calcium Hydroxide) and protein, which are “antidotes” for the tannins.

Obviously, acorn poisoning can be prevented by removing cattle from areas with oak trees when acorns have recently fallen. These pastures should be held in reserve for grazing in late fall or winter, when the acorns have had a chance to age, turn brown and become somewhat less toxic.

No matter when cattle are turned onto oak tree pasture, remember that they still could be affected if they eat too many acorns. If you have any questions pertaining to this article or any others, contact Lee Dudley County Extension Agent Ag & NR Panola County at (903) 693-0300 Ext 161.

Upcoming Panola County AgriLife Extension Events/Programs:

October 16th: Major Stock Show Validation for Lambs and Goats 2pm – 4pm Beckville Highschool

October 18th: 4-H Cooking Night 5:30 – 7:00 pm Central Baptist Church

October 19th: Entries due into office for County Food Show

October 20th: Panola SWCD Hay Show/Program 6 pm Panola County Expo

October 25th: Validation for Major Stock Show Breeding Heifers 6 – 7 pm

November 1st: Panola County 4-H Food Show

November 4th: All Entries for Major Stock Shows Due into Office