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Acorns Can Cause Poisoning

A good acorn crop can pose a serious threat to cattle producers. Most animals are susceptible to acorn poisoning, although cattle and sheep are affected most often. Most species of North American oak trees are considered toxic. Clinical signs of illness occur several days after consumption of large quantities of green acorns in the fall.

Some cattle can apparently eat acorns with no ill effect, while others develop kidney and digestive problems that can lead to death. Brood cows consuming acorns during the second trimester of pregnancy have produced malformed calves.

Symptoms of acorn poisoning include lack of appetite, rough hair coat, a dry muzzle covered with dry, crusty blood, abdominal pain, excessive thirst, frequent urination, and thin rapid pulse. There usually is not an increase in body temperature. Tannic acid in acorns is poisonous and can cause death by severely damaging the kidneys.

The best way to prevent acorn poisoning is to keep cattle away from acorns, but if you fence off an area covered with acorns, you may have to leave the fence up for a while. Acorns retain high levels of tannic acid for several months. Mature cows grazing on acorn pasture can be partially protected by feeding 4 pounds of the following mixture each day-cottonseed meal, whole cottonseed or ground soybeans (40%), cottonseed hulls or corn (44%), hydrated lime (10%) and liquid molasses or vegetable oil (6%). Use

liquid molasses with either whole cottonseed or ground soybeans. For calves, feed 2 pounds of the mixture per head per day in a creep feeder.

The goal is to get the mature cows to consume about .4 pound of hydrated lime each day. Other mixes that provide this rate of intake can be used, but because hydrated lime is unpalatable, the mix should contain no more than 10 percent lime. It is difficult to thoroughly mix hydrated lime in supplemental feeds, so molasses or vegetable oil is recommended to prevent the lime from settling out of the mixture. If a mature cow is constipated because of acorns, administer 2 to 3 quarts of mineral oil orally. Continue treatment as needed.

For more information visit our website www.aces.edu or call our office at 766-6223.