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## **NOVEMBER 2012 NEWSLETTER**

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### **Cold weather livestock tips**

It is always good advice for livestock owners to prepare for the cold-weather. This is because animals can suffer from hypothermia, frostbite and other cold weather injuries. Harsh conditions can weaken their immune systems, leaving them vulnerable to illness. It is essential to think about extra nutrition, access to water, plenty of good bedding, and proper shelter for livestock.

We recommend the following:

**Shelter** — Since wind-chill is an ever present condition make sure animals have a place to get out of the wind, even if it is just a windbreak or a three-sided shelter. Watch that other buildings don't deflect wind and snow into the shelter.

**Food** — Livestock kept outdoors will need more food energy than usual. As a general rule, nutrient requirements increase about 1% for every degree that the temperature falls below 7° C.

**Water** — Provide access to fresh water – not frozen– daily. Stock tank heaters and frost-proof watering systems will ensure that livestock get enough to drink.

**Bedding** — Keep plenty of *dry* bedding to insulate udders and legs from frostbite.

**Moisture** — Long hair or fleece insulates only when it is dry. Prevent wet or muddy hair or fleece heat loss.

**Transportation** — When hauling animals, cover openings in the vehicle box to cut wind chill and keep rain out, but allow some air to pass over the animals for ventilation. Provide a deep bed of dry straw for calves younger than 4 months

## **Aflatoxin-Contaminated Feeds: Watch Effects on Dairy**

Aflatoxin is produced by the *Aspergillus* mold and oddly enough it thrives in periods of excessive heat and drought as we had this past summer. Spores are spread by the wind to infect silks or kernels. Aflatoxin is considered carcinogenic (cancer-causing) to animals and potentially humans. For that reason, aflatoxin contamination is of great concern.

### **How Much is Too Much?**

When aflatoxin-contaminated feeds are ingested by dairy cows, the toxin can be absorbed by the animals and enter the milk. CFIA requires that all milk contain less than 0.5 ppb aflatoxin. Any milk above that level must be dumped. It is estimated that the absorption rate of dietary aflatoxin is between 1.75 and 2.0 percent. Thus, to stay below the maximum limit of 0.5 ppb in milk, the overall feed concentration cannot be higher 20 ppb (Canadian Food Inspection Agency).

### **Is it in my feed?**

Aflatoxin levels vary greatly from field to field and even plant to plant. Also consider that, although your fields appear aflatoxin-free, your feeds may still be at risk for contamination especially if you are feeding byproducts that originated in drought and heat-stressed areas. Make sure that your feed suppliers are checking and rejecting feed with high levels of aflatoxin.

### **How do I test my corn grain for aflatoxin?**

Proper sampling is critical. It is recommended to take at least 8 to 12 samples at each of 3 to 5 locations in the feed bin or trough. Mix the sub-samples and take a composite sample.

### **What are my feeding options?**

First, if you suspect aflatoxin in a field, harvest that first, and get the corn drying. It's critical to maintain low moisture levels of 13 to 15 percent. A storage temperature below 5°C is ideal if weather permits. Options for managing aflatoxin in your feeds are that you might be able to **dilute** the feed if the aflatoxin is at a manageable level. Research trials have shown that certain feed ingredients may **bind** the aflatoxin. Second, you may **divert** the grain to be fed to other species less susceptible to aflatoxin. Lastly, roasting corn at 140 to 160°C can reduce the aflatoxin content by 40 to 80 percent. Remember, the higher roasting temperature may result in some loss in feed value.

### **What if aflatoxin shows up in my milk?**

Aflatoxin can have a significant economic impact. Once you start feeding corn with a high level of aflatoxin, the milk level goes up almost immediately. However, it may take four to five days after you eliminate the contaminated feed for the milk aflatoxin level to clear the animal's system. This depends both on the concentration of aflatoxin and the diet being fed. If aflatoxin is detected in milk, it is critical that records be maintained of all feeds, feeding practices, milk quantities and contamination levels, plus animal health and performance. If your milk exceeds the allowable limit, all grain products should be removed from the ration immediately. However, no clear testing protocols are indicated by CFIA.

### **Aflatoxin animal effects.**

It has been demonstrated that dietary aflatoxin levels had influences on lameness and retained placenta. Also, decreases in milk production are directly related to decreased dry matter intake due to aflatoxin in the feed. Symptoms of acute aflatoxicosis in cattle include: inappetence, lethargy, ataxia, rough hair coat, and pale, enlarged fatty livers. Symptoms of chronic aflatoxin exposure include reduced feed efficiency and milk production, jaundice, and decreased appetite. Aflatoxin lowers resistance to diseases and interferes with vaccine-induced immunity.