

For Immediate Release
10/19/12

Aflatoxin in Corn
By Gene Schmitz, MU Extension Livestock Specialist

Aflatoxin in corn and other feedstuffs is becoming an issue for some livestock producers this year. Aflatoxin is produced by the fungi *Aspergillus flavus* and *Aspergillus parasiticus*. These fungi grow rapidly in hot weather especially within corn grain which has been drought stressed, infested with insects or damaged by harvest equipment. Stored corn contaminated with aflatoxin should be properly dried and then monitored carefully for changes in temperature and moisture content to try to prevent further aflatoxin contamination.

Aflatoxin contaminated grain can be fed to livestock, although there are strict limits on the amount of aflatoxin that can be in the diet. The maximum level in dairy rations or feed for immature animals, including poultry, is 20 parts per billion. For beef cattle rations, some recommendations suggest aflatoxin should be less than 20 parts per billion for creep feeds, gestating and lactating beef cows, and stressed cattle. Backgrounding rations can contain up to 100 parts per billion aflatoxin.

All types of livestock can be affected by aflatoxin. Symptoms of aflatoxin contaminated feed include reduced feed intake, decreased milk production, decreased weight gains, decreased resistance to infection, and decreased reproductive performance. In some instances, liver or kidney damage can occur. Non-ruminant animals are generally more susceptible than ruminants. Young animals are more sensitive than mature animals. Aflatoxin can be passed through the milk and cause damage to nursing calves.

If you suspect a problem, aflatoxin tests are available. Once levels are known, rations can be adjusted accordingly. There are feed additives that act as aflatoxin binding agents, and these can be added to the grain mix in order to reduce the risks associated with feeding aflatoxin contaminated grain.

Additional aflatoxin information is contained in MU Guide G4155 entitled "Aflatoxins in Corn". This guide is available on the MU Extension website at www.extension.missouri.edu and typing "aflatoxin" in the search box. If you have further questions on managing aflatoxin contaminated grain, contact me at the Extension office in Warsaw at (660) 438-5012, by e-mail at schmitze@missouri.edu or contact your local MU Extension Center. University of Missouri Extension is an equal opportunity / ADA institution.