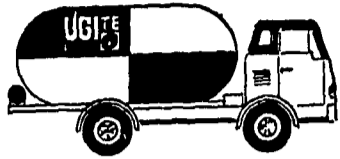


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Moldy Feeds: Source Of Livestock Losses & Death

A clearer understanding of livestock damage caused by moldy feed is leading to better diagnosis and control of fungus-caused problems.

Research indicates that mold can reduce production efficiency and cause death, ARS specialists suggest that farmers seek laboratory tests and post-mortem examinations to establish the cause of unexplained abortions in cattle or poor growth and death losses in swine.

The mold *Aspergillus fumigatus*, for example, causes several diseases in poultry and livestock, including fungal abortion in cattle. Livestock need not eat contaminated feed to get into trouble; mold spores enter as easily when animals merely breathe spore-laden dust from moldy hay.

Aspergillus flavus causes damage indirectly by producing a poison called aflatoxin, which may kill swine by disorganizing and destroying liver cells. Small amounts of aflatoxin administered experimentally over a period of time cause pigs to use feed inefficiently and grow slower; a single, larger dose produces death in 1 to 7 days.

ARS veterinarian S. J. Cysewski and scientists at the Nation-

al Animal Disease Laboratory, Ames, Iowa, followed the exact progression of aflatoxin damage.

Young pigs weighing about 33 pounds became listless and began shivering 6 hours after receiving orally about 29 mg. of crude aflatoxin — a dose known to be lethal. They stopped eating but continued drinking. Droppings were stained with blood after 24 hours, and pigs started dying from then on.

Post-mortem examination of pigs at various stages of the study confirmed that liver damage started 3 hours after aflatoxin was administered. Extent and severity of damage increased, and many liver cells were destroyed within 72 hours. Remaining cells showed various signs of internal disorganization.

Plant poisons or tars that pigs may chew out of old roofing and clay pigeons cause liver changes similar to those caused by aflatoxin. The best specific diagnosis, Cysewski found, is to check either the feed or urine of stricken pigs first for traces of aflatoxin in natural or metabolically altered form. This is readily done by thin-layer chromatography, a chemical method for separating and identifying related substances in complex mixtures. Aflatoxin poisoning is then confirmed by finding the toxin and typical liver damage in autopsied pigs.

Pigs in these tests received aflatoxin derived from known strains of mold grown on rice in the laboratory. Buy Cysewski says that the symptoms and evidence of liver damage were indistinguishable from those observed by other scientists in field cases.

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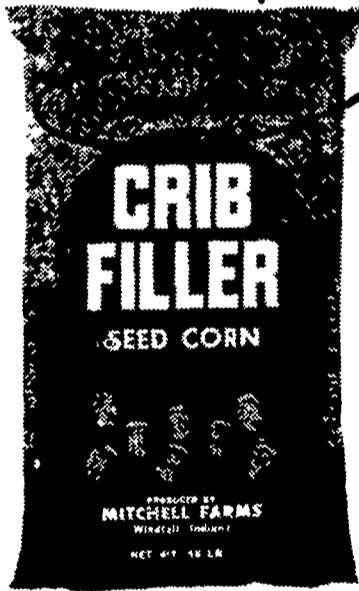
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