

# Fungus in sorghum gets hog infertility blame

COLUMBIA, Mo. — For the first time, a serious disease-causing fungus has been found in grain sorghum.

And the University of Missouri scientists who made the finding say they have strong circumstantial evidence that the fungus causes infertility problems in hogs.

As a result, the scientists are

warning farmers to be on the lookout for a "white, dense velvety mat of fungal growth" on the surface of grain sorghum (milo).

The fungus, *Schizophyllum commune*, was identified by Arnold Foudin, survey and detection plant pathologist for the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and Oscar Calvert, UMC plant pathologist.

Here's the story:

A livestock producer in Silex, Mo., ran short of 1980 high-moisture sorghum grain he was feeding to brood sows from a grain silo. So he bought additional sorghum grain from a local elevator.

"It wasn't long after he started feeding the grain that his sows showed a drastic decrease in conceptions. For those that were bred, there was a notable increase in abortions," Foudin reported.

After consulting with a local veterinarian, the producer stopped feeding the grain sorghum to his

sows, and they recovered their fertility.

The sorghum's sample was sent to the University of Missouri's vet clinic toxicology laboratory. They screened the sample for toxins, but couldn't find any.

So they sent it to the plant pathologists who incubated the fungus in the laboratory.

"As soon as I saw the fungus, I knew what it was," Foudin said. "It's common in plants like the oaks causing wood rot."

"But until our findings, there had been no previous report of this

fungus disease in grain sorghum or that it affected animal fertility. That's probably because the fungus needs just the right conditions to grow—especially temperature and light at the right time."

Foudin said it's not unusual for fungi to produce toxins that affect animal reproduction, but this particular one had never been so implicated.

Einar Palm, UMC Extension plant pathologist, said farmers should be especially careful to store grain sorghum properly.

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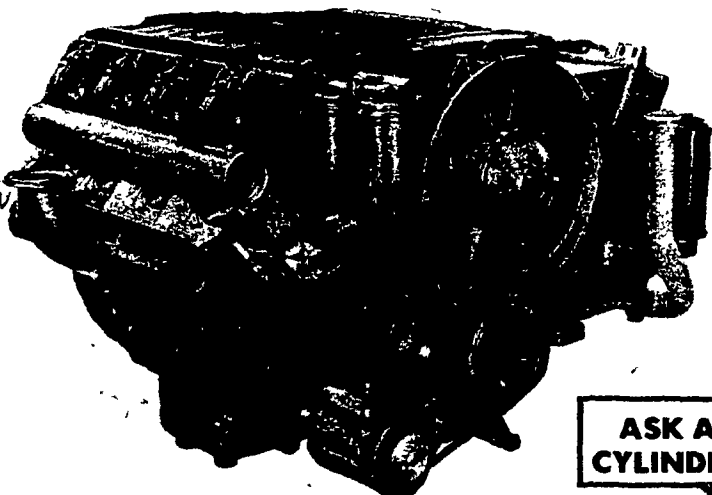
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