

Poisonous Plants Of Pennsylvania

Penn State Veterinary Science Extension

Many plants are potentially poisonous to livestock. The conditions for causing plant poisoning are, in most cases, more important than the plants themselves.

Factors Contributing To Plant Poisoning

A. Undernourishment, Starvation — This is the most common reason why animals eat poisonous plants. Pennsylvania woods and natural meadows contain many species of plants which are capable of killing animals. These woods and meadows are not good sources of forage for

livestock. In early spring, late fall or during dry seasons when forage is scarce, animals may eat plants they would not eat under normal circumstances. This reason is one of many good reasons why domestic animals should never be turned into woodlands for "pasture."

B. Accidental Poisoning — Some very poisonous plants may be accidentally eaten as animals graze. Water Hemlock is one of these. In early spring, animals hungry for green grass seek young grass growing along water courses where Water Hemlock lives. The Water Hemlock plants at

this season are a small whorl of leaves growing on a heavy carrot-like root. One crown of such a root bitten off by an animal and eaten, as the animal eats grass, will kill a large horse or cow. Similarly, the two-leaf stage of the common Cocklebur is extremely poisonous when accidentally eaten by hogs foraging in old cornfields. Corn cockle, formerly a very common weed in wheat and barley fields has poisonous seeds which can produce symptoms of poisoning when enough of the seed contaminates grain fed to poultry.

C. Browsing Tendency of

Animals — Well-fed animals in dry lots or the best of pastures may become bored with the same constant diet. Out of sheer boredom or a craving for variation in diet they may browse weeds or shrubs available along fence rows. All grazing animals like to vary their diet with a little browse and many ornamental and wild plants may be consumed — not because they are palatable, but simply because the animal craves variation in its diet.

D. The Amount of the Plant Eaten — The amount of the poisonous plant consumed may be the most important factor in determining why animals are poisoned. This is particularly true of cyanogenetic plants, nitrate-

accumulating plants and those causing photosensitivity. This will be explained in the section where those plants are discussed. Some plants capable of severe poisoning can be very well utilized if they complement a good diet. This is particularly true of nitrate-accumulated or cyanogenetic plants.

E. Conditions Under Which Plants Grow — Cold, dark weather greatly increases the nonprotein nitrogen content of many warm-season plants. Sorghum-sudan hybrids, many grasses, alfalfa and corn may have dangerously high levels of non-protein nitrogen under such conditions. Excessive application of N fertilizers

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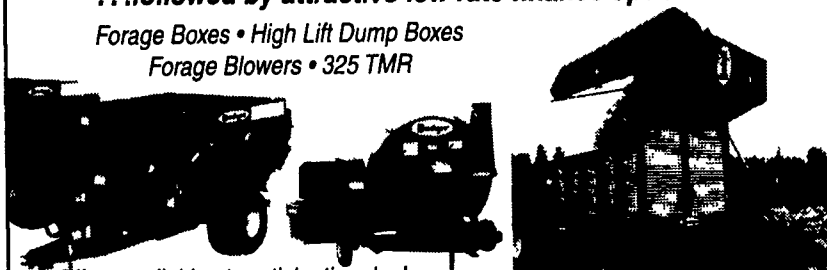
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Project Grass Announces Field Day

NEEDMORE (Fulton Co.) — Western Project Grass and Southcentral Project Grass, consisting of 29 Pennsylvania counties, will conduct a grazing field day May 8 at the farm of Ed and Sandy Swope, Needmore.

The Swope farm is a grass-based, seasonal dairy operation, featuring 80 Holsteins that are pastured and milked from March through November.

Speakers and topics scheduled for the field day include Darrell Emmick, Cortland, N.Y., dry matter intake, and Glenn Moyer, Mercersburg, Cove Mt. economics.

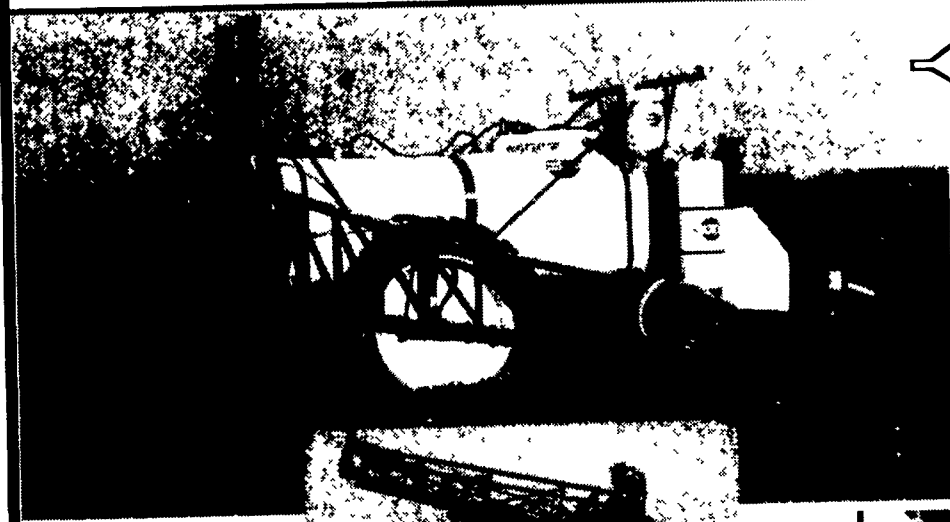
Participants will tour the Swope's pastures, water systems, and pasture layouts.

Cost for lunch is \$5.

For reservations, call Karen Kelly at (717) 485-3547, ext. 116.



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