

Lead Poisoning In Livestock Costly, But Preventable

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Even though lead paint was banned in the U.S. in the 1970s, there are still plenty of ways livestock can be affected by lead, one of the most common causes of poisoning in farm animals, said Tom Troxel, associate head-Animal Science, for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

“Lead is one of the most common causes of poisoning for farm animals, especially cattle, sheep and horses,” he said. “It represents a significant and unnecessary loss to producers.”

The good news is that “just simply by improving awareness and improving waste management on the farm could significantly reduce the incidence of lead poisoning,” Troxel said.

Common sources of lead include: farm rubbish dumps, car batteries, crankcase oil, lubrication grease, television screens, linoleum, roofing felt, putty, lead in paint from rusted pots, or licked or chewed from old boards, farm gates, burlap, canvas, silo interiors, boiled linseed oil used as laxative, lead shot, leadlight windows and soft water that has lain stagnant in lead pipes. Other causes include eating hay or silage made from plants polluted by lead smelting, car exhausts or some now-banned

pesticides.

“We often see lead poisoning in cattle and sheep during the summer when the pasture forage is short and the animals graze closer to the ground where they might have access to items contaminated with lead,” Troxel said. “Death loss can be heavy on the individual farm.”

Death occurs suddenly in calves, but is more rare in adult cattle. Surviving adult cattle may lose their sight and become aggressive.

Other symptoms include: tremoring in the head and neck region, staggered gait, jaw champing, saliva frothing, eyelid snapping, eye rolling, pupil dilation, ear flicking, facial and neck twitching, bellowing, bouts of paddling convulsions until death. Sheep may show signs of stiff gait, lameness, paralysis and osteoporosis.

“Horses are affected too, but not as commonly,” he said. “Pigs are not often exposed to lead and appear to be extremely tolerant to it.”

Troxel said the best treatment is prevention. “Proper disposal of lead material at environmental approved sites is very important,” he said. “This will insure the lead material is appropriately disposed of and your farm and animals remain safe.” Δ