

For immediate release:
November 30, 2009

Beef cattle producers should use caution when grazing corn stalks or feeding baled corn stalks this winter.

The unusually wet fall and late harvest has resulted in several incidences of mold and fungi in corn and corn stalks. This has resulted in several questions regarding feeding the moldy corn grain, baled corn stalks, and grazing corn stalks. The answer is not simple on whether or not to feed the moldy corn or corn stalks to cattle, because mold does not always result in mycotoxins and not all mycotoxins are harmful to cattle. Generally cattle are more tolerant of mycotoxins than other livestock, however, this fall more caution may be warranted. Reports in the state of Wisconsin have indicated that the more dangerous molds of *Fusarium* and *Gibberella* are present, whereas other molds of *Diplodia* or *Penicillium* have also been present, but have lower risk of mycotoxin contamination. There have not been reports of high incidence of *Aspergillus* mold, which produces aflatoxins. This mold requires a very warm growing season to flourish, which Wisconsin did not have in 2009, but it could be a problem in some areas.

Fusarium mold will typically be white or pink in color and produces common mycotoxins of DON (vomitoxin), T-2, Zeralenone, and Femonisins. Ruminants can break down some of the *Fusarium* mycotoxins in the rumen and exhibit few clinical problems, however toxic levels of the mycotoxins can have negative effects on the animal. Some of the clinical symptoms of high levels of mycotoxins include reduced feed intake, weight loss, skin or muzzle irritations/ulcers, diarrhea, poor response to antibiotic treatment and bloody diarrhea. In pregnant females, high levels of exposure to Zeralenone can also result in abortions. Therefore, producers should avoid feeding moldy feeds to more susceptible animals, such as recently weaned calves and pregnant females. Molds or fungi can also release mold spores that can cause lung irritation. Pregnant cows fed and/or bedded on moldy vegetation potentially are susceptible to mold infections that can result in mycotic abortions.

If mold is evident, beef cattle producers should closely monitor cattle for these clinical signs and unusual behavior. Producers may want to avoid a field or parts of fields for grazing or baling if extremely high levels of molds are present on the stalks. If producers observe any of the clinical signs, they should quit feeding the stalks or grazing the field and provide another non-moldy feed. Supplementing the moldy feed with hay, grain, or other by-products could dilute the mycotoxins effects in the animal. Moldy baled corn stalks could be used as bedding, but it is recommended bedding the animals shortly after cattle are fed to prevent cattle from eating the bedding. It may also be a good preventative measure to unroll bales outside so the wind can blow the spores away, or make sure there is plenty

of ventilation or air movement when bedding to help reduce mold spore content of the air that the cattle have to breath.

Feed can be tested for mycotoxins, especially those mycotoxins, which could negatively impact animal health. Mold within a field of corn can vary with certain locations having higher concentrations of mold than other another location, therefore a representative feed sample should be taken. A directory of additional resources including laboratories, which test for mycotoxins, can be found at <http://fyi.uwex.edu/grain/> /

If you have additional questions please contact your local UW Extension Office.