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Prussic Acid Answers

There are times of the year that producers need to be concerned about Prussic acid poisoning in cattle on pastures or in hay put up. Prussic acid can occur after stressful conditions such as frost, drought, extended periods of cloudiness or exposure to a herbicide that kills grasses. Any condition that causes stress to the grass has a potential of producing this poison that can kill your cattle. It's not a common occurrence, but poisonous prussic acids can form in forages like Bermuda, Ryegrass, Alfalfa etc... but is most common in Sorghum's and Sorghum Grasses like Johnsongrass and Sudan. So I thought I would explain a few things concerning Prussic Acid(PA) and hopefully answer any questions one might have on the subject. I'm sure no authority on the matter but I have dealt with this issue all of my life and want to share my experiences. The first question we need to answer is about grazing cattle in suspect pastures. If cattle are already grazing pastures with Johnson grass present, then the only time I would worry about PA is the first frost. Pull them out of the pasture immediately after a frost for about two weeks and let the PA dissipate, then resume grazing. If you are turning in on a suspect pasture for the first time with Johnsongrass present, turn in a couple of test cows to see if they have a reaction in an hour or two, if not turn in the rest of the herd. Another thing I always did is to fill the cattle up on hay before turn in, which normally always worked.

If your are baling sorghum forages or pastures with Johnsongrass, allow hay to cure properly to remove the danger of prussic acid poisoning from hay containing these forages. Usually the PA dissipates in 48 hours or so, so give it 3-4 days to be safe. If you dont it could still be in the hay you put up

If you have any questions please contact me at marty.morgan@ag.tamu.edu or call 940-668-5412