

# Ohio County Farm & Home News

## BEWARE OF POISON HEMLOCK

One of the first weeds to start growing in hay and pasture fields is poison hemlock. Poison hemlock can also be found growing in ditches, roadways, fencerows, shaded areas of pastures, and in no-till cropping systems. The biennial weed forms a basal rosette of leaves during the first year and then bolts a flower stalk in its second year. It can grow to 10-feet tall.

Don't confuse poison hemlock with Queen Anne's Lace, some areas also call it Wild Carrot. Poison hemlock is typically much taller and has a hairless, purple-mottled stem.

Poison hemlock's white flowers form in umbrella-shaped clusters like those of queen anne's lace, and both have hollow stems. But, poison hemlock's purple-mottled stem is hairless. Wild carrot also tends to be short in height and poses no danger to humans or livestock.

Every part of poison hemlock contains gamma-coniceine, coniine, and other toxic compounds that are harmful, even in small amounts. These toxins affect cattle most, particularly with respect to birth defects, but they also affect sheep, goats, swine, horses, and other domestic animals.

The toxins in poison hemlock affect the animal's nervous system, initially causing tremors that may progress to total paralysis and suffocation. Symptoms usually appear within an hour of ingestion, and an animal can die within a few hours. Cows that eat poison hemlock during the first trimester of pregnancy may give birth to calves with skeletal deformities, a condition known as crooked calf syndrome. The offspring



of pigs, sheep, and goats can exhibit similar signs.

The most palatable plant part of immature poison hemlock is the leaves. Typically, animals avoid eating mature plants, but this is not the case when poison hemlock is accidentally incorporated into hay.

With the correct timing, controlling the biennial weed is not difficult. Control poison hemlock with pasture herbicides early while it is in the rosette stage and before the plant forms flowers. Early control is important because

mature plants with flowers do not respond as well to chemical control.

Growth regulator herbicides or products with 2,4-D, dicamba, or 2,4-D plus triclopyr are good options for controlling poison hemlock in pastures. Nonchemical control

options include hand weeding, mowing, and tillage. When hand weeding or working around poison hemlock, farmers should be aware the plant's potent toxins can irritate the skin. He recommends wearing protective gear, including gloves, long sleeves, long pants, and eye protection.

## BEEF MANAGEMENT TIPS

### \*Spring Calving Cow Herd

- Watch cows and calves closely. Work hard to save every calf. Calves can be identified with an ear tag while they are young and easy to



handle. Commercial male calves should be castrated and implanted. Registered calves should be weighed at birth.

- Cows that have calved need to be on an adequate nutritional level to rebreed. Increase their feed after calving. Do not let them lose body condition. Keep feeding them until pastures are adequate.
- Do not "rush to grass" although it can be really tempting. Be sure that grass has accumulated enough growth to support the cow's nutritional needs before depending solely upon it. Cows may walk the pastures looking for green grass instead of eating dry feed. This lush, watery grass is not adequate to support them. Keep them consuming dry feed until sufficient grass is available to sustain body condition. We've spent too much money keeping them in good condition to lose it now!
- *Prevent grass tetany!* Provide magnesium in the mineral mix until daytime temperatures are consistently above 60°F. Mineral supplement should always be available and contain a minimum of about 14% magnesium. Make sure that your mineral mix also contains adequate selenium, copper, and zinc. You can ask your feed dealer about the UK Beef IRM High Magnesium Mineral.

- Make final selection of heifer replacements. Strongly consider vaccinating with a modified-live BVD vaccine.
- Purchase replacement bulls at least 30 days before the breeding season starts. Have herd bulls evaluated for breeding soundness (10-20% of bulls are questionable or unsatisfactory breeders). Get all bulls in proper condition (BCS 6) for breeding.
- If you are going to use artificial insemination and/or estrous synchronization, make plans now and order needed supplies, semen, and schedule a technician.
- Prebreeding or "turnout" working is usually scheduled for late April or May between the end of calving season and before the start of the breeding season (while cows are open). Consult your veterinarian about vaccines and health products your herd needs. Decide now on the products needed and have handling facilities in good working order. Dehorn commercial calves before going to pasture.

### \*Fall Calving Cow Herd

- Determine pregnancy in your herd now and cull open ones at weaning especially if the open cows are older than 6 years of age.
- Re-implant feeders.
- Consult with your veterinarian about preweaning working of the herd.
- You may let calves creep-graze wheat or rye if it is available. Calves will benefit from extra feed until spring grass appears.
- Plan marketing strategy for feeder calves.

### \*Stockers



- Do not go to pastures too soon, give plants some growing time. Then stock at two to three times the July rate and rotate rapidly.
- "Condition" purchased calves prior to grazing. They should be processed

and fed a conditioning diet prior to being placed on pasture. You can also use this time to introduce them to electric fences used in rotational grazing.

- Provide a good mineral supplement which contains a rumen modifier (Rumensin, Bovatec, etc.) along with adequate levels of copper and selenium.

**\*General**

- We have made a muddy mess this winter, so be prepared to reseed bare spots. Our forage group has some excellent information on restoring heavy-traffic areas.
- Make plans to improve hay feeding areas to avoid muddy conditions like we have faced this winter. Consider geotextile fabric with gravel or concrete feeding pads.
- Prepare for the grazing season. Check fences and make necessary repairs. Check your corral, too.
- Get everything ready to make high quality hay in May! Have equipment serviced and spare parts on hand. Order baler twine now. Be prepared to harvest an adequate supply of hay when you have the opportunity. Re-supply the extra hay that you fed out of the barn. This past winter caused most producers to exhaust their hay supply, so it is time to re-stock.
- Plan now for fly control ... decide what fly control program that you will use but do not put insecticide eartags on cattle until fly population appears.

**BEEF AI SCHOOLS SCHEDULED**

Are you interested in learning how to AI (artificially inseminate) your cows? AI is an excellent way to interject high quality genetics into your herd quickly. There are two AI Schools scheduled in April:

- AI Certification Course – April 3, 4, & 5. This program is being offered thru the Owensboro Community & Technical College and is being taught by Ben Lloyd, with Kentucky Beef Network.

Times: April 3 – 4:00 p.m. till 7:00 p.m. – OCTC campus

April 4 – 2:00 p.m. till 7:00 p.m. – OCTC campus

April 5 – 8:00 a.m. till Noon – Kentuckiana Livestock Market

The course cost \$400. To register, contact Tara Groves at [tara.groves@kctcs.edu](mailto:tara.groves@kctcs.edu) , include your first & last name and your phone number.

- U.K. AI Course – April 22 & 23. This course will be held at the Woodford County Research Farm in Versailles. Dr. Les Anderson will lead the instruction on proper AI procedures and how to pregnancy diagnosis your cows. Classes will be held from 10:00 a.m. till 4:00 p.m. ET each day. Lunch will be provided. They have 10 spots open for the course, on a first come, first served basis. Cost of the course is \$400. To register, contact Tyler Purvis at 859-257-7512 or by email at [tapu228@uky.edu](mailto:tapu228@uky.edu) .



- April 22 & 23 – U.K. AI Course; Woodford County Research Farm, Versailles
- May 13 – U.K. Wheat Field Day; U.K. Research Farm, Princeton