

June 2017

### **AVOID POISONING LIVESTOCK WITH HEMLOCK**

Poison hemlock and its cousin, water hemlock, are two of the most poisonous of all flowering plants. We find them throughout our region, especially in wet or moist soils along streams, roadsides, and grasslands. The heavy, persistent rain this spring has made them abundant and especially vigorous this year.

Fortunately, hemlock usually is not palatable to most livestock. Animals won't eat much of it unless very hungry or if the plant has been altered in some way.

So how should this affect your management? It's critical that you avoid overgrazing pastures that contain hemlock. When adequate forage is available to graze, animals select healthy, palatable plants to eat and avoid the hemlock. But if grass gets short, even unpalatable poisonous plants might be eaten. This includes turning hungry animals into fresh pasture containing hemlock, since some hungry animals will eat the first green plant they come to when very hungry, palatable or not. Also make sure plenty of water, salt, and mineral always are available. Animals deprived of water or mineral may eat abnormally, increasing the risk of consuming some hemlock.

Do not try to control hemlock during the grazing season by clipping or spraying. I repeat – do not spray or clip hemlock during the grazing season. This alters the plant and actually can increase its palatability, making it more likely that animals will eat enough of it to cause poisoning.

The risk of poisoning animals with hemlock may be greater than normal this year. But, graze intelligently and losses can be avoided.

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