Ergot a Serious Problem in Feed

Ergot is being found in feed grain at much higher levels than usual. The ergot problem, precipitated by the spring weather conditions, is very widespread across most of Alberta and in other Prairie Provinces as well.

“Weather conditions this year when plants were heading and flowering was very cool with high humidity and it took more time than usual for the plants to pollinate,” says Barry Yaremcio, beef and forage specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. “Airborne ergot spores from previous crops infected the developing heads. This year, there’s a problem with not only rye, but triticale, wheat, barley oats and even some of the grasses; producers are finding that ergots are presents at much higher levels than usually seen in all of these crop types.”

Ergot causes three serious problems when fed to an animal. For females in the breeding herd, any ergot in grain or hay will cause an abortion. This applies to not just cows, but horses, pigs and chickens as well; all of these animals will be affected if given feed that contains ergot. Tolerance for ergot in pregnant or breeding animal rations is zero.

Feeder and growing animals are not immune to the effects of ergot. Animal performance is impaired. It is often seen as poor daily gains and lower growth rates. It will take six to eight weeks for the slower growth rates to become apparent.

The greatest concern, after the threat to reproduction, is that ergot reduces the blood flow to the extremities, such as the tail, ears and hooves or claws. If ergot levels are high enough, the animals will start to slough off their hooves, ears and tails. The reduced blood flow also makes the animals more susceptible to frostbite in colder weather. It is unlikely that animals affected to this extent will ever recover.

“The Ag Info Centre has been receiving a lot of calls about buying screenings as a feed source,” says Yaremcio. “While screenings reduce costs of feeding over the winter, the cautionary factor here is that if there is any ergot at all in the screenings, there will be problems in the herd.

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“The ergot limit for pigs is zero. For all other species, the maximum limit is one kernel per 1000 or 0.1% by weight. In cattle, you can allow a maximum of 12 gm of ergot consumption per day; that’s a quarter of an ounce. It’s easy to see that it doesn’t take much ergot to start causing problems. It may take six to eight weeks, but problems will start showing up.”

Some feed mills are not accepting ergot levels above 0.04 to 0.06 per cent in purchased grains. This is to reduce risk to those purchasing complete feeds and pelleted rations.

When it comes to swath grazing, there is no easy way to measure for ergot. On a case-by-case, field-by-field basis, producers will have to evaluate their swaths, pulling them apart, calculating how much ergot is present and making a judgement call.

“If a swath looks like it may contain borderline toxic levels of ergot, dilute out the ergot level by feeding forage that does not have ergot. When in doubt dilute, as it is better to be on the safe side,” says Yaremcio. “This means diluting the feed with other feeds that are ergot-free, and not giving the livestock full feed on the swath grazing material.”

Two factsheets provide additional information on how to prevent or manage ergot infections online:

• Management of Problem Feeds — factsheet from Manitoba Agriculture — www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/forages/bjb00s18.html


Contact: Barry Yaremcio
310-FARM (3276)

Government and Industry Reach Agreement on Livestock Traceability Principles

The Alberta government and representatives of the province’s beef cattle industry have reached an agreement that will provide the foundation for livestock traceability in Alberta and is key to expanding market access and managing animal health and food safety issues.

The Guiding Principles for Beef Cattle Traceability establish an acceptable common understanding of traceability among government and industry partners as they move towards a national beef traceability system.

“In July 2009, the federal and provincial agriculture ministers agreed to move forward on a comprehensive national traceability system for livestock,” said Jack Hayden, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. “This agreement helps move this system forward.”

Joining Hayden in signing the agreement were representatives from the Alberta Beef Producers, the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, the Beef Industry Alliance, the Canadian Beef Breeds Council, the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association, the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency and Livestock Inspection Services.

“All these organizations share a common goal of strengthening Alberta’s world-class animal health and food safety system and recognize the importance of the three pillars of traceability: premises identification, animal identification, and animal movement tracking,” said Hayden. “A strong traceability system enables producers to enter valuable foreign markets, China being a recent example, and receive the premium prices that their high-quality products deserve.”

With the signing of this agreement, the Government of Alberta and key industry organizations recognize the need to operate under a set of guiding principles for beef cattle traceability.

Contact: Ag Media Line
Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
780-422-1005
To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000
Guiding Principles for Beef Cattle Traceability

1. Traceability will support industry standards for commerce - the technology used for beef cattle traceability will accommodate the way the industry conducts commerce. The highest volume of cattle is sold in the fall of each year at auction marts, to feedlots and at other industry sales. The technology utilized for traceability will support industry standards at these points of handling or sale of cattle.

2. The traceability system for the beef cattle industry will enhance the competitive position of the industry – traceability is a critical element of a robust and internationally recognized animal health and food safety system. Progressive implementation of traceability will occur only when there are identifiable benefits and the available technology results in acceptable incremental costs. Costs will be assessed against a measurable value of real benefit such as the mitigation of foreign animal disease impacts, protection against loss of market access, increased market value or enhanced market access. Identification of these benefits and a phased-in approach to implementation will encourage industry to adopt and accept traceability.

3. Traceability will expand as the appropriate technology to support initiatives is available – the expectation is that a reasonable rate of reading the ID tags respects the speed of normal commerce. For example, tags and readers need to be capable of functioning at an acceptable standard for many groups of cattle moving through an alley or weigh scale rather than being read or scanned individually.

4. Industry standards will drive tolerance ranges for tag readability and retention – all stakeholders recognize that the beef cattle tagging system that underpins traceability will not, under existing technology, achieve a rate of 100 per cent tag retention or 100 per cent readability. Establishing and accepting tolerance ranges and a practical enforcement policy will help industry and government implement a successful beef cattle traceability system.

5. Producer information must remain confidential – a producer’s information collected through the beef cattle traceability system is confidential unless a producer provides consent for disclosure, the collected data is disclosed in aggregate, or disclosure to government is necessary for dealing with animal health or food safety purposes.

Contact: Brent McEwan
Executive Director
Traceability Division
Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
780-427-2799

Alberta Wins Trade Challenge on Vegetable Oil Products

Alberta has won a long-standing trade dispute with Ontario over protectionist policies that for years have restricted Alberta vegetable oil producers and refiners from selling in Ontario.

A panel under the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) determined that Ontario regulations restricting the sale of products that blend vegetable oil with dairy ingredients are a barrier to interprovincial trade.

“It has been a long fight but one that was worth fighting,” said Iris Evans, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. “For too long Ontario has maintained these restrictions that are contrary to its domestic trade obligations and we are pleased the panel has ruled in our favour.”

Alberta launched the challenge in March 2010, and was supported by British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The AIT panel has given Ontario until February 1, 2011 to comply by ensuring that its policies are consistent with the agreement. If Ontario remains in breach of the AIT it could face a monetary penalty of up to $5 million.

It is estimated that access to Ontario could create a market of approximately $225 million within Canada for dairy-vegetable oil blends. Common vegetable oils include canola, sunflower and soya and are often used to create blends of margarine and butter and blended drinks such as soymilk.

“Oilseed production in Alberta is a significant and important part of our agriculture sector,” said Jack Hayden, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. “This ruling provides an opportunity for both our producers and our processing industry as we regain access to the Ontario market.”

The AIT came into effect on July 1, 1995, to reduce and eliminate, to the extent possible, barriers to the free movement of people, goods, services, and investments within Canada and to establish an open, efficient, and stable domestic market. Through the AIT, governments work to remove existing interprovincial trade barriers, prevent the establishment of new barriers, and harmonize interprovincial standards.

The Alberta government has a clear plan for a strong economic recovery. An important part of The Way Forward is maintaining support for programs and services Albertans need most, such as health care, education and safe and vibrant communities. For more information on the plan visit www.Alberta.ca

Contact: Mike Deising
Communications
International and Intergovernmental Relations
780-422-2524
Ag Media Line
Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
780-422-1005
To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000
Northern Alberta Ranchers Included in Tax Deferral Program

Livestock producers in northern Alberta who are struggling as a result of well below normal temperature and low precipitation have been included in a federal tax deferral program. The preliminary designation was established based on spring moisture and summer rainfall, supplemented with estimates of forage yield.

The tax deferral allows eligible producers in designated areas to defer income tax on the sale of breeding livestock for one year to help replenish breeding stock in the following year. Proceeds from deferred sales are included as income in the next tax year, when they may be at least partially offset by the cost of reacquiring breeding animals. In the case of consecutive years of designation, producers may defer sales income to the first year in which the area is no longer designated.

To defer income, the breeding herd must have been reduced by at least 15 per cent. Thirty per cent of income from net sales can be deferred if the breeding herd has been reduced by at least 15 per cent. In cases where the herd has been reduced by more than 30 per cent, 90 per cent of income from net sales can be deferred.

Eligible producers will be able to request this deferral when filing their 2010 income tax returns. Livestock producers are advised to contact their local Canada Revenue Agency Tax Services Office for details on the income tax provisions.

Assessment of the drought situation will continue throughout the fall and, as more data about forage yields are known, tax deferral areas could be expanded.

For more information on the extent of the drought or programs to assist farmers, visit the AAFD Drought Watch website at www.agr.gc.ca/drought

The preliminary designated Alberta tax deferral areas include: Birch Hills County, Clear Hills County, County of Northern Lights, Grande Prairie County No. 1, Improvement District No. 12, M.D. of Big Lakes, M.D. of Fairview No. 136, M.D. of Greenview No. 16, M.D. of Peace No. 135, M.D. of Smoky River No. 130, M.D. of Spirit River No. 133, Northern Sunrise County, Saddle Hills County, Woodlands County and Yellowhead County.

Contact: Media Relations
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
613-773-7972
1-866-345-7972

National Farm Safety Conference

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA) is holding the annual national Farm Safety Conference in Winnipeg, MB, on November 15 to 17, 2010.

“In an effort to help keep farmers out of tight spots, CASA is kick starting the event with an interactive workshop on safety in confined agricultural spaces,” says Diane Wreford, CASA/ACSA. “The six-hour workshop will be led by two of North America’s leading confined space safety experts, Neil McManus of WorkSafe BC and Scott Fraser of Farm and Ranch Safety and Health Association (FARSHA) in BC.”

The workshop, being held on November 15, will focus on basic training to prevent confined spaces injuries and fatalities. The presenters will explain some recent, high-profile confined spaces incidents, exposing information never before released.

The national conference theme is PLAN.FARM.SAFETY. - Working the Plan. Designed for farmers, safety professionals, suppliers, trainers, manufacturers and researchers, the conference will provide timely and relevant safety information that will be of benefit to all in attendance.

“Most farmers say farm safety is a priority in their operation but they want more training and tools to help minimize safety risks for themselves, their families and employees,” says Wreford. “That’s why the conference focuses on understanding what is needed and planning the necessary steps.”

CASA supports regional and national ag safety programs. These programs have been proven to make a difference in keeping Canadian farmers safe.

More information, an agenda and online registration are available on CASA’s website at http://conference.casa-acsa.ca/registration/english/default.aspx

Advance registration for the workshop alone is also possible by calling Stella toll-free at 1-877-452-2272. Registration payment for the workshop can be made in advance or at the door.

Contact: Diane Wreford
204-275-8874
dwreford@casa-acsa.ca
Agri-News Briefs

Green Industry Show & Conference
The Green Industry Show and Conference is being held in Edmonton on November 18 and 19, 2010. The conference will be of special interest to landscape construction professionals, landscape maintenance, greenhouse operators, nursery operators, tree specialists, garden centre operators, lawn care specialists, turf producers, golf course professionals. The conference has a new workshop format focusing on targeted education for all industry sectors. All workshops and general sessions feature insightful speakers. After November 2, 2010, registration for the two-day event is $229 for Landscape Alberta Nursery Trades Association (LANTA) and Alberta Greenhouse Growers Association (AGGA) members, and $250 for non-members. More information and online registration are available online at www.greenindustryshow.com

Entrance fee for the Green Industry Trade Show, featuring over 250 booths, is $10 at the door. A coupon which can be found on the conference website for a half price discount on trade show admission.

Advanced Agronomy Conference
Up to seven Continuing Education Units (CEU) will be available at the Advanced Agronomy Conference. Crop advisers, farmers, industry partners and anyone interested in crop production will have the opportunity to listen to speakers from around the world present the latest information, ideas and techniques. The two half-day events allows sessions to be balanced out so that attendees can make the most of their time. The conference will also be a great opportunity to learn and network with fellow agronomists, farmers and industry peers. The Advanced Agronomy Conference is being held in Leduc on November 24 and 25, 2010. For further information, conference agenda and registration, contact Ellen Anderson at 403-650-9196 or Ty Faechner 780-416-6046.

Farming Today: Are You Ready?
The Southern Applied Research Association (SARA) is hosting a conference and tradeshow in Medicine Hat on November 30 to December 1, 2010. The conference will update attendees on many agronomy topics such as market driven environmental standards, the future of food, market trends, producer investments in research, and many other subjects and issues of concern to Alberta producers. For further information, an agenda and online registration, visit www.farmingsmarter.com or contact Chris Procyk, SACA manager at 403-381-5118 or e-mail chris@farmingsmarter.com