

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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Blue-Green Algae in Farm Ponds

It feels like here in Kansas, we have successfully jumped into the heat of summer. By detouring around the nice spring weather. Unfortunately, it feels like the heat of this Kansas summer is probably here to stay. And with this hot summer weather, there is potential for lots of sunlight which may bring with it a cause for concern among livestock producers.

Those conditions, combined with the often stagnant nature of farm ponds, heighten the risk of toxic levels of blue-green algae in producers' watering sources, says Dr. A.J. Tarpoff who is the Kansas State University beef veterinarian (some folks may remember Dr. Tarpoff from the Beef Quality Assurance Training we hosted in Eureka earlier this spring). Blue-Green algae is not actually algae at all, but rather a cyanobacteria or bacteria that lives off the sun. It can be toxic to livestock, dogs, and people. Blooms of cyanobacteria can build up in a pond and form into distinct blooms of bacteria, often looking like paint sliming around in the water. Tarpoff said the paint-like texture of cyanobacteria is what differentiates it from non-harmful moss in a pond. The harmful cyanobacteria can look green or dark green, but can turn and have more of a bluish tint, thus leading to its more common name as blue-green algae.

Cyanobacteria can release two types of toxins: Neurotoxins which can affect an animals' nervous system; and hepatotoxins, which affects the liver function of cattle. Both toxins can cause death, which sometimes is the first signal to a producer that they have a problem with their watering source. If you suspect you may have blue-green algae in your ponds, you should get water tested immediately. You do that by capturing 500 milliliters of water in a sealed container, refrigerating that sample, and shipping it with an ice pack to a testing facility. You can call the Extension office for more assistance and for lab shipping details.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at lindsayshorter@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.