“Watch out for Perilla Mint this Fall”

 Poisonous plants cause significant losses in the livestock industry each year due to decreased production, reproductive problems, and animal death. It is important that livestock owners are able to recognize these potentially harmful plants, in order to be in a position to avoid potential problems. In general, most poisonous plants are not very palatable and if given a choice, animals will not consume them. Factors that increase the likelihood of animal poisoning from plants include lack of good forage, deficient ration, and overfertilization of nitrogen. One of the most dangerous poisonous weeds in Tennessee pastures is perilla mint.

 Perilla mint causes more cattle deaths in Tennessee than any other toxic plant. Perilla is very poisonous to cattle and other ruminants, as well as horses. All plant parts are toxic, especially the flowering structures. Dried plants in hay can be toxic, but the greatest risk is associated with consumption of fresh plant material, especially if flowers and fruit are present. Cases of poisoning from these weeds are a concern during the late summer and early falls when other grasses and forages might be in short supply and the perilla mint is flowering. Cattle will normally not feed on these toxic weeds unless there is a shortage of other feed. Therefore, it is crucial to have a ready supply of quality feed available for farm animals during this time of the year.

 Cases of animal poisoning from consuming perilla mint are usually seen in late summer and early fall after grazing of the plant. Cattle, horses, and sheep are the most commonly affected animals. Affected animals will exhibit signs of respiratory distress. Clinical signs include labored breathing, a grunting sound when exhaling, and possible nasal discharge and elevated temperature. Once these symptoms begin to appear, treatment is usually ineffective. Injections of antihistamines, steroids, and antibiotics may be given. Affected animals should be handled gently to prevent further respiratory complications.

 The best time to scout for and control perilla mint is late April to early June. The distinctive minty odor and oval, green to purple leaves with toothed margins are all characteristics that help in the identification of perilla mint. It is very difficult to control perilla mint in late summer and early fall when it also becomes the most dangerous to livestock. If control measures are not taken early, it becomes even more crucial in late summer to maintain an adequate supply of quality feed for cattle and other farm animals so they will not feed on these toxic weeds.

 To avoid toxicity problems, avoid harvesting forages in areas contaminated with perilla mint. Mowing perilla mint plants before seed is produced will help prevent further reproduction and spread. Several of the broadleaf pasture herbicides, such as Weedmaster, Grazon P+D, 2,4-D, Banvel, Remedy, Crossbow, etc. should provide excellent control if applied timely and at the correct rate. If you have any questions regarding perilla mint or any other poisonous plant, feel free to call me at the University of Tennessee Extension office at 931-946-2435.
Perilla Mint