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**Wilson County Agricultural Article from Ruth Correll, Agricultural Extension Agent**

**Dallisgrass Staggers in Cattle**

If you have been out in your pastures recently you have probably noticed a lot of grass seedheads which have a good chance of being Dallisgrass. Dallisgrass is a good quality summer perennial grass which fills a gap when our perennial cool season grasses are not actively growing. It has become more prevalent since the droughty summers of the past few years. Dallisgrass is good except for one problem. Dallisgrass poisoning also known as “Dallisgrass staggers” can occur several days after cattle ingest a significant amount of dallisgrass seedheads infected with an "ergot-like" fungus.

The seedheads typically are infected with the fungus in the late summer and fall, as the seedheads age. Rather than flat looking seeds on the heads, the infected heads have gray to black swellings that have a sticky sap material on them. Walk through the pasture with some light colored trousers such as khaki's and you see residue on the trouser legs.

Usually not all the herd is affected, and it appears that it occurs when some animals develop a preference for the tips of the seedhead. The affected animals show neurological symptoms, including trembling of the major muscles and the head, jerky uncoordinated movements, and they also are easily spooked and sometimes aggressive. The animals will startle and run, and often will fall in unusual positions. In bad cases the animals will go down, and may stay down for several days. Convulsions and death can occur in extreme cases but is rare.

The symptoms are somewhat like grass tetany, and this is often misdiagnosed, but they don't show the sudden death characteristic of grass tetany, and don't respond to treatment for grass tetany.

There is no treatment for the dallisgrass staggers, except to get the cattle off the affected grass, and provide them with other high quality forage. Usually cattle can completely recover from the poisoning.

Rotational grazing the grass after seedheads emerge but before the fungus grows on them is a good management technique. Cattle will readily eat the immature seedheads. If the seedheads do become infected, clipping them off at about 12" before grazing should help prevent the problem.

Hay with high amounts of infected seedheads can also be a problem, so feeding Dallisgrass hay along with other hay is advised, especially if infected seedheads are present. The ergot

may diminish in baled hay but toxicity can remain a problem depending on amount of infected seedheads at harvest.

### **Cattle Market Trends**

Slaughter cows mostly steady, \$62.50-\$82.00; Slaughter bulls \$1 to \$2 higher, \$87.50-\$105.00; Feeder steers under 700 lbs. \$2 to \$6 higher, over 700 lbs. steady to firm; \$106.00-\$205.00; Feeder heifers under 700 lbs. \$2 to \$4 higher, over 700 lbs. steady, \$97.00-\$173.00. Feeder Cattle Index - Wednesday's index \$149.00. Fed Cattle 5 area live price of \$119.52 is down \$0.08 and the dressed price is down \$2.27 at \$190.18. Cattle Receipts (# sales): This week: 7,172 (9) Week ago: 6,300 (9) Year ago: 5,300 (12). (UT Extension Market Highlights)

### **Cattle Market Comments**

Cattle markets have been extremely favorable for producers. Demand on limited numbers has helped drive the price as we head into early August. A tight cattle supply and corn prices plummeting the past couple of weeks have been the major contributors to the rising prices. Prices are likely to continue stronger the next few weeks, but they could level off and trade in a smaller range as we head into the fall. Stocker producers need to take a close look at the expected cost of gain and the break-even price they will need to receive extremely closely as fall calf prices might be some of the highest ever paid. Cull cows continue to hold their own this week. The market has not witnessed the "normal" decline in cull cow prices that is commonly seasonal this time of year. They are likely to soften a little more between now and October, but it is unlikely they will soften as much as their normal tendency. Cattle buyers continue to gobble up load lots of heavy weight feeder cattle. Load lots have done extremely well on the Tennessee market this week as dedicated video sales, video sales at weekly auctions, and alliance cattle have all experienced strong prices. These cattle are going to continue receiving a lot of attention as feedlots really like these low risk cattle. Farmer-feeders are also in the hunt and wanting cattle. Sometimes it is more profitable for the farmer-feeder to market their corn grain in the form of beef instead of in the form of grain and that may be the case for many of these producers if corn prices continue on their downward trend. (Dr. Andrew Griffith, UT Extension)

### **Grain Market Trends**

Corn, and soybeans were down and wheat was up for the week. **Corn** - Weekly export net sales were within expectations for old crop and above expectations for new crop. Corn prices have continued their decent from June highs. A lot can change between now and harvest, however the odds are that harvest prices will be lower than current price levels rather than higher. Prices paid at elevators, \$4.52-\$6.26. September futures closed at \$4.76 a bushel, down 16 cents a bushel for the week. **Soybeans** - Weekly export net sales were within expectations for old crop and exceeded expectations for new crop. Soybean prices have dropped \$1.20/bu since the middle of June. Prices paid at elevators \$11.92-\$14.80. September closed at \$12.12 a bushel, down 63 cents a bushel for the week. **Wheat** - Weekly exports were within expectations. Prices paid at elevators, \$6.55-\$6.80. September closed at \$6.60 a bushel, up 10 cents a bushel for the week. (Dr. Aaron Smith, UT Extension)

For additional information on these and other topics, contact the UT Extension Office, 925 East Baddour Parkway, Lebanon, TN 37087, 615-444-9584 or [acorrell@utk.edu](mailto:acorrell@utk.edu). UT Extension pro-vides equal oppor-

tunities in all programs. Visit the UT/TSU Extension webpage at <http://utextension.tennessee.edu/wilson> or look for UT & TSU Extension, Wilson County on Facebook.

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Submitted by:

Ruth Correll

Agricultural Agent

UT/TSU Extension, Wilson County

acorrell@utk.edu