

# High nitrate levels can harm livestock

Earlier this summer several horses in the Fairbanks area became critically ill due to high nitrate levels in the forages they were grazing. A number of weather, soil and management practices combined to cause the problem. When temperatures warmed up and the rains stopped in July, the nitrates in the plants declined to safe levels.

University of Alaska Extension specialists believe the primary cause of the nitrate poisoning was due to the horses selectively consuming a concentration of either lambsquarter or fireweed

or both. These two plants act as accumulators of nitrates and, under the conditions which existed in May and June, could have caused the problem if eaten in large quantities. Plant samples analyzed by the University since the incident occurred have shown both lambsquarter and fireweed to contain substantially higher levels of nitrates than brome and other grasses; however, none of the samples tested contained dangerously high levels.

Information from other parts of the country indicates high nitrate levels in plants tend to dissipate

with time after the forage has been baled as dry hay. Extension specialists feel it would be rare to find hay baled this season which contains dangerously high levels of nitrates; however, anyone wanting to have their hay tested for this problem may do so by

taking samples to their local University of Alaska Extension office. They are asked to call the office for sampling instructions before coming in.

Testing will be done at no cost to the owner.

For further information,

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