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Nutritionist

Managing Hairy Panic

Since 2000, Hairy Panic (*Panicum effusum*) has become endemic on most farms in southern Australia.

Native to the summer rainfall area of northern NSW & Queensland, hairy panic has spread south over the last few decades and is now common in southern NSW and Victoria.

Whilst not a good competitor, it responds quickly to even small rainfall events, seeds rapidly and prolifically and, free from competition, can dominate our fallows.

Unfortunately, consumption in large quantities can have a negative impact, particularly in young sheep.

The Plant

Hairy panic is a short-lived summer growing (C4) perennial, although its sensitivity to frost makes it more like an annual in southern NSW/Victoria.

In its original environment, it occurs in low to sometimes moderate densities in native pastures. However, competition from other C4 native species means that it rarely dominates those pastures.

Nutritionally, it is actually one of our better native species, having a moderate to high grazing value with digestibility around 65 – 70% and crude protein levels around 15 – 20 %.

However, like ‘The Force’, it has a dark side.

When consumed in large quantities, hairy panic can cause photosensitisation and jaundice, particularly in young sheep, often rendering them unsaleable.

AT A GLANCE

- **Hairy panic has become just another challenge producers need to deal with.**
- **Whilst providing valuable grazing, hairy panic, like all panics, creates issues, particularly in weaners and lambs.**
- **Fabstock’s Lactation Stubble Mix ‘Summer Weeds Plus’ together with sensible management can go a long way in mitigating those risks.**

The Disease.

Photosensitisation occurs when non-pigmented areas of sheep become abnormally sensitive to light resulting in skin damage.

Photosensitisation can either have a primary or secondary cause. Both are a result of ingesting various toxic plants.

Primary causes are where stock graze plants containing light sensitive compounds – St Johns Wort is a major culprit – whereas secondary causes are as a result of liver damage.

Chlorophyll, the green pigment in plants, is metabolized by bacteria in the rumen into a light sensitive compound called phylloerythrin which is excreted by the liver in bile into the small intestine.

Hairy Panic contains compounds known as saponins. These form crystals which accumulate in the bile ducts and damage the liver. As the liver is now unable to excrete phylloerythrin, it builds up in the blood stream where it interacts with sunlight.

Whilst Photosensitisation only affects the areas with little wool covering, newly shorn sheep can be more broadly affected.

Following exposure to sunlight, an inflammatory response occurs. Initially, sheep will show signs of increasing restlessness, headshaking as well as scratching at the effected areas, or rubbing those areas along the ground.

Eventually, affected areas become swollen, followed by heavily drooping ears with seepage of a sticky, honey coloured serum that forms extensive scabs on the affected areas.

In addition, signs of jaundice become obvious because of liver damage. The extent of the damage depends on the amount of panic consumed, with severely affected animals going into shock followed by death.

Often, signs may occur some time after the ingestion of the toxic plants.

Affected animals need to be removed from the source of the problem and placed in a darkened shed for at least 7 days. Provide them with water and a low-quality hay, ideally with no green matter (chlorophyll) present.

Fabstock's LSM 'Summer Weeds Plus'

Fabstock's **Lactation Stubble Mix** has been trusted by countless producers to help them maximise the nutritional value of their crop stubbles.

However, increasing regularity of summer rains in what was traditionally winter rainfall areas plus panics ability to thrive and flourish in our winter crop stubbles, have left producers with a dilemma – to graze or not to graze.

To assist producers to better manage these potentially toxic stubbles, Fabstock has developed **Lactation Stubble Mix 'Summer Weeds Plus'**.

Fabstock's **Lactation Stubble Mix 'Summer Weeds Plus'** is our trusted formulation, fortified with additional Molybdenum to support liver function, Organic Zinc to minimize eczema as well as mycotoxin binders and eliminators.

Management.

It is critical to understand that **Lactation Stubble Mix 'Summer Weeds Plus'** is a tool, not a cure-all and therefore good management has a powerful role to play.

Whilst it is true that other stubble weeds such as heliotrope and caltrop also play havoc with liver function, we need to understand that those weeds are relatively unpalatable, and stock tend to only eat them when nothing else is available.

As mentioned earlier, hairy panic is not. In terms of digestibility, hairy panic ranks up there with our

better-quality C3 native grasses such as danthonia (wallaby grass) and microlaena (weeping rice grass). So, when green and actively growing, stock will readily consume it. Indeed, in predominately summer rainfall areas, other panics such as Bambatsi & Gatton will also cause secondary photosensitisation.

As with other panics, hairy panic poisonings affect young sheep rather than adults. Although, they too can be susceptible if plant numbers are high. Lambs are particularly susceptible. Also, poisonings tend to increase if the plants are grazed during the 2 – 3 weeks after a rainfall event.

Where hairy panic comprises greater than 50% of the green herbage mass in a paddock, the safer alternative is to spray the paddock out. Whilst the paddock can then be grazed, defer grazing until the plants have 'browned off' as following desiccation, the rising sugars in the plant will make it more palatable.

If possible, only graze lambs on mature panic that has 'hayed off or at least not actively growing. If you really need to graze the paddock with lambs, 'crash' graze it with ewes first to remove the green 'pick'.

In all cases, monitor your stock. At the first sign of trouble, have somewhere you can move the stock to.

Summary

Like rabbits, hairy panic is an issue that we have to live with. Whilst it can provide valuable grazing, that grazing comes with risks. Fabstock's **Lactation Stubble Mix 'Summer Weeds Plus'**, together with good management can go a long way to mitigating those risks.

For further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact the author or your local **Fabstock** reseller.