

Summer Annual Hay Crops and Nitrate

Hot, dry summer weather brings about heat and drought stress on summer annuals. Stressed plants such as forage sorghums can occasionally accumulate dangerous levels of nitrates. High nitrate plants, consumed either standing in the field or as hay, can cause abortion in pregnant cattle or death if eaten in great enough quantities. Nitrates do not dissipate from sun cured hay (unlike prussic acid) therefore, once hay is cut, nitrate levels remain constant. Producers should test summer annual hay fields before they cut them for hay. Call or stop by the Tulsa County OSU Extension Center (918) 746-3725 for testing details. Preliminary testing gives producers an option of waiting and allowing nitrates to lower in concentration before cutting for hay. The major sources of nitrate toxicity in Oklahoma will be summer annual sorghum type plants, including Sudan hybrids, sorgo-sudans, sorghum-Sudan, millets and johnsongrass. For additional information on nitrates in hay, review OSU fact sheet F 2903 or contact your local county extension office.