

WEEDS POISONOUS TO LIVESTOCK

INTRODUCTION

The poisonous weeds of Alberta found to be most dangerous to livestock are: Tall Larkspur, Low Larkspur, Death Camas, Water Hemlock, White Loco-weed, Woolly Loco-weed, and Showy Loco-weed. These poisonous weeds may occur on ranges and other grazing areas, and may be found in hay cut on native prairie meadows. When stock are grazing on ranges and pastures there are several circumstances which tend to increase the danger of plant-poisoning.

The poisonous weeds usually begin to grow early in the spring, offering green, succulent forage before the native grasses have made much progress. Hence, stock may be tempted to eat this poisonous food before good forage becomes plentiful.

In the early spring months, during rainstorms and late snowstorms, stock often seek shelter in coulees and ravines. Certain poisonous weeds, especially the tall larkspur, grow in these locations, and stock are thus exposed to these plants, when they are very poisonous.

After snowstorms, grazing plants are often covered and only the poisonous plants are left standing above the snow.

When stock come out from their places of shelter, in which they have been during long-continued rains, they are very hungry and exercise little discrimination in their choice of forage.

It is believed that certain plants are more poisonous when wet with rain or dew than under other conditions.

When the ground is wet after rainstorms, animals can much more readily pull up the roots and bulbs of plants, as they pull or nip off the stems and leaves. In some plants, such as the water hemlock, a great deal of the poisonous principle is contained in the rootstock and roots, and in the case of the death camas much of the poisonous principle is contained in the bulb.

It is also possible that storms accompanied by winds may beat down the weeds and the grass together, so that stock cannot distinguish them readily.

During dry seasons, on dry areas, and on stony, gravelly locations pasture may become scarce, and stock then do not exercise a choice in the food they eat.

The greatest losses of sheep from poisoning occur when sheep are being transferred from one range to another. This is due to the fact that they cannot make the same choice of forage while being hurried over the range as they can when they are allowed plenty of