

Health and Disease Issues

Feed toxins

Toxins originating from plants are called **phytotoxins**. These include alkaloids, glucosinolates, and saponins, many of which are bitter and/or have unpleasant odours which reduce palatability.

Toxins originating from microbial action and/or animals are called **mycotoxins**, and **zootoxins** respectively.

Fungal contaminants include those responsible for mould growth within feeds. Such feeds are generally:

- Less palatable, may reduce dry matter intake and reduce growth etc by 5 - 10%
- May have reduced digestibility and energy content (by as much as 10%) due to moulds deriving energy from the feed's protein, fat and carbohydrate
- May produce harmful levels of potent mycotoxins and cause health problems.

To prevent mould formation:

- Minimise grain moisture content at harvest (<15%)
- Remove old-grain, damaged kernels, and any foreign matter from storage silo's etc
- Check grain periodically for temperature, moisture, and insect damage
- If moulds and mycotoxins are suspected test a sample and formulate ration to account for quality of contaminated feed and class of stock to be fed (mature stock before feeding to younger stock)
- Dilute contaminated feed with good quality feed
- Consider the feeding of binder materials such as bentonite.

Feed toxins can be identified through laboratory analysis. Where a toxin is suspected the feed should be tested and a veterinarian consulted for specific treatments.

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