

Blue Green Algae Season

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Calm, sunny, dry, and hot days of summer create ideal conditions for blue green algae to thrive in our livestock ponds. Blue green algae occurrence is sporadic making its threat unpredictable. Despite its name, these blooms are not algae, but a cyanobacteria. Some of these cyanobacteria produce and release dangerous toxins that are of major concern for our livestock.

Blue green algae blooms are green and float at or just below the surface of the water. The appearance almost looks like paint in the water. Once the cyanobacteria die, it turns a blue color. The color can also vary to a grey to almost a red or brown color as well. Toxin concentrations in affected water can vary drastically. The wind can move these blooms and concentrate them in certain areas along the shorelines of ponds. These concentrations increase the lethality of the toxic blooms.

Since blooms can establish quickly, monitor ponds closely and be prepared to sample pond water if the green paint like consistency is observed or if acute animal deaths are found in the pasture. The water sample itself is a snapshot in time, so proper handling and methods of obtaining the sample helps deliver accurate results. The sample should be at least 500 mL of water (with scum included) held in a sealable plastic bottle or container. Sample blue green algae bloom just below the water surface along the shoreline. Remember, it will have the appearance of blue or green paint floating in the water not floating mats of moss or aquatic vegetation. Use care not to touch the blue green algae with bare skin, as it can cause skin irritation in people. Once the sample is taken, it should be cooled and refrigerated, then shipped chilled with an ice pack. Samples can be sent to the Kansas State Veterinary Diagnostic Lab (KSVDL) for analysis.

Monitoring of stock ponds during the summer months and having a plan in place to combat blue green algae will help ensure the health and wellbeing of our herds.

For more information, please contact the local K-State Research and Extension Office.
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