TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

TN - RANGE - 39

Davis, California
July 23, 1976

Livestock Poisoning

The following note published in "Herd 'Round the Range" by Farm Advisor Charles B. Wilson, of Sutter and Yuba Counties, is pertinent to horse owners throughout the Mediterranean climate portion of California. It should be noted that horses affected to the point of showing symptons do not respond to treatment.

YELLOW STAR THISTLE POISONING

Every year there are horses that die from excess consumption of Yellow Star Thistle. This year might possibly be a bad year for Star Thistle poisoning - shortage of native feed due to the dry year and the higher prices for hay - horse owners may allow their horses to scavenger for whatever they can.

To become poisoned a horse must eat about 600 pounds of Yellow Star Thistle during a 35 to 40 day period. A horse may become addicted to it and will seek out mature and spiny plants. This generally occurrs when there is a shortage of other feeds.

Yellow Star Thistle can be controlled through cultivation or by chemical weed control methods. Generally speaking, the most satisfactory control of this weed is done in the spring. Therefore, if a horse is in a field with large stand of Yellow Star Thistle and very little forage from other plants, they should be removed immediately.

Some of the symptoms of Yellow Star Thistle poisoning are: unable to grab its food; pushes its head into water to drink; skin takes on a wrinkling affect around the mouth and nostrils; face takes on a wooden expression; the lips are pulled over the teeth like a purse string suture; tongue may run in and out of the mouth; horse will make chewing movements with or without feed in the mouth; yawning is exibited; horse usually stands or walks around with its head down, exhibiting depression; when it attempts to graze, it cannot close its mouth.

There is no known treatment for this poisoning. In most advanced cases, the horse usually starves to death.

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