



NSW Agriculture

# Risks in grazing or feeding canola

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Because canola is a brassica and problems have been found in stock fed on brassicas, grazing canola crops or feeding canola hay may pose some animal health and chemical residue risks. These risks need to be appreciated and managed.

## STOCK POISONING

Poisoning by brassica crops is usually confined to ruminant animals.

In the 1994 drought, there were reports of some deaths in sheep grazing canola crops, although generally there were few problems, considering the large area grazed. A dozen or so cases were reported, involving sheep of most categories, ages and breeds. The highest incidence reported was 100 deaths in a mob of 1,500. Most deaths occurred on the second or third day after introduction to the canola and where stock were introduced with little or no gut-fill.

The primary cause was not identified at the time but overseas research has identified a toxin, S-methyl cysteine sulphoxide (SMCO), as the cause of haemolytic anaemia in stock that were fed fodder rape.

Nitrate poisoning was discounted as the likely cause of stock deaths in 1994, but it has caused deaths at other times in stock grazing fodder brassica crops. Nitrate poisoning risks are increased by high soil N levels, stunted plants with purple discolouration, cloudy and rainy weather, and feeding after frosts.

Other animal health problems recorded in stock fed on brassicas include:

- photosensitisation
- goitre
- digestive disturbances
- respiratory problems
- blindness
- pulpy kidney
- bloat.

For more information contact your veterinary advisor.

## TAINT

Grazing stock on brassica crops or feeding them brassica hay may also taint meat and milk. To minimise potential taint problems do not feed or graze stock on brassica crops within 1–2 weeks of slaughter. Do not feed or graze dairy stock within 4 hours of milking or allow brassicas to form more than one-third of their total daily diet.

## Recommendations from NSW Agriculture are:

- Do not put hungry stock onto a brassica crop. Ensure that stock have at least partial gut-fill when they are introduced.
- Ideally, restrict grazing to short periods when introducing stock.
- Where possible, supply supplements such as hay or grain to dilute the diet.
- Alternatively, introduce a small number of stock and observe them closely for four days. If there are no problems, introduce the whole mob.
- Monitor the mob and immediately remove them from the feed if any abnormal behaviour is noted.

## CHEMICAL RESIDUES

Ensure that the grazing/cutting for fodder withholding period (WHP) for any chemical treatments applied to the crop are observed. Some herbicides commonly used on canola have long withholding periods. Check the product label to confirm the relevant grazing/cutting for fodder WHP.

As well as observing the grazing/cutting for fodder WHP shown on the label, stock that are

fed any materials treated with endosulfan should spend 42 days on feed that is free of endosulfan residues before sale or slaughter.

Producers who purchase any fodder, including canola hay, should obtain a commodity vendor declaration or similar statement specifying:

- the chemical treatments applied to the crop
- whether the grazing/cutting for fodder WHPs have been observed
- whether the crop was exposed to contamination by spray drift and, if so, by what chemical(s)
- whether the paddock from which it was cut is contaminated by organochlorine chemicals.

If producers feed materials with an unknown chemical treatment history to stock they run a risk of those stock having unacceptable chemical residues. Such stock can be condemned at slaughter with no payment to the producer and the property may be quarantined.

When producers feed such materials to stock within 60 days prior to selling them, they must answer 'don't know' to question 7 on any National Vendor Declaration they give for cattle or to question 5 on any National Vendor Declaration given for sheep. Buyers may discount such stock.

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