# HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS IN STOCK PONDS & DUGOUTS

## Why it matters

Harmful algal blooms (cyanobacteria) can produce toxins that pose serious health risks to livestock. Regularly monitoring stock ponds and dugouts, managing livestock access to potentially affected water, and providing clean, reliable drinking water are important steps to protecting herd health.




## Spot a bloom

- Scum on or just below the surface, like spilled paint or pea soup
- Usually green, but can look red or yellow; turns blue as it dries on shore
- Most likely in warm, calm, nutrient-rich water

## If you suspect one

- Move livestock to a safe, alternate water source.
- Sample the water wearing gloves; keep cool, not frozen.
- Test at the NDSU Veterinary Diagnostic Lab.

## Fix the source

Blooms feed on nitrogen and phosphorus. Fewer nutrients in the water means fewer blooms.

- Keep grass buffers around ponds and dugouts
- Move feeding and wintering sites away from runoff paths
- Manage manure and fertilizer to keep them out of drainages
- Rotate grazing so shorelines are not trampled bare

## Where to get help

**NDSU Extension and Veterinary Diagnostic Lab**

- Harmful algal bloom ID, usually within a day
- Livestock water screens (nitrate, sulfate, TDS)
- Extension vets for herd health guidance

VDL: 701-231-7527 | vdl.ndsu.edu

## Provide clean water

Cattle drinking from a tank instead of the pond are safer and gain better.

- Drill a livestock well or connect to rural water
- Pump from an unaffected pond or dugout (solar or wind) to a tank
- Fence ponds and dugouts to exclude livestock
- Pipe water to tanks across pastures

## Conservation assistance

Conservation technical and financial assistance may be available to help with water and grazing infrastructure that keeps livestock safe, such as wells, pipelines, tanks and fencing.

Visit your local NRCS / SCD office to learn about opportunities in your area.

## Algaecides are not a fix

Copper sulfate and other algaecides break open cyanobacteria cells and can release a burst of toxins, making a bloom more dangerous in the short term

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