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MOUNT ST. HELENS
TECHNICAL INFORMATION
NETWORK

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BULLETIN #11 - "Poultry - Bees - Livestock"

While the long-term health effects of Mount St. Helens' volcanic dust still are unknown, Washington State University scientists in Pullman, Washington have yet to see any animals suffering ash-related health problems, and they have conclusively determined that the fallout is not acutely toxic.

In a preliminary study on the toxicology of the fallout, Dr. William Huber, Associate Dean of Research at the Veterinary School, said the results indicate the volcanic ash has very little capacity for producing acute toxicity following ingestion. "We were extremely pleased to note that the laboratory animals, rats, are very tolerant to ingested volcanic dust," Huber said. This information matched field observation. The ash administered to the rats was equivalent to five pounds of ash consumed by a 1000 pound cow, or 20 tablespoons consumed by a human being. In order to assess the effects from drinking water contaminated with ash, a saturated solution was administered to the animals. There were no toxic effects.

Huber noted that the toxicological studies are being continued to assess longer-term effects of the volcanic ash in animal feed and drinking water. He hopes to know some of these effects in about two weeks.

Two concerns remain for livestock. The first is whether there will be any health problems associated with long-term breathing of the ash. The other is whether the ash will cause cattle, particularly dairy cows, to eat less, thus affecting milk production. Dr. Steven Davis, University of Idaho Animal Sciences Professor, said that livestock and wildlife, particularly animals which depend on outside sources of feed, are likely to develop lung congestion from the volcanic ash. This may pose some long-term health problems, depending on the condition

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