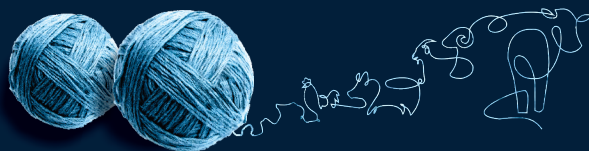


12th  
INTERNATIONAL  
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MODERN  
TRENDS  
IN LIVESTOCK  
PRODUCTION



P R O C E E D I N G S

9 -11 October 2019, Belgrade, Serbia

# Institute for Animal Husbandry

Belgrade - Zemun, SERBIA

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# CONTENTS

## INVITED PAPERS

<i>Čedomir Radović, Marija Gogić, Dragan Radojković, Vladimir Živković, Nenad Parunović, Aleksandar Stanojković, Radomir Savić</i> AGRO BIODIVERSITY AND LIVESTOCK FARMING: AUTOCHTHONOUS SPECIES AND BREEDS IN SERBIA (Serbia).....	1-12
<i>Vesna Gantner, Irena Jug</i> THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION – COULD THE FORECASTED EVENTS BE ALTERED? (Croatia).....	13-22
<i>Slavča Hristov, Dušica Ostojić Andrić, Branislav Stanković</i> GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND GOOD ANIMAL WELFARE PRACTICES ON DAIRY CATTLE FARMS (Serbia).....	23-38
<i>Dušica Ostojić Andrić, Slavča Hristov, Radica Đedović, Teodora Popova, Vlada Pantelić, Dragan Nikšić, Nenad Mičić</i> EMOTIONAL STATE OF DAIRY COWS IN LOOSE AND TIED HOUSING SYSTEM - IS THERE A DIFFERENCE? (Serbia- Bulgaria).....	39-47
<i>Pero Mijić, Tina Bobić, Mirjana Baban, Maja Gregić, Franjo Poljak, Vesna Gantner</i> EFFECT OF STARTING MILK FLOW ON UDDER HEALT OF HOLSTEIN COWS (Croatia).....	48-54
<i>Dragan Nikšić, Vlada Pantelić, Dušica Ostojić Andrić, Predrag Perišić, Nenad Mičić, Marina Lazarević, Maja Petričević</i> FREQUENCY OF $\kappa$ -CASEIN AND $\beta$ -LACTOGLOBULIN GENOTYPES IN DAUGHTERS OF FIVE SIMMENTAL BULL SIREs (Serbia).....	55-63
<i>Marina I. Selionova, Magomet M. Aybazov, Milan P. Petrovic, Galina T. Bobryshova, Violeta Caro Petrovic</i> SCIENTIFIC DIRECTIONS OF SHEEP BREEDING DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA (Russia-Serbia).....	64-73
<i>Yessenbay E. Islamov, Gulzhan A. Kulmanova</i> CONDITION AND PROSPECTS OF SHEEP BREEDING DEVELOPMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN (Kazakhstan).....	74-85

<i>Violeta Caro Petrović, Milan P. Petrović Marina I. Selionova, Dragana Ružić-Muslić, Nevena Maksimović, Bogdan Cekić, Ivan Pavlović</i> SOME NON-GENETIC FACTORS AFFECTING LAMBS BIRTH WEIGHT IN F1 GENERATION OF MIS X ILE DE FRANCE (Serbia).....	86-93
<i>Marjeta Čandek-Potokar, Nina Batorek Lukač, Urška Tomažin, Rosa Nieto</i> GROWTH RATE OF LOCAL PIG BREEDS: STUDY OF PROJECT TREASURE (Slovenia-Spain).....	94-104
<i>Dubravko Škorput, Zoran Luković</i> SELECTION OPPORTUNITIES AND MAINTAINING GENETIC DIVERSITY IN LOCAL PIG BREEDS (Croatia).....	105-114
<i>Juan M. García Casco, Juan L. Duarte, Carmen Caraballo, Miguel A. Fernández, Patricia Palma, María Muñoz</i> A GENETIC EVALUATION PROGRAM FOR MEAT QUALITY TRAITS IN IBERIAN BOARS FROM DIFFERENT LIVESTOCK ORIGINS (Spain).....	115-122
<i>Patricia Palma Granados, Isabel Seiquer, Luis Lara, Ana Haro, Rosa Nieto</i> PROTEIN AND LIPID METABOLISM AND THEIR INTERACTION IN FATTY (IBERIAN) PIGS (Spain).....	123-136
<i>Giacomo Biagi, Monica Grandi, Carlo Pinna, Carla Giuditta Vecchiato</i> HOW NUTRITION MAY INFLUENCE CANINE BEHAVIOR AND COGNITIVE ABILITIES (Italy).....	137-147
<i>Aleksandar Stanojković, Čedomir Radović, Aleksandra Stanojković- Sebić, Marija Gogić, Violeta Mandić, Jakov Nišavić, Maja Petričević</i> ANTIMICROBIAL SUSCEPTIBILITY TESTING OF <i>STREPTOCOCCUS SUIIS</i> ISOLATES TO COMMON ANTIBIOTICS USED IN PIG FARMS (Serbia).....	148-156
<i>Władysław Migdał, Bartosz Klusek, Łukasz Migdał, Anna Migdał, Maria Walczycka, Ewelina Węsierska, Marzena Zajac, Joanna Tkaczewska, Piotr Kulawik</i> THE CHEMICAL COMPOSITION AND QUALITY OF MEAT POLISH NATIVE CATTLE BREEDS (Poland).....	157-166

<i>Yalçın Bozkurt, Tuncay Aydoğan, Cevedet Gokhan Tuzun, Cihan Dogan</i> A COMPUTERISED SYSTEM FOR PREDICTION OF SLAUGHTERING CHARACTERISTICS OF BEEF CATTLE (Turkey).....	167-176
<i>Maja Petričević, Dušan Živković, Dušica Ostojić Andrić, Dragan Nikšić, Veselin Petričević, Marija Gogić, Violeta Mandić</i> THE EFFECT OF THE FLAX SEEDS NUTRITION OF CATTLE ON PRODUCTION AND SLAUGHTER PROPERTIES (Serbia)....	177-185
<i>Giuseppe Bee, Antonia Katharina Ruckli</i> MORINGA OLEIFERA, AN ALTERNATIVE PROTEIN SOURCE TO SOYA IN PIG PRODUCTION? (Switzerland- Austria).....	186-190
<i>Miloš Lukić, Zdenka Škrbić, Veselin Petričević, Vesna Krnjaja, Zorica Bijelić, Nikola Delić</i> LAYING HENS MANAGEMENT AND NUTRITION FOR MAXIMAL EGG PRODUCTION AT 100 WEEKS OF AGE (Serbia).....	191-202
<i>Tanja Petrović, Snežana Stevanović, Dragana Paunović, Jasmina Rajić, Viktor Nedović</i> INNOVATION IN MEAT PACKAGING (Serbia).....	203-218
<i>Zorica Bijelić, Violeta Mandić, Vesna Krnjaja, Dragana Ružić-Muslić, Aleksandar Simić, Zdenka Škrbić, Dušica Ostojić Andrić</i> NITROGEN STATUS EVALUATION OF GRASS-LEGUME SWARDS UNDER FOUR N FERTILIZATION LEVELS (Serbia)	219-229
<i>Violeta Mandić, Zorica Bijelić, Vesna Krnjaja, Maja Petričević, Aleksandar Stanojković, Marija Gogić, Aleksandar Simić</i> SALINITY STRESS EFFECT ON SEED GERMINATION AND SEEDLING GROWTH OF SOME CROP PLANTS (Serbia).....	230-240

## **ORALLY PRESENTED PAPERS**

<i>Martin Wähner</i> PERSPECTIVES IN PIG FARMING IN GERMANY (Germany)..	241-249
--	---------

- Jovan Bojkovski, Jasna Prodanov-Radulović, Milica Živkov-Baloš, Radiša Prodanović, Sreten Nedić, Sveta Arsić, Ivan Vujanac, Ivan Doborsavljević, Suzana Đedović, Renata Relić, Dušica Ostojić Andrić*  
 BODY SCORE CONDITION OF SOWS AND THE THIN SOW SYNDROME AS HEALTH PROBLEMS ON COMMERCIAL FARMS (Serbia)..... 250-258
- Miguel Moreno-Millán, Delia Saleno, Gabriel Anaya, Yamila Pirovano, Florencia Azcona, Olivia Marcuzzi, Antonio Molina, Sebastián Demyda-Peyrás*  
 A COMBINATION OF KARIOTYPING AND MOLECULAR METHODS COULD INCREASE THE DETECTION ACCURACY OF CHROMOSOMAL ABNORMALITIES IN HORSES: A CASE REPORT IN PURA RAZA ESPAÑOL HORSE (Spain-Argentina) 259-266
- Maha I. Hamed, Taha A. A. El-Allawy, Esraa A. Hassnein*  
 EPIDEMIOLOGICAL AND THERAPEUTICAL STUDIES ON STRONGYLE INFECTION OF DONKEYS IN EGYPT.. 267-284
- Ivan Pavlović, Snežana Ivanović, Milan P. Petrović, Violeta Caro Petrović, Dragan Ružić-Muslić, Nevena Maksimović, Bogdan Cekić*  
 SEASON DISTRIBUTION OF GASTROINTESTINAL HELMINTHS OF GOATS KEPT UNDER SEMI-INTENSIVE CONDITIONS IN NORTH WEST SERBIA (Serbia)..... 285-292
- Antonov Valeryi Alekseevich, Grishina Marina Anatolievna, Nikolaev Sergei Ivanovich, Itskovich Aleksandr Yurievich*  
 INCLUSION SPORE PROBIOTICS «ENSIMSPORIN» IN RATIONS OF SWINES AND ITS EFFECTS ON PRODUCTIVITY, NON-SPECIFIC AND SPECIAL RESISTANCE OF PREGNANT AND LACTATING SOWS (Russia) ..... 293-304
- Łukasz Migdał, Krzysztof Krzysztoforski, Anna Migdał, Władysław Migdał*  
 THE INFLUENCE OF AGE AND BREED OF PIGS ON THE CONTENT OF TOTAL AND SOLUBLE INTRAMUSCULAR COLLAGEN (Poland)..... 305-315
- Ivan Yanchev, Kamelia Kancheva*  
 POSIBILITIES FOR UTILIZATION OF CARBON DIOXIDE FROM POULTRY IN GREENHOUSE PLANTED LETTUCE (*LACTUCA SATIVA*) (Bulgaria)..... 316-325

## POSTER SECTION I

*Marinela Enculescu*

EVALUATION OF THE HAEMATOLOGICAL PROFILE AND  
SERUM ENZYMES DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD IN  
DAIRY COWS (Romania)..... 326-335

*Muamer Pekmez, Admir Dokso, Muhamed Brka*

EXTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HOLSTEIN-FRIESIAN  
BREED ON AREA OF FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND  
HERZEGOVINA (Bosnia and Herzegovina)..... 336-341

*Miloš Marinković, Predrag Perišić, Dušica Ostojić Andrić, Vlada*

*Pantelić, Nikola Molerović, Nenad Mičić, Vladimir Živković*  
THE EFFECT OF SIRES ON THE SEMEN QUALITY OF  
HOLSTEIN-FRIESIAN BULLS (Serbia)..... 342-351

*Ivan Ćosić, Dragana Ružić Muslić, Nevena Maksimović, Bogdan*

*Cekić, Dragan Nikšić, Nenad Mičić, Miloš Marinković*  
THE EFFECT OF PARTICULAR PARAGENETIC FACTORS ON  
FERTILITY AND MILK PERFORMANCE PROPERTIES OF  
COWS (Serbia)..... 352-362

*Nenad Mičić, Miloš Marinković, Vlada Pantelić, Dragan Nikšić,*

*Marina Lazarević, Nikola Molerović, Ivan Ćosić*  
PRODUCTION PERFORMANCES AND HERD BOOK OF  
SIMMENTAL AND HOLSTEIN FRIESIAN CATTLE IN  
CENTRAL SERBIA (Serbia)..... 363-372

*Madlena Andreeva, Nikola Metodiev, Bogdan Cekić, Rossen*

*Stefanov*  
STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF LOW TEMPERATURES ON THE  
MORPHOLOGICAL STATUS OF RAM SPERMATOZOA  
(Bulgaria-Serbia)..... 373-381

*Tsonka Odjakova, Pavel Todorov, Atanaska Zgurova*

MONITORING AND TRENDS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF  
SREDNORHODOPSKA SHEEP (Bulgaria)..... 382-392



<i>Rossen Stefanov, Georgi Anev, Madlena Andreeva, Plamen Todorov, Nevena Maksimovic</i> DIFFERENT OESTRUS SYNCHRONIZATION PROTOCOLS IN LACTING NORTH-EAST BULGARIAN MERINO SHEEP IN ANESTRAL PERIOD (Bulgaria-Serbia).....	393-400
<i>Daniela Miteva, Stayka Laleva, Teodora Angelova, Daniela Yordanova, Nikolay Ivanov</i> QUALITY MILK COMPOSITION AND COAGULATION ABILITY IN SHEEP FROM THE BULGARIAN DAIRY SYNTHETIC POPULATION WITH DIFFERENT GENOTYPES (Bulgaria).....	401-410
<i>Jaroslava Bělková, Miroslav Rozkot, Eva Václavková</i> THE PIG PRODUCTION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC - REQUIREMENTS FOR FARROWING MANAGEMENT IN HIGHLY PROLIFERATIVE SOWS (Czech Republic).....	411-422
<i>Oleksandr Tsereniuk, Oleksandr Akimov, Yuriy Chereuta, Mikola Kosov</i> FEATURES OF SPERM INJECTION INTO GENITAL TRACTS OF SOWS AND GILTS IN ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION (Ukraine).....	423-430
<i>Nenad Stojiljković, Dragan Radojković, Čedomir Radović, Marija Gogić, Vladimir Živković, Radomir Savić, Aleksandar Stanojković</i> THE VARIABILITY OF ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT TRAITS MONITORED IN THE PERFORMANCE TEST OF GILTS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF FARM, YEAR AND SIRE BREED (Serbia).....	431-441
<i>Elena Cibotaru, Grigore Darie, Alisa Pirlog, Doina Plesca</i> THE ROLE OF ANTIOXIDANTS IN BOAR SEMEN PRESERVATION (Moldova).....	442-448
<i>Ksenija Nešić, Marija Pavlović, Vladimir Radosavljević</i> INSECTS – A NEW BRANCH OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY? (Serbia).....	449-458
<i>Mirna Gavran, Dragan Dokić, Maja Gregić, Vesna Gantner</i> THE ASSOCIATION OF ROE DEER POPULATION WITH WEATHER CONDITIONS IN HUNTING AREA IN EASTERN CROATIA IN PERIOD 2008-2018 (Croatia).....	459-467

*Rositsa Shumkova, Ralitsa Balkanska*  
INFLUENCE OF MICROBIOLOGICAL PRODUCT BAIKAL  
EM1 ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOPHARYNGEAL  
GLANDS ON WORKER BEES AND THORACIC GLANDS ON  
WORKER BEES AND BEE DRONES (Bulgaria)..... 468-478

*Dragan Dokić, Maja Gregić, Mirna Gavran, Vesna Gantner*  
SIGNIFICANCE OF INVESTMENTS IN AGRICULTURAL  
PRODUCTION ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE RURAL  
COUNTIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA (Croatia)..... 479-487

## POSTER SECTION II

*Radojica Djoković, Zoran Ilić, Marko Cincović Vladimir Kurćubić,  
Miloš Petrović, Milan P. Petrović, Violeta Caro Petrović*  
INSULIN RESISTANCE IN DAIRY COWS (Serbia)..... 488-504

*Goran Vučković, Mirna Gavran, Maja Gregić, Pero Mijić, Ranko  
Gantner, Marcela Šperanda, Vesna Gantner*  
THE INFLUENCE OF MASTITIS RISK ON RESPONSE TO  
HEAT STRESS IN DAIRY SIMMENTAL COWS (Croatia)..... 505-515

*Mahmoud R. Abd Ellah, Ghada I. Soliman, Mohamed A.H. Abd  
Elhakeim, Hanan K. Elsayed*  
EFFECT OF NATURAL *STRONGYLUS* SPP. INFECTIONS ON  
SYNOVIAL FLUID CONSTITUENTS IN DONKEYS (Egypt)... 516-525

*Jasna M. Kureljušić, Aleksandra Tasić, Jadranka Žutić, Branislav  
Kureljušić, Ljiljana Spalević, Suzana Vidaković, Dragana  
Ljubojević*  
SURVIVAL OF SALMONELLA IN PIG CARCASSES IN  
SLAUGHTERHOUSES (Serbia)..... 526-532

*Jadranka Žutić, Olivera Valčić, Branislav Kureljušić, Dobrila  
Jakić-Dimić, Jasna Kureljušić, Nemanja Jezdimirović, Nemanja  
Zdravković*  
SEROPREVALENCE TO *MYCOPLASMA HYOPNEUMONIAE* IN  
GILTS AND SOWS (Serbia)..... 533-540

*Dragana B. Ljubojević Pelić, Suzana Vidaković, Sandra Jakšić,  
Miloš Pelić, Jelena Vranešević, Jasna Kureljušić, Brankica  
Kartalović, Milica Živkov Baloš*  
THE OCCURRENCE OF RESIDUE OF ANTIBIOTICS AND  
SULPHONAMIDES IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF HONEY (Serbia) 541-547

<i>Ivan Mičić, Zoran Rajić, Marija Mičić</i> ECONOMICS OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND ANALYSIS MACROINVERTEBRATES OF WATER SOURCES IN SERBIA (Bosnia and Herzegovina- Serbia).....	548-557
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### POSTER SECTION III

<i>Bojan Stojanović, Goran Grubić, Nenad Đorđević, Aleksa Božičković, Aleksandar Simić, Vesna Davidović, Aleksandra Ivetić</i> EFFICIENCY OF PROTEIN UTILIZATION BY GRAZING RUMINANTS AND POSSIBILITY FOR IMPROVEMENT (Serbia).....	558-568
<i>Dragana Ružić-Muslić, Milan P. Petrović, Zorica Bijelić, Violeta Caro Petrović, Nevena Maksimović, Bogdan Cekić, Ivan Ćosić</i> ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF PROTEIN IN LAMB DIET (Serbia).....	569-579
<i>Vesna Krnjaja, Slavica Stanković, Ana Obradović, Tanja Petrović, Violeta Mandić, Zorica Bijelić, Marko Jauković</i> THE EFFECT OF CLIMATE CONDITIONS ON AFLATOXIN CONTAMINATION OF CEREAL GRAINS AND FEEDS (Serbia)	580-591
<i>Marija Pavlović, Aleksandra Tasić, Ksenija Nešić, Snežana Ivanović</i> SACCHAROMYCES CEREVISIAE IN FEED FOR RUMINANTS (Serbia).....	592-600
<i>Daniela Yordanova, Georgi Kalaydzhiev, Stayka Laleva, Vladimir Karabashev, Teodora Angelova, Evgeni Videv</i> IN VITRO ANALYSIS OF GAS PRODUCTION OF ROUGH AND JUICY FEEDS WITH FRESH AND LYOPHILIZED RUMEN FLUID (Bulgaria).....	601-609
<i>Marzena Zajęc, Joanna Tkaczewska, Piotr Kulawik, Paulina Guzik, Bronisław Borys, Władysław Migdał</i> COMPARING THE CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF THE LAMB MEAT OF VARIOUS NATIVE BREEDS (Poland).....	610-617
<i>Vladimir Dosković, Snežana Bogosavljević-Bošković, Lidija Perić, Zdenka Škrbić, Simeon Rakonjac, Veselin Petričević</i> MEAT QUALITY OF BROILERS IN AN EXTENDED FATTENING PERIOD (Serbia).....	618-624

<i>Zdenka Škrbić, Miloš Lukić, Veselin Petričević, Snežana Bogosavljević-Bošković, Simeon Rakonjac, Vladimir Dasković, Nataša Tolimir</i> EGG QUALITY OF COMMERCIAL LAYER HYBRID KEPT IN DIFFERENT HOUSING SYSTEMS (Serbia).....	625-632
<i>Nataša Tolimir, Marijana Maslovarić, Zdenka Škrbić, Borislav Rajković, Robert Radišić, Miloš Lukić</i> PREFERENCES OF CONSUMERS/CUSTOMERS FROM SERBIA TOWARD ORGANIC EGGS (Serbia).....	633-642
<i>Teodora Popova, Jivko Nakev</i> FATTY ACID COMPOSITION OF MUSCLE AND BACKFAT IN PIG BREEDS AND CROSSBREEDS (Bulgaria).....	643-652
<i>Vladimir Živković, Łukasz Migdał, Władysław Migdał, Čedomir Radović, Marija Gogić, Slavča Hristov, Nenad Stojiljković</i> INFLUENCE OF SIRE BREED ON MEATINESS OF PIG CARCASS (Serbia-Poland).....	653-658
<i>Milica Živkov Baloš, Sandra Jakšić, Nenad Popov, Suzana Vidaković, Dragana Ljubojević Pelić, Jasna Prodanov Radulović, Željko Mihaljev</i> ELECTRICAL CONDUCTIVITY OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF THE SERBIAN HONEY (Serbia).....	659-665
<i>Aleksandra M. Tasić, Tijana D. Mitrović, Marija Pavlović, Jasna Kureljušić</i> A COMPARISON OF TWO METHODS FOR DETERMINATION OF HMF IN HONEY: HPLC METHOD VERSUS SPECTROPHOTOMETRIC METHOD (Serbia).....	666-673
<i>Jordan Marković, Tanja Vasić, Dragan Terzić, Dragoslav Đokić, Jasmina Milenković, Mladen Prijović, Đorđe Lazarević</i> CARBOHYDRATE AND PROTEIN FRACTIONS, AND FERMENTATION CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMON VETCH – OAT SILAGES (Serbia).....	674-683
<i>Vesna Dragičević, Milena Simić, Branka Kresović, Milan Brankov</i> HOW CROPPING SYSTEMS AFFECT PHOTOSYNTHETIC PIGMENTS AND MAIZE GRAIN YIELD (Serbia).....	684-694

<i>Milena Milenković, Milena Simić, Milan Brankov, Vesna Perić, Miodrag Tolimir, Vesna Dragičević</i> COMPETITIVE ABILITY OF SOYBEAN AND PROSO MILLET IN DIFFERENT INTERCROP COMBINATIONS (Serbia).....	695-703
<i>Tanja Vasić, Snežana Andjelković, Jordan Marković, Sanja Živković, Đorđe Lazarević, Mladen Prijović</i> MYCOPOPULATION OF DIFFERENT FABA BEAN GENOTYPES IN SERBIA (Serbia).....	704-711

# THE EFFECT OF CLIMATE CONDITIONS ON AFLATOXIN CONTAMINATION OF CEREAL GRAINS AND FEEDS

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Review paper

**Abstract:** Production and consumption of healthy food occur as the necessity of the modern life habits. The reduced risk of diseases improves the quality of life. Feed safety is a priority trend in all process of animal production. However, toxigenic fungal species and their secondary metabolites (mycotoxins) are the common feed contaminants. The aflatoxins and the producing *Aspergillus* species section *Flavi* in cereal grains and feeds has emerged as a serious concern with potential health hazards in humans and animals. This paper aimed to give an overview on of the effect of climatic factors on *Aspergillus* and aflatoxin contamination of cereals and feeds in agro-ecological conditions of Serbia and other European countries. Since the reduction of health risks and diseases in the livestock as consequences of aflatoxins presence in feed have become the priority tasks in feed safety control strategy thus the aim of this review has also been to recommend some of the measures for preventing their adverse effect.

**Key words:** cereal grains, feeds, *Aspergillus* spp., aflatoxins, climate factors

## Introduction

The high-quality feed is a significant component of a successful animal rearing. Cereal grains (maize, wheat, barley, and ray) are the main components of feed for farm animals. However, infection of grains by toxigenic fungi is inevitable occurred in the field and during storage. Fungal development can reduce the nutritional quality of grains and provoke the production of their secondary

metabolites (mycotoxins) (*Krnjaja et al., 2012*). Mycotoxins are toxic compounds and can cause health disorders in humans and animals (*Zain, 2011*). The one mycotoxin can be produced by several fungi, and that a fungus can produce several mycotoxins (*Smith et al., 2016*).

The most common toxigenic fungal species belong to the genera *Alternaria*, *Aspergillus*, *Fusarium* and *Penicillium*. *Alternaria* and *Fusarium* are classified as field fungi, while *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium* species are considered as storage fungi, based on their different moisture requirements (*Logrieco et al., 2003*). Field fungi require higher moisture conditions (20–21%) while the lower requirements of moisture (13–18%) is necessary for the development of storage fungi (*Santin, 2005*). The interactions of host crop, genotype, soil type, stress, and biological factors encourage the preharvest fungal development. The complex interactions of environmental factors (moisture, temperature, oxygen, and carbon dioxide), substrate, and biotic factors (insects and microorganisms) are favorable for postharvest fungal contamination (*Miller 1995; Santin, 2005*).

According to the reports of The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, approximately 25% of the cereals produced in the world are contaminated by mycotoxins (*Reddy et al., 2010*). Mycotoxin contamination of cereal grains represents a potentially high risk for the health and production of farm animals (pigs, poultry and cattle). Mycotoxins are introduced into animal and human organisms most often through contaminated feeds and foods. Health disorders are most prominent in high-productive farm animals, given the significantly higher consumption of fodder. Factors such as the type and amount of mycotoxins in feed, duration of feeding with contaminated feed by the organism, species, breed, category, age, housing (rearing) of animals, etc. may also affect the degree of animal health disorders (*Krnjaja et al., 2009*).

Aflatoxins, ochratoxins, fumonisins, zearalenone, deoxynivalenol, T-2 toxin, other trichothecenes, and ergot alkaloids are the most commonly detected mycotoxins in cereal grains (*Binder, 2007*). These mycotoxins cause significant economic losses in livestock production worldwide (*Zain, 2011*). Favorable environmental factors (high humidity and temperature) can increase the occurrence of mycotoxins in the crops. In particular, the occurrence of the aflatoxin is highly depended by the weather conditions. The global climate heating can cause that aflatoxins become a serious problem in grain production (*Mannaa and Kim, 2017*).

Considering that feed safety is a priority trend in all process of livestock production, the main aim of this review paper is to present the data on the effect of climatic factors on the natural occurrence of aflatoxins in cereal grains and feeds under agro-ecological conditions in Serbia (Europe). In addition, the aims have also been to indicate on potential hazards and harmful effects of these contaminants

in the animal production, and to recommend some of the preventive measures for the reduction of these contaminants in cereals and feeds.

## Aflatoxins

Aflatoxins are difuranocoumarin derivatives produced by the *Aspergillus* species of section *Flavi* (Monge *et al.*, 2013). Four major aflatoxins founded in feedstuffs are aflatoxins B<sub>1</sub> (AFB<sub>1</sub>), B<sub>2</sub> (AFB<sub>2</sub>), G<sub>1</sub> (AFG<sub>1</sub>), and G<sub>2</sub> (AFG<sub>2</sub>), while two metabolic products, M<sub>1</sub> (AFM<sub>1</sub>), and M<sub>2</sub> (AFM<sub>2</sub>) has been detected as milk contaminants. *A. flavus* and *A. parasiticus* primarily produce AFB<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub>, while *A. parasiticus* produce AFG<sub>1</sub> and G<sub>2</sub> (Ajani *et al.*, 2014). AFM<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>2</sub> are hydroxylated metabolites of AFB<sub>1</sub> and AFB<sub>2</sub>, respectively, which are produced in the liver of humans and animals fed with contaminated foods/feeds and are secreted in the milk of mammals. Among the mentioned aflatoxins, AFB<sub>1</sub> is the highest toxic and most potent (Luongo *et al.*, 2014). According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer AFB<sub>1</sub> has been classified as the human carcinogen, Class 1 (IARC, 1993).

Aflatoxin occurrence in different types of feeds is a major risk for animal health, and causes high losses in livestock production. These toxins have been occurred all over the world in feedstuffs due to international trade in these commodities that contributes to their worldwide dispersal. They can also be found in animal-derived food namely meat, eggs, milk, and milk products if animals were fed with contaminated feed (Smith *et al.*, 2016).

AFB<sub>1</sub> was a first mycotoxin isolated from the feed and caused the death of 100.000 turkeys in 1960 in England (Bennet and Klich, 2003). Aflatoxins have been determined worldwide in different types of animal feeds, and their quantity varies depending on numerous factors. There are great differences in the levels of livestock feed contamination in particular years. In favourable years, such as warm and dry seasons, the fungi may accumulate aflatoxins before grain harvest. Also, as *Aspergillus* spp. tolerates low water activity, grain commodities under storage conditions can subsequently be contaminated (Bryden, 2012).

The poultry, pigs, and cattle are the most sensitive farm animals to aflatoxins, while sheep and rabbits are the least sensitive. Younger, gravid animals and males are more sensitive than mature ones, non-gravid, and females, respectively (Krnjaja *et al.*, 2009). Clinical signs and symptoms of aflatoxicosis in animals are vomiting, feed refusal, abdominal pain, pulmonary edema, gastrointestinal dysfunctions, fatty infiltration and necrosis of the liver, reproductivity disorders, anemia and jaundice (Talebi *et al.*, 2011; Ajani *et al.*, 2014). Aflatoxins may induce hepatotoxic, carcinogenic, teratogenic, and immunosuppressive effects on humans and animals (Smith *et al.*, 2016).



From that there are the risks by mycotoxin contamination, many countries have regulations for maximum permissible levels of mycotoxins in foods and feeds. According to Serbian regulation (*Službeni Glasnik RS 22/2018*), it adopted maximum permissible levels of total aflatoxins, aflatoxin B<sub>1</sub> (AFB<sub>1</sub>) and aflatoxin M<sub>1</sub> (AFM<sub>1</sub>) in different agricultural commodities and limits of AFB<sub>1</sub> in feedstuffs according to adequate regulations. These legislation limits are complied with EU regulations (*EC, 2010*), except for AFM<sub>1</sub>. According to the mentioned Serbian and EU regulations, in all cereals and cereal products including also maize and rice, the maximum permissible level of AFB<sub>1</sub> and sum of aflatoxins (B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>, G<sub>1</sub>, and G<sub>2</sub>) have been set in 2–5 µg kg<sup>-1</sup> and 4–10 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>, respectively.

According to the EU regulation (*EC, 2010*), the maximum level of AFM<sub>1</sub> is 0.05 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>. However, in Serbia, the regulation limit of AFM<sub>1</sub> in milk is 0.25 µg kg<sup>-1</sup> (*Službeni Glasnik RS, 90/2018*). This limit has been reviewed every six months, since 2013 year, and has been determined based on available data from official laboratories on contamination of milk and feedingstuffs (*Jakšić et al., 2018*).

The European community set the maximum permissible level for AFB<sub>1</sub> to 20 µg kg<sup>-1</sup> for all feed materials (*EC, 2003*). According to the Serbian Regulation on the quality of animal feeds (*Službeni Glasnik RS, 27/2014*), the maximum level of AFB<sub>1</sub> for all feed materials is 30 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>.

## **Natural occurrence of aflatoxins in cereal grains and feeds in European countries under climate change conditions**

Contamination of cereal grains by *Aspergillus* spp. and higher occurrence of aflatoxins has been rare under climatic conditions of many European countries Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, UK, etc. (*Lević et al., 2013*). In support of that, by mycotoxins analyzing of cereal grains samples collected during 2005–2009 in five countries from Southern Europe (Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Italy, and Portugal) *Griessler et al. (2010)* obtained the average aflatoxins levels which were not above EU regulation limits. However, in Northern Italy during 2003 it has been reported the intensive occurrence of *A. flavus* and aflatoxin presence in the maize crops (*Moretti et al., 2004*). The other one, in Northern Italy, it has noted the maize contamination by aflatoxins due to drought conditions in 2012–2013 favorable to *A. flavus* infection (*Perrone et al., 2014*). Likewise, aflatoxin contamination of maize was seven times higher in 2012 than in 2011 due to differences in weather conditions (*Accinelli et al., 2014*). Furthermore, in southeastern Romania, *Tabuc et al. (2009)* reported that 20% of maize samples collected during 2002–2004 had AFB<sub>1</sub> level above the adopted EU maximum limit (5 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>) (*EC, 2010*). Similar to that, in Hungary, *Borbély et al. (2010)* have

determined 4.8% cereal and feed samples with AFB<sub>1</sub> levels above the EU limit. Then, in Serbia, the epidemic incidence of *A. flavus* and the increased aflatoxins levels in the maize grain crops during 2012 were determined. These intensive occurrences of *Aspergillus* spp. and aflatoxins can be explained with specific environmental and climatic conditions. Very high temperatures from the anthesis to maturity stages, then, the dry summers and the low seasonal rainfalls reported in 2012 in Serbia contributed to increase the development of *Aspergillus* spp. and aflatoxins levels in the maize crops (Kos *et al.*, 2012, 2014, 2017; Lević *et al.*, 2013; Krnjaja *et al.*, 2013; Obradović *et al.*, 2018). By analyzing maize kernel samples during 2012–2016, Kos *et al.* (2018) detected aflatoxins in 72.3%, 24.7%, 36.7%, and 5% of the maize samples in 2012 (range 1–111.2 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>), 2013 (range 1.2–65.2 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>), 2015 (range 1.1–76.2 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>), and 2016 (range 1.3–6.9 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>), respectively, while during the wet year of 2014, aflatoxins were not detected. Obradović *et al.* (2018) established AFB<sub>1</sub> level above a regulation limit in 16.7% of 90 investigated maize kernel samples in 2013 originating from production plots in Zemun Polje (suburb of Belgrade). However, Krnjaja *et al.* (2015, 2016, 2018) were not established the mean levels of aflatoxins above the regulation limits in post-harvest maize samples originating from different FAO maturity groups and different districts in Serbia in years 2013, 2014 and 2016. By analyzing the samples of different types of cereal grains (wheat, barley, oats, maize, and ray) after the harvest in 2012 from the main cereals growing area in Serbia, Kos *et al.* (2014) established aflatoxins only in the maize samples. Then, in Spain, the presence of aflatoxins under international regulation limits in stored barley grains collected from 2008–2010 has reported by Mateo *et al.* (2011). Similar that, in Poland, by analyzed mycotoxins in different genotypes of wheat, Rachoń *et al.* (2016) detected aflatoxins in trace amounts.

According to the results of Krnjaja *et al.* (2019), it has been reported that in 14.29% of chicken feed samples collected from different farms in Serbia during 2016, AFB<sub>1</sub> level was above the regulation limit. Similarly, in Republic of Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Dojčinović *et al.* (2017) have reported that AFB<sub>1</sub> levels were above the regulation limit (> 20 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>) in one of 101, four of 85 and two of 86 tested samples of concentrated feed from 2014, 2015 and 2016, respectively.

Based on listed results, cereal grains and feed safety of fungal and aflatoxin contamination have been strongly influenced by climate conditions. The temperature, humidity, and precipitation are major climatic factors which directly affect fungal growth and infection. *Aspergillus* species have been occurred in tropical and subtropical regions in which droughts and high temperatures exist. Those factors also increase aflatoxin contamination of grain crops in the field. Until recently, *Aspergillus* species have not been often isolated in Europe, but in some years after the 2000s which are connecting with hot and dry summers the

occurrence of *A. flavus* and aflatoxin contamination of maize crops greatly increase (Van der Fels-Klerx et al., 2016). *A. flavus* can cause pre- and post-harvest contamination of cereal grains. Although, the soil is the native habitat of this species, many types of organic substrates can be invaded by this fungus. Since aflatoxins are synthesized under the high moisture and temperature conditions, *A. flavus* produces them commonly in warmer, tropical and subtropical climates. So, in the European countries, the moderate climate should not be the risk of aflatoxins occurrence in cereals and other agricultural products. However, the effects of global climate heating started to influence, that aflatoxins become more prevalent in countries with the moderate climate (Baranyi et al., 2013). Serbia with continental to moderate continental climate has also been under the risk of the effect of climate changes which may contribute to increased aflatoxins occurrence in cereals. In the future, it is predicted that AFB<sub>1</sub> will become inevitable in production of maize in Eastern Europe, the Balkan Peninsula, and the Mediterranean regions (Milicevic et al., 2019).

Additionally, Battilani et al. (2016) reported the prediction of aflatoxin contamination in maize and wheat crops under a +2°C and +5°C climate change scenario where AFB<sub>1</sub> will become a feed safety issue in maize in Europe, especially in the +2°C scenario which will be expected scenario in the upcoming years.

## Mitigation of aflatoxin cereal grains and feeds contamination

The control strategy of mycotoxin contamination in cereal grains and feeds consist of prevention of fungal development and mycotoxins production and detoxification of existing mycotoxins.

The preventive pre- and post-harvest measures, such as the healthy seeds, early sowing, harvest in full maturity, good storage conditions can be used to reduce fungal and aflatoxin contamination of cereal grains. Regular and correct ventilation and aeration of storage facilities may also prevent the increase in fungal contamination. Generally, only the dry grains with the moisture content of approx. 13% should be stored (Krnjaja et al., 2009).

Physical adsorption, chemical, and biological detoxification methods are used for adsorption and degradation of toxic into non-toxic compounds. In practice, zeolite and clay minerals are used as adsorbents of aflatoxins. They are from a group of aluminosilicate minerals. Also, some of the biological adsorbents, such as modified glucomannan (isolated from cell walls of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* yeast) are applied for inactivation of aflatoxins (Devegowda and Murthy, 2005). Individual or combinations of organic acid (propionic, sorbic, acetic acids, etc.), salts of organic acid (calcium propionate and potassium sorbate) and copper

sulphate are some of the chemicals which can inhibit fungal growth and proliferation (Akande *et al.*, 2006). Lactic acid bacteria (LAB) are used in silage feeds. Probably, organic acid by LAB inhibits fungal growth, or there is the competition for nutrients in the substrate between fungus and LAB. Additionally, growing in the culture medium the bacteria can adapt faster than fungi. Then, binding AFB<sub>1</sub> and AFM<sub>1</sub> by LAB influenced by specified strains, matrix, temperature, pH, etc. The binding is a slightly reversible phenomenon. However, this biocontrol method could be a promising measure against fungal growth and aflatoxins in feeds (Ahlberg *et al.*, 2015).

## Conclusion

It has been predicted that aflatoxins will continue to be of increasing importance in cereal grains and feeds. Therefore, there is a need for detailed information on the effect of climate conditions on the aflatoxin production by *Aspergillus* spp. Determination of climate factors will be the crucial task to control strategy and risk assessment of aflatoxin contamination. Monitoring of weather conditions in certain regions and constant control of aflatoxins level in cereals and feeds are necessary for health risk assessment of humans and animals.

For successful livestock production, it is necessary to ensure both healthy and high-quality fresh components that are included in the feed mixtures, and ready-made mixtures without contaminants that may cause adverse effects in the production chain. Given the importance of the aflatoxins as a hepatotoxic and carcinogenic agent that causes aflatoxicosis in animals, the best solution to control the formation of this mycotoxin is to prevent the growth of fungi on maize as the main component of animal feed and also on other susceptible commodities. Pre-harvest and post-harvest measures should be raised to cereal grains safety by aflatoxin contamination.

## Uticaj klimatskih uslova na kontaminaciju žita i hrane za životinje aflatoksinima

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## Rezime

Proizvodnja i potrošnja zdrave hrane je potreba savremenog načina života. Bezbedna hrana za životinje je prioritet u svim procesima stočarske proizvodnje. Međutim, toksigene vrste gljiva i njihovi sekundarni metaboliti (mikotoksini) su najčešći kontaminanti hrane za životinje. Aflatoksini i produkujuće *Aspergillus* vrste iz sekcije *Flavi* u žitima i hrani za životinje pojavljuju se kao ozbiljan problem sa potencijalnim opasnostima po zdravlje ljudi i životinja. Cilj ovog preglednog rada je da se razmotri negativan uticaj klimatskih faktora na infekciju/kontaminaciju zrna žita vrstama roda *Aspergillus* i aflatoksinima, kao i hrane za životinje u agroekološkim uslovima Srbije i drugih evropskih zemalja. S obzirom da smanjenje rizika koji ugrožavaju zdravlje i smanjenje bolesti u stočarstvu, kao posledica pojave aflatoksina u hrani za životinje, postaje prioritetan zadatak u strategiji kontrole bezbednosti hrane za životinje, cilj ovoga rada bio je, takodje, da se preporuče neke od mera.

**Ključne reči:** žita, hrana za životinje, *Aspergillus* spp., aflatoksini, klimatski faktori

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