

## NEWS COLUMN

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### **Grass Tetany in Cattle**

Grass tetany, a magnesium deficiency usually occurs when cows are changed from their normal winter feeds to new growth of grass in the early spring. The most critical period is late April to mid May.

Many cattle that die from grass tetany are never observed while showing any symptoms of the disease. This is mainly due to the very short time interval between onset of symptoms and death. One symptom observed is excitement caused by abnormally low levels of mineral. Cows grazing early, lush, rapidly growing grass may not consume adequate amounts of dry matter and therefore magnesium. However, the main cause appears to be failure to adequately utilize magnesium obtained from the grass.

If in an area where there is a history of grass tetany problems, cows should not be allowed to graze when grass is young and growing rapidly. Confinement and feeding of winter/spring rations would be best advised until late May in these situations.

Other options of prevention include increasing dietary magnesium intake. This is easiest accomplished by feeding a palatable supplement containing magnesium. The daily magnesium requirement of beef cows with calves at side is in a range of 6 to 15 grams per head per day. Using magnesium oxide, between 10 to 25 grams would be needed to supply these daily levels. Since some magnesium would be obtained from the feed, a daily supplement of 10 grams of magnesium oxide would be adequate.

It is highly recommended that all cows in the herd consume the magnesium supplement regularly, both before and after the critical period. Surplus magnesium is not stored to a great amount in the animal's body. Giving cows extra magnesium before new grass starts without supplementation while on grass will not prevent the disease. Due to erratic mineral consumption when fed free choice, it may be advised to force feed minerals during the critical period.

The most common treatment for grass tetany is an intravenous injection of 500 milliliters of a calcium and dextrose solution. However, chance of recovery is slight if treatment is not started within one hour of the first signs of symptoms. Emphasis therefore must be placed on prevention rather than treatment.