

# Forage, Grass Tetany And The Ag Census

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Information gleaned from the recently released "2007 Ag Census," as always, holds a few surprises. One point that caught my attention is that 90 percent of all forage acreage is located in two-thirds of Arkansas counties, which serves to make it the No. 1 commodity.

Forage acreage, whether used as pasture or hay, comprises over 70 percent of the total farmland in these counties.

Farm size continues to dwindle as a full 36 percent are less than 50 acres in size with a good chunk of that number falling below 10 acres. This comes as no surprise across north-west Arkansas since many of our city cousins continue to opt for the esthetics of rural living as long as their ranchette can be located within a comfortable drive of their other work site.

The numerical growth and visibility of the smaller farms and the production of many small animal species leaves it to our imagination in regards to what animals are grazing this abundant forage acreage.

One thing for certain, the learning curve for individuals new to rural life is steep and often costly since nature allows for few mistakes. Another certainty is the bulk of this acreage is occupied by cool season forages, whether native or introduced.

Immediately after the ice melt, cool-season forages began a spurt of new growth. We quickly notice that animals prefer the quality of new growth over that of even the best hay. However, Extension Veterinarian, Dr. Jeremy Powell re-

minded me that new forage growth is directly associated with a potential health problem known as grass tetany, which is caused by abnormally low levels of magnesium in animals.

Ruminants, large or small, are less efficient in absorbing magnesium from feed or forage, especially when quality and moisture content are high as is the case in this new growth. Lactating animals, a normal occurrence at this time of year, are more susceptible, but a number of other factors can serve to aggravate the incidence of tetany.

Unfortunately, symptoms of tetany are usually observed too late to help the animal recover, which makes prevention the only practical method of control. A tetany-free season can be achieved by providing animals a free-choice salt-mineral supplement containing at least 10 percent magnesium. The stuff tastes as bad as castor oil, so mineral companies usually dress it up with molasses to gain animal acceptance.

The "Agriculture Census" noted that 60 percent of our farms now have internet access so a search for grass tetany will provide more detail. While surfing the net, check out the ag census. It makes for fairly good reading and provides food for lots of speculation.

For more information about cattle production, contact your county extension agent or visit [www.uaex.edu](http://www.uaex.edu) and select Agriculture, then Beef. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the U of A Division of Agriculture. Δ

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