Prepare For Grass Tetany Season

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As spring grass green-up approaches so does the potential for grass tetany for spring-calving cow herds. Grass tetany is generally considered a magnesium (Mg) deficiency observed in spring calving herds consuming lush forages high in potassium and low in calcium and sodium. Older, high milk-producing cows during early lactation are most susceptible to grass tetany due to inability to mobilize Mg from bone. Cattle grazing nitrogen-fertilized grass pastures, high in potassium, are also more susceptible to grass tetany due to greater forage potassium levels interfering with Mg uptake. Cattle suffering from grass tetany will walk with stiff, uncoordinated legs and frequently urinate. During advanced stages cattle will lie down and thrash with paddling motions and convulsions. Avoid placing additional stress on affected animals by moving to a new pasture. Immediate attention from a veterinarian is required to treat affected animals. Given the rapid progression of grass tetany symptoms, prevention is key to preventing death losses. Establishing legumes in grass pastures is one prevention method for grass tetany offering several benefits to producers. Grass pastures with 30-40 percent legumes will provide increased forage Mg and calcium while reducing nitrogen fertilizer needs. Producers unable to establish pasture legumes should consider supplemental Mg. Magnesium oxide is the most common source of supplemental Mg; unfortunately, magnesium oxide is unpalatable causing difficulty maintaining consistent Mg intake. Mixing magnesium oxide with salt and a carbohydrate source such as ground corn, dried molasses, cottonseed or alfalfa meal in a 1:1:1 ratio has prevented grass tetany while improving palatability and intake. Daily supplementation during early spring forage growth is critical to prevention due to low body Mg stores and high Mg requirements due to lactation. Δ

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