

Prevent Grass Tetany
Clyde Lane, Jr.
Professor – Animal Science

Grass tetany is a metabolic disease in beef cattle that is caused by a magnesium deficiency.

Treatment for grass tetany is generally not an option, since the animal is usually dead when found. Prevention is the best option.

Prevention needs to be addressed two ways. First, pastures need to be fertilized according to soil tests. Research has shown a relationship between high levels of potassium in the soil and the magnesium level in the forage. Forages produced on fields fertilized heavily with potassium tend to have lower magnesium levels. Soil testing allows producers to fertilize without getting potassium levels too high.

The next and most important step in grass tetany prevention is feeding a high magnesium mineral mixture to the animals. The higher magnesium levels need to be fed during the period when grass is very lush and cows have young calves. The greatest incidence occurs when cows have calves that are 4 to 6 weeks of age.

To aid in preventing grass tetany a cow need to consume the equivalent of one ounce of magnesium oxide or .6 ounce of magnesium on a daily basis. Look at the mineral tag to determine if the mineral will provide enough magnesium. Determine the percent magnesium in the mineral and the recommended consumption. By multiplying these two numbers together, it can be determined how much magnesium will be consumed. Be sure to monitor consumption.

Animals consuming less than recommend will not be getting enough magnesium.

Check under the ingredients heading on the mineral tag to determine the source of magnesium in the mineral. Magnesium oxide or magnesium sulfate are good sources of magnesium. Stay away from supplements that contain magnesite and dolomitic limestone. The magnesium in these forms is not readily available to animals.

For more information on grass tetany, contact your local Extension office.