

OSU EXTENSION

Cows on wheat pasture

Many Oklahoma cow calf producers will use wheat pasture as a major source of winter feed for beef cows. If wheat pasture is the predominant feed in the diet of mature beef cows, providing appropriate “wheat pasture” mineral mix will be helpful in preventing grass tetany at, or after the calving season begins.

Grass tetany, caused by magnesium deficiency does not seem to be a major problem in Oklahoma although occasional cases are reported. It typically occurs in beef cows during early lactation and is more prevalent in older cows. The reason is thought to be that older cows are less able to mobilize magnesium reserves from the bones than are younger cows. Grass tetany most frequently occurs when cattle are grazing lush immature grasses or small grain pastures and tends to be more prevalent during periods of cloudy weather. Symptoms include incoordination, salivation, excitability (aggressive behavior towards humans) and, in final stages, tetany, convulsions and death.

It is known that factors other than simply the magnesium content of the forage can increase the probability of grass



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tetany. High levels of potassium in forages can decrease absorption of magnesium and most lush, immature forages are high in potassium. High levels of nitrogen fertilization have also been shown to increase the incidence of tetany. It is likely that a combination of factors, all related to characteristics of lush forage are involved.

When conditions for occurrence of tetany are suspected, cows should be provided mineral mixes containing 12 to 15 percent magnesium and be consumed at 3 to 4 ounces per day. It is best for the mineral supplements to be started a couple of months ahead of the period of tetany danger so that proper intake can be established. More information about mineral supplementation for grazing cattle can be found in the OSU Extension Circular E-861 Vitamin and Mineral Nutrition of Grazing Cattle or by contacting your local OSU Extension Office.

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