4-10-14

**Grass Tetany**

Technical terminology from Merk Veterinary Manual 9th edition defines a complex metabolic disturbance by hypo magnesium, a reduction in the blood. We are talking about a condition in cattle known as “Grass Tetany” or “Grass Staggers”.

Grass Tetany does occur mainly in a cow and or heifer in early lactation (shortly after giving birth) when grazing lush, early spring grass pastures. The effected cows or heifers are often the heavy milking group being the most susceptible. Also, other conditions may influence the problem such as sail fertility and weather.

Magnesium absorption may be reduced when potassium (potash) and nitrogen intakes are high and sodium and phosphorus intakes are early fertilization of grasses or soils that are naturally high in fertility. Also, cool, cloudy and rainy conditions that are favorable for cool season grasses (fescue) or small grain pastures (wheat, oats, rye) to grow rather quickly, thus absorbing less magnesium from the soil.

Most generally grass tetany occurs in the spring due to conditions being more favorable for rapid grass growth. However it could happen at other times during the year. Sometimes fall conditions are favorable for quick grass growth.

Many times the symptoms are finding a dead cow in the pasture with signs of struggling on the ground around the head and legs. It’s already past time to consult your herd health veterinarian, but a correct diagnosis may prevent future losses.

Traditionally farmers have supplemented cattle with “High Mag” blocks- ever try getting a drink of water from a block of ice- its hard for cattle to consume enough from the blocks to meet their needs. The cattle need a daily intake of magnesium because their body does not store a reserve supply.

A loose, free-choice mineral mix will aid cows to consume the desired amount of grain with magnesium oxide. The magnesium oxide is not very tasty so it needs to be mixed with a tasty feed.