



**Ask the  
VMD**

Leon Riegel



Tim Trayer



Edgar Sheaffer

If you have a question you would like answered by the team from Valley Animal Hospital, send it to Ask the VMD, Box 366, Lititz, Pa. 17543. Questions will be kept anonymous on request.

**A reader asks:**  
Have there been many cases of grass tetany in Southeast Pennsylvania? Are there enough minerals in the trace mineral salt blocks to prevent it? Is it only a problem with cows and heifers, or can it affect steers and bulls also?

**Dr. Sheaffer comments:**  
Yes there continually are cases of grass tetany or more properly called hypomagnesemia. Actually, the problem is the result of a low uptake of available magnesium in the forage creating low blood magnesium in the cattle eating it. This problem is most commonly seen in the Spring and Fall, although cases have been seen in the Summer months.

There are areas in Southern and Eastern Pennsylvania where forage plants are low in available magnesium and cattle are not getting enough magnesium in their diets. The lack of magnesium may be due to a tie-up of the mineral because of heavy fertilization, or due to excessive rains and fast growth of the plants.

I do not believe there is enough magnesium in the trace mineralized salt blocks

to prevent this disease.

What I recommend is that a precalculated amount of magnesium oxide or magnesium carbonate be added to the ration, mixed right in with the grain, if the soils in the area are deficient in magnesium or forage tests indicate a deficiency. Don't rely on trace mineralized salt to supply adequate magnesium to prevent grass tetany.

This disease is rarely seen in bulls and steers. However, there have been cases treated. Even though steers are not losing the magnesium like a lactating cow does in the milk, it still has a surprisingly similar magnesium requirement.

The two most common ways of supplementing the diet with magnesium are: the calculated amount added per batch or ton of feed

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ground; or topdress to each cow. Adding the mineral when the feed is mixed saves on labor, and once it is discovered the forage and

soil is deficient in magnesium, the addition of the mineral becomes part of the normal management scheme.

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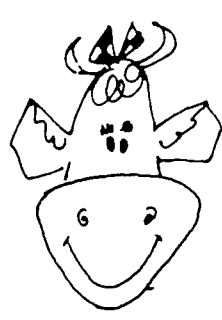
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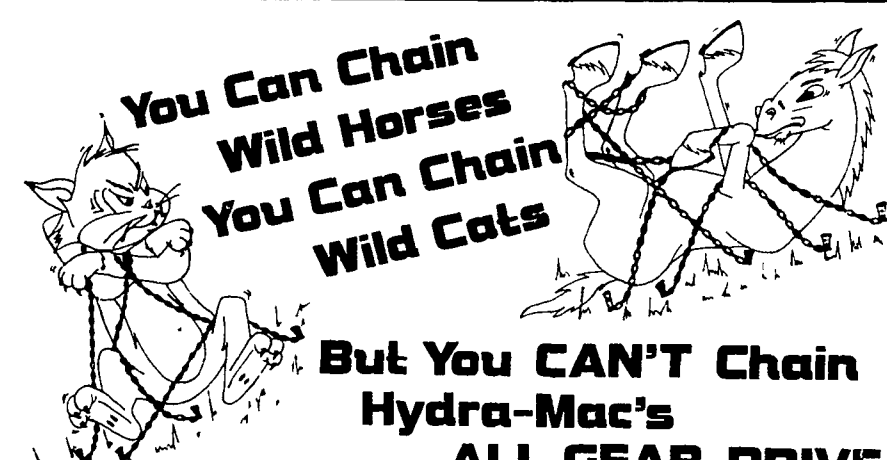
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