

## Consider risks of grass tetany

COLD and wet conditions across much of south-east Australia have prompted Kondinin Group to remind cattle producers to keep a watchful eye on their early-calving cows.

Favourable winter conditions in many areas have been a boon to cattle producers all too familiar with costly winter-feeding regimes during recent dry seasons.

But Tasmanian consulting veterinarian, Paul Nilon, warned rapid growth in moisture-laden, grass-dominant pastures this winter could see many older cows on the knife-edge with maintaining a healthy magnesium balance.

"Producers in many areas would be wise to consider the potential risks of grass tetany this year, particularly in older cows which may be carrying more condition due to plentiful feed availability," Dr Nilon said.

Dr Nilon said the risks were

increased further when cold fronts passed through and cows spent more time avoiding cold conditions and less time grazing.

Treatment of affected cows had to be fast to be effective and an injection of a combined calcium magnesium injection was the recommended approach.

However, prevention was always better than the cure, as grass tetany often occurred without warning and the success rate of treatment depended on how quickly it is administered after an affected animal has been identified.

Dr Nilon said cattle producers had a range of preventative options available, all of which involved supplementing animals with magnesium during the period of highest risk.

"Prevention is commonly managed by feeding out magnesium supplements on hay or pasture, or through lick blocks

and drinking water," Dr Nilon said.

"However, it is hard to ensure every animal consumes an adequate amount of supplement with these approaches, and this season's abundant pasture growth could see many producers reluctant to engage in the costly and time-consuming process of supplementary feeding."

Rumen magnesium capsules were another effective option to consider, and with careful application directly into the rumen, each animal was provided with a long-acting supplement affording a high level of protection.

Salt supplements increased rumen sodium, which in turn overcomes the magnesium-blocking effect of high potassium intake.

"However, the decision on which management option is the right one will come down to individual circumstances," Dr Nilon said.

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