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Don't play guessing games with cowherd minerals

Missing the mark on minerals can affect your cows and their calves many ways, and none of them are good.

By Jill Seiler

There are cows in every herd that seem to coast through the production year without any trouble. Their body condition stays sufficient and they bring a calf to the branding party every year.

But are these “easy keepers” really easy keepers that don't need any supplement, especially vitamins and minerals? There's a chance they're costing you money in spite of their outward appearance, says Jeffery Hall of Utah's State Diagnostic Lab, in remarks at this year's Cattle Industry Convention in Phoenix, Ariz.

He told producers that mineral deficiencies are widespread. He told beef producers that mineral deficiencies are widespread. The leading concerns nationwide, copper and selenium deficiencies, can cause white muscle disease and weaken immune function to let in pneumonia, diarrhea and other diseases. Other potential shortages may relate to zinc, manganese or vitamins A and E.

“Most of the time it's due to inadequate intake,” Hall said. “Most of the forages that our cattle run on are not at high enough concentrations to optimize productivity within those animal systems.”

His nationwide copper deficiency tests found 53% to 70% of cattle short on copper, with a need to supplement seen in every state.

It's not the lack of these micronutrients that directly cause sickness, but the effect on immune and reproductive systems, all starting in the third trimester of pregnancy. That's when a cow passes some of her mineral and vitamin stores to her calf, to use in those first 90 days of a milk diet that does not contain significant trace minerals.

“That allows the calf to be born with really good body reserves to where its immune system is running good the day it hits the ground, and it keeps it in a healthier state for a longer period of time when its predominant intake is milk,” Hall said.

Calves with compromised immune systems struggle to fight off diseases or maintain optimum growth. Many of the ranchers Hall worked with have seen increases in average weaned weight, from 25 pounds or so when correcting mild deficiencies to as much as 80 pounds after correcting a severe deficiency, the boost including more live calves to wean.

However, left unchecked, “deficiency actually causes a long-term production loss,” Hall said.

On the cow side, even correcting mild mineral deficiencies can gain a 2- to 4-point increase in the percentage of cows bred back. Hall shoots for 95% there, and said falling short means money left on the table.

“If you have to sell a cow after she has her first calf, even though you have the sale of that calf and the salvage value of selling that open cow, you've effectively lost close to \$600 because of the year-and-a-half to two years it took to develop that cow before you got her first calf on the ground,” Hall said.

Although a casual inspection out the pickup window may show no problems, he suggested testing to “find out exactly what's going on.” Then, realize because forage quality is different across the country, every producer has to make a different decision about what is best for his or her herd.

Those working to produce high-quality beef, especially when calving outside of a forage grazing season, should feed mineral supplements based on test results. Animals under less stress from disease pressure tend to produce higher quality carcasses, he noted.

“The biggest thing is, as you correct these problems and you put overall healthier animals into the next stage of the development phase, these healthier animals gain better, they're more profitable all the way up the chain and they also tend to marble out better, so you end up with better carcass characteristics and quality,” Hall said.

Seiler is a communications intern with Certified Angus Beef

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Future Cattleman Charley Deering son of Mike and Julie Deering of Montgomery City, MO knows where to get his daily dose of vitamins and minerals!! Mike the Executive Vice President of The Missouri Cattlemen's Association said that when he told Charley “we need to go”, Charley replied “No me eat all this Dad”

You have to love this young mans taste in supplements.

Chelates - do your cattle need them?

Reprinted from *Beef Magazine* http://www.beefmagazine.com/mag/beef_chelates_cattle_need

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One of the most frequently asked questions I get from cow/calf producers is whether they should use chelated minerals. Chelated minerals are trace minerals that have been attached to an organic compound such as an amino acid. Oddly, the answer is "yes" and "no." It's "yes" if the producer has a specific problem - breeding, scours, foot rot, grass tetany, weaning, calving, or uses other practices like

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Oddly, the answer is "yes" and "no." It's "yes" if the producer has a specific problem - breeding, scours, foot rot, grass tetany, weaning, calving, or uses other practices like AI or embryo transfer. It's "no" if the animal is fed a balanced diet and does not encounter any stress factors or specific problems. Here are 7 top recommendations to avoid heat stress

When asked to consider using chelated minerals, many producers say "I will just feed more of my regular (inorganic) mineral." This does not work. Research shows that twice the level of the sulfate (inorganic) form of copper or zinc will depress the response from the mineral.

In addition, high levels of one mineral may tie up another mineral - iron and molybdenum may tie up copper. In water samples, I use a maximum of 400 ppm to determine if there is enough excess sulfate in the water to tie up copper.

With inorganic minerals (sulfates, carbonates and oxides) the availability (solubility) of the mineral varies a lot. Generally, the sulfate form is more available than the oxide form.

Some of the most positive responses I've experienced in clients' herds are improved reproductive performance, increased immune response and prevention and treatment of foot problems.

* Research reports indicate that up to 25% more viable embryos/flush, higher conception rates, and fewer services/conception may be obtained with chelates. These results are more profound when the cattle are on a poor-quality mineral program prior to receiving chelated minerals. Regarding the bull side, increased testicular size and improved semen quality and quantity have been reported.

* The immune response. Cows fed chelated minerals before calving are more likely to have calves with less scour problems and less sickness and death loss. Research shows that calves that get scours or pneumonia in the first 30 days of life will show the effects the rest of their life in reduced longevity, more health problems and reduced performance.

Weaning, especially this year with the possibility of light calves coming off dry, dusty pasture and being on the short side of feed, is another important time to use chelated minerals in the diet. The positive response of the immune system will make the vaccination program work better and improve overall health.

* It's an accepted fact that zinc-methionine aids in the improvement of hoof quality and the prevention and treatment of foot rot. In areas with continual foot rot problems, the use of zinc methionine is recommended.

One place where chelates should be used but rarely are is in areas where losses from grass tetany are a problem. Producers still use 10-14% magnesium oxide or sulfate to prevent grass tetany when a chelated magnesium would do a much better job.

"It costs too much" is the common response. I say, "What is a cow worth this year?"

When the situation calls for it, I recommend including chelates at 30% of the total mineral package. In times of extreme stress or if other situations warrant, the level of chelates may be increased to 60-70% of the total.

In most cases, chelates do not need to be fed all year. A practical program is using chelates one to two months prior to calving and continue their use until breeding season is over or it is no longer feasible to put mineral on the range.

Before a decision is made to use chelated minerals, we must first analyze the nutritional program and what the producer is trying to achieve. In some instances, we just need to get the producer on a mineral program.

Maximum production is not always economical. If there is a problem that may be eliminated or reduced by the use of chelates, then I will incorporate the specific chelated minerals I feel will do the job - not just a blanket approach.

Remember, there is a place for chelates but not every place needs chelates.

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