



Weaned calves eating a mineral supplement.

## Shopping For Best Mineral Supplement For Beef Cows Can Be Overwhelming; Extension Specialist Offers Some Advice

**MT. VERNON, MO.**

**M**ineral supplementation of beef cows and stockers creates many questions that are sometimes difficult to answer according to Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

Cole says shopping for the best mineral can be overwhelming when the feed tag lists major minerals, trace minerals, vitamins, percent and parts per million and additives that may boost gains, efficiency, prevent fly development and reduce infections.

"I suspect most supplements are purchased on a price basis or on recommendations from a neighbor or a salesman. I know my experience with research in this area, it's not difficult to show absolute performance enhancement from the various supplements," said Cole.

Forage samples with mineral analyses are less common but Cole says the ones he has seen from fescue fields in southwest Missouri often show copper, zinc and selenium to be borderline to lower than desired.

"However, several grazing trials have been run under various conditions and daily gains tend to be similar regardless of the mineral supplement," said Cole.

Fescue does receive attention regarding minerals due to the endophyte toxin. The toxin reduces animal intake which affects total mineral intake. In this case, a person would expect a well-fortified mineral supplement to improve cattle performance.

"An excellent combination pasture of grasses and legumes may even be enough to meet the mineral needs of most classes of grazing cattle. In this instance, plain salt could be all you need to give them. Salt is the primary mineral all cattle need," said Cole.

Cole says many cattlemen do not want to take a chance that some mineral may limit their cattle's performance. In those cases, they should pick a mineral mix that covers the basic needs of their cattle with a reasonable cost.

"I've looked at numerous mineral tags and most are certainly adequate in the likely trace elements, copper, manganese, selenium and zinc," said Cole.

Justin Sexten, a beef nutrition specialist with University of Missouri Extension, says a general "thumb rule" for copper, manganese and zinc is 1000, 2000 and 3000 parts per million (ppm) respectively in a mineral supplement.

"Selenium should be a minimum of 10 to 12 ppm. Of course, consumption enters into the picture and most intakes are based on 3 or 4 ounces per head per day. If for some reason cattle are eating two or more times that amount it can get in your pocket without you seeing significant performance changes," said Sexten.

Most minerals include various amounts of vitamin A, D and E. In a good weather year, Cole says these vitamins should not be a critical concern. They will add some to the cost of the supplement. Δ