

## Free Choice Mineral

Free choice mineral mixes are commonly used to provide the mineral that grazing cattle need. Cattle are great self-regulators and they usually know about how much to consume in order to balance the minerals in their body. Free choice programs are an excellent way to allow the livestock to choose the nutrients they need and replenish what might be lacking in their feeds.

Salt can be used as a weapon to control intake. In most situations cattle intake of free choice mineral is driven by their desire for salt. Mineral mixes with smaller target intake usually have more salt than those with greater target intakes. As you start increasing the salt, you can cause them to start decreasing their intake because they get their salt “fix” with less intake. If cattle are eating above your target intake, mixing in more salt can help reduce their intake of the mix.



Many factors enter into determining the amount and frequency of free-choice minerals consumed by a cow, such as environmental conditions, pasture topography, grazing patterns, location of shade, number and placement of watering stations, and soil fertility. How can you tell if your cattle are achieving their mineral target consumption goal? Following these principles listed below will help you achieve this goal.



A mineral feeder should be provided for every 15 to 20 head. This will help make sure that more timid cows have the opportunity to get access.

- Feeders that are at ground level will encourage mineral intake.
- Minerals fed in a feeder where the tub is off the ground (12 to 24 inches) will lower intake.

The location and number of feeding stations must be adjusted to control intake.

- Moving a feeder as little as 50 yards can sometimes make a huge difference in intake.
- Adjust for low intake (and encourage increased intake):
  - o Place feeders closer to shade, water or loafing areas.
  - o Place feeders closer to the cow path or trail.
  - o Remove or reduce salt.
  - o Place in mineral tubs set on the ground.
  - o Place additional mineral feeders in new location.
- Adjust for excessive intake (and encourage decreased intake):
  - o Place feeders farther from water, shade or loafing area.
  - o Move feeders away from the cow path or trail.
  - o Mix additional salt with the mineral.
  - o Place feeders up off the ground.

- Pastures with creeks running through them may include several watering locations, so an increase in the number of feeding stations is recommended to encourage consistent intake.
- Most minerals do not need added salt. However, if cows are overconsuming, additional salt can be added to control intake.
  - o When added salt is needed for controlling or reducing mineral intake, it is always advisable to mix salt with the mineral rather than feeding mineral and loose salt side by side.
  - o If fed separately, some cows will tend to eat only salt and others will eat only mineral.

Record when and how much mineral is put out by pasture to know what the cows are consuming. Making filling mineral feeders a consistent chore and schedule time for it in the workday.

Free choice programs can not only be for beef cattle and dairy cattle, but also for sheep, goats and horses. For sheep and goats, you just have to be cautious about the copper levels as they are more susceptible to copper toxicity.



## Product of the week

### “O” Free Choice Mineral



“O” Free Choice Mineral is a free-choice mineral designed to supplement the nutritional needs of livestock.

#### Product characteristics:

- Provides supplemental calcium and phosphorus in a 1.5:1 ratio.
- Provides high levels of magnesium to aid in prevention of grass tetany (Hypomagnesemia) in livestock pastured on lush grass.
- Contains sulfate forms of trace minerals.
- Provides supplemental selenium.
- Contains Icelandic kelp as a source of over 60 trace minerals and vitamins.
- Helps improve reproduction health, immune system function and hoof health.