

TECH TALK

Why Performance Trace Minerals Should Be a Regular Part of Your Cow-calf Nutrition Program

Article Provided By:



Mr. Jeff Lyle
Zinpro Account Manager, Western Canada
Zinpro Corporation

Every day, farmers and ranchers across the world choose performance trace minerals to help improve growth and reproductive performance, overcome stress or battle hoof diseases like foot rot in their cow-calf herd. Producers are continuously evaluating the decisions that they make, and may be tempted to remove performance trace minerals from the diet for several reasons, including:

- The problem that led you to start feeding them in the first place has been solved.
- You are under pressure to cut costs and increase your ranches' profitability.

So when is the ideal time to remove performance trace minerals from your beef cattle nutrition program? The answer is simple: never.

Performance Trace Minerals Prevent Problems and Improve Production, Profits

Once a problem you have been dealing with has been solved on your cow-calf operation, it may be easy to forget the value of performance trace minerals. For example, a year ago you may have treated 10% of your cows for foot rot but, but with the help of performance trace minerals, you only had to treat 4% this year. At this point, it may seem like the problem is manageable and the money spent is an unnecessary addition to your feed costs.

These essential minerals don't just solve a problem, they also prevent it from happening in the first place. If you pull them out of your cows' ration, the problem you had solved may reappear after a few months. Afterall, the bacteria that causes foot rot is likely still present in the environment on your ranch.

Foot rot isn't the only example. Performance trace minerals help beef cattle mount a rapid and robust inflammatory response to immune challenges so that they spend less energy being sick and more energy fueling their maintenance, production, reproduction and beyond.

During an economic downturn, removing performance trace minerals from your beef cattle nutrition program may seem like an easy way to cut costs. This is only a short-term solution though as you will be sacrificing long-term production and profitability.

Feeding performance trace minerals to gestating cows increases weaning weights by up to 28 pounds per head, improves average daily gain by 0.09 pounds and reduces the incidence of foot rot by 30% to 57%. We also see an increase in the number of cows that calve within the first 21 days of calving season, which gives those calves more time to grow before being sold, resulting in heavier weaning weights for your calves.

Consistency is Key

You typically wouldn't wait until an outbreak of bovine respiratory disease (BRD) to start vaccinating against it. So why wait for an immune challenge to start feeding performance trace minerals? Considering production alone, we see a return on investment of 3:1 from feeding performance trace minerals. That number climbs even higher when you consider health challenges that may arise and the money you will be saving on treatment costs.

For performance trace minerals to help your cow herd contend with the stressors that occur in their life, we recommend starting supplementation 60 to 90 days before the start of a stressor. So if you're looking for a time when you can safely remove them from the ration, I would ask if you can find a 90- to 120-day period on your calendar when your cows will not be facing a stressor. Unfortunately, we can't predict that. When you look at the reproduction cycle alone, the reality becomes clear that such a period is not likely to occur, which is why performance trace minerals should be a regular part of their nutrition year-round.

To learn more about the value of including performance trace minerals as a regular part of your beef cattle nutrition program, [reach out to your Zinpro representative](#).