Some home truths about minerals

I hope in this article to explain a little about what minerals do and why we do actually need them. There has been so much mis information about minerals that too many of you think they are a dirty word. I will try to give you some pointers so in future you will be better armed to deal with the dreaded mineral man.

Firstly, I will give you an over -view of what they do and why. Then, I will briefly go through what each element does and what might be happening if it is not available. Lastly, I will (give you all my telephone number so you have no excuses in the future) lay out a plan you should try to follow.

In the earth's crust are the minerals we need and use in life. Some we regard as precious and sell for money, others we acquire naturally through the food we eat. These trace elements are in the plant and the animal; the animal we eat gets its supply from what it eats (forage) but as in everything man has interfered with this cycle by pushing everything to the limit. Something has to give and usually that will be something small, but will push things out of balance. At first, there will be little obvious change but through time reserve levels will go down and the problems will begin. This is what has happened over the years with farming.

If you now look at the forage analysis you will see that it lists all the trace elements that we know are required by your stock. It also has a number in the next column and lastly it has a coloured bar which, depending on the colour, will indicate the level of trace element in the plant. The very low –very high is actually what the plant requires so it is a little misleading. The number is the most important as it is what is available in each Kilo of dry matter consumed.

Firstly the major elements: these elements are measured as a percentage and are to be found and required in larger amounts.
Calcium (Ca) this is probably the most important element of all and is needed for bone growth and milk production.
Phosphorus (P) is required in the production of energy.
Magnesium (Mg) will help prevent stress and nervousness.
Potassium (K) is important for maintaining a correct fluid balance within the body.

Sodium (Na) is also very important for the correct balance of body fluids and the absorption of nutrients.
Chloride (Cl) works in conjunction with sodium.

Now for the micro trace elements. These are required in smaller amounts but are probably the most spoken about (not always correctly).
Iron (Fe) is required to produce haemoglobin within the blood cells.
Aluminium (Al) we know has an affect on availability of phosphorus and the utilisation of energy.
Manganese (Mn) can give young stock a problem due to deformation of the joints.
Zinc (Zn) is very important to the immune system as well as feet and skin.
Cobalt (Co), as everybody will know,causes ill thriftiness and lack of appetite, most commonly in young stock.
Iodine (I) has a vital role especially around calving or lambing.
Iodine has a very close relationship with selenium, which also has an important role at this time.
Selenium (Se) is very important for fertility and muscle development.
Copper (Cu) is important for fertility, utilisation of feed and the immune system.
Molybdenum (Mo) has a detrimental role with in the animal especially if levels are high.
Sulphur (S) has an effect on rumen function and skin.

So there it is, a very brief insight to the murky world of minerals. Most of what goes on daily on the farm has a connection to minerals and the animal's health but it's only when you get a problem, which no one else can fix, that you turn to the witch doctor (Mineral Man). Why wait till then?
Have you ever considered how much money you are losing by not keeping on top of your stock?
Have you ever fed minerals and seen no difference?
This is because you probably bought something off the shelf at your local merchant or even worse it was supposedly tailor made to suit your needs.
We only do minerals so we <u>have</u> to get it right!

Here is a simple plan, which you may like to follow:

- Take time out to have a real good look at your stock especially your young stock and your older cows. Are you really happy with them?
- Take a good look at your calving pattern. Is every cow having a live calf every 12 months?
- Do you weigh your cattle and do you set targets for your stock ? If so, are they reaching them?
- Do you really know what your stock is eating and what minerals are really available? If not, it is time you took some samples.
- Make up some proper diets and minerals to balance them. Use professionals and set targets to reach.
- Monitor regularly and work with your team of professionals to reach your goals.

Finally, if this has been of interest and you would like to find out more, please feel free to contact us with no obligation.