

Put the Farm to Bed

It's that time of year, time to put the farm to bed. Many tasks need to be done before the snow flies! One of those tasks is to mulch the strawberries, tear up the garden and put a leaf cover over my fish pond. You see, I've neglected to do some of those in the past, and it ends up more work the next year, or in the case of the strawberries, I lost some plants the next year.

Along with these chores, there's all the things to do with the livestock. Whether it's moving them closer to home or onto stock fields, make sure you provide salt and mineral.

Daily salt requirement for mature cattle is less than 1 oz/head/day; however, voluntary intake often exceeds minimum needs. Because there are practical limits to the amount of salt cattle eat, salt can be used to restrict the consumption of highly palatable feeds such as grains and supplements. In such instances, daily voluntary intake of salt will approximate 0.1 pound salt/100 pounds body weight for most classes of cattle.

Using salt to supplement your livestock and animals' diets is essential to their health, as well as their production. Salt is made up of two vital nutrients: sodium and chloride. Sodium is necessary for the animals' nervous system, muscles, blood, and other required functions. Chloride also benefits the blood and aids in digestion. This basic mineral has a huge impact on the livestock's production. Studies have shown that a producer will see a significant loss in production long before any symptoms of deficiencies are observed in the animal.

Many animals will regulate their own salt intake, as long as a source is available. However, there are certain times when more salt is required. For example, the heat will cause your animals to lose more salt through sweat and urine. The same loss of salt occurs during times of extreme humidity. Especially when the animal is consuming more water, salt intake may need to be doubled.

Salt toxicity is seldom seen in cattle because of their high tolerance for salt. The one-time lethal dose for mature cattle is 4 to 5 pounds salt. Salt is rapidly absorbed from the intestinal tract into the bloodstream. It is then excreted by the kidneys through urine. However, the animal is able to eliminate excess salt only when adequate clean water is available.

Salt toxicities are most likely to occur: 1) where cattle have been deprived of salt for extended periods of time and suddenly have readily available salt; 2) if cattle are forced to eat excessive salt with an inadequate water supply; or 3) when cattle are forced to drink water containing a high concentration of salt.

