Mineral Necessities

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Wintertime can bring many enjoyable activities to Central Montana. Skiing, Snowmobiling, and ice-skating just name a few. Many cattle producers get the enjoyment of dreaming of such activities while holding the mouth of a calf that was born at midnight and still hasn't eaten at two in the morning while feeling the wind rip past at sub zero temperatures. The stress of calving season on a producer's body and mind is not one of Montana's best-kept secrets. Despite all the late nights and early mornings, though, the stress on the producer still sits a strong second to that of the cow.

Between November and March we require that cow to grow two thirds of a fetus, give birth to a calf, begin lactating steadily, heal herself, and re-breed within at least two cycles or else she becomes hamburger. That's a lot to ask and puts a major strain on her system. Her need for ample protein and energy during this period are important but it's her ability to meet her trace mineral requirements that often keep her from being sent down the road.

Copper, zinc, manganese, and selenium are all trace minerals that are essential in a cow's ability to breed back after calving and the health of her calf. Each play specific roles that are, unfortunately, too numerous to cover within the confines of this article. All work in conjunction to make sure both the cow and her calf are healthy throughout the calving process and that she can heal properly coming back into cycle in ample time to be bred for the next season. Unfortunately each of these minerals are found to be deficient in Central Montana. To add to the problem of deficiencies are antagonists such as the sulfates found in water sources and the molybdenum that used to be mined in the Snowy Mountains. Each wrap up trace minerals, especially copper, rendering them unavailable to the cows system.

Paying close attention to mineral availability and the presence of antagonist such as sulfates and molybdenum can pay off in the fall. If you have any curiosity about the effectiveness of your mineral program don't hesitate to give us a call or stop in. We would be glad to discuss the effectiveness of trace minerals in greater detail. Look for more articles about the specific functions of trace minerals in later issues of *Ag News at a Glance*.