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What determines how much supplement my cattle eat?

Intake of supplement by cattle is an area of considerable interest. Firstly we need to get enough supplement into cattle to be effective while not having them eat too much so that supplement and money is wasted. The amount of supplement required by cattle varies with **size, age and pregnancy and lactation status**. Cattle with higher demands for nutrients tend to eat more supplement and so balance their intake of nutrients.

Cattle tend to select feed based on **palatability**. As the palatability of the pasture changes throughout the year then so the preference for Quicklick will vary. On lush green feed cattle will not tend to consume the dry season Quicklick as it is so much less palatable than the pasture available. The wet season Quicklick is much more palatable and designed for this type of feed. On extremely low palatability feed, that is generally lower in digestibility and protein, then the Quicklick becomes more appealing and so intakes will rise. By souring the product to where it is in the similar level of palatability as in the pasture, then we can keep the intake of Quicklick in the desired range.

Cattle will stop eating due to any of a number of **physiological factors**. The first one to kick in will be the factor that stops the cattle eating. On forage diets rumen fill is usually the factor that stops intake of pasture. This means that the beast cannot physically fit any more grass in and so stops eating. Chemical factors such as having enough energy, protein, phosphorous or any other nutrient will also stop intake.

Cattle will also select what they require, based on nutrient requirements, to an extent. A beast will have a hunger for a **missing nutrient**. It will try eating various things in an attempt to satisfy the hunger for that nutrient. A prime example is bone chewing. Phosphorous deficient cattle will chew all sorts of things including rocks, sticks and poly pipe until they find that chewing bones helps relieve their hunger for phosphorous. This is the reason that cattle that have mineral deficiencies tend to eat more Quicklick and so attempt to correct these deficiencies.

If you need to feed irregularly to limit intake it is best to feed at least twice a week. **Rumen microflora** only survive for 24 to 48 hours. If we feed once a week and leave the cattle without supplement for 3 or 4 days the population of rumen bugs will revert very close to an unsupplemented state as we have allowed them to go up to 4 generations without supplement. By feeding twice a week we will hopefully only leave the cattle and rumen bugs unsupplemented for a day at most. By maintaining the rumen microflora digestion and intake of dry feed will be enhanced.

Managing the intake of supplement is a vital part of any supplementary feeding program. Too little intake will cause a loss of the benefits of feeding while too much feed will be wasteful of feed and money. Cattle that are eating far in excess of requirements may be chasing a missing nutrient or may simply find the supplement far more palatable than the pasture available. If you are concerned about your stock's intake of Quicklick please give us a call.

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