



ARE MINERALS REALLY NECESSARY AT GRASS?

Many sheep and beef producers would get their silages tested to help decide supplementary mineral requirements over the winter, but how many know the macro and trace element content of their spring and summer grazing pastures?



David Thornton,
Rumenco Technical Manager

By mid-May, grass is usually growing well and the sight of plentiful forage stocks is a welcome one for any sheep and beef farmer. With the current squeeze on lamb and beef margins, making the most of low-cost summer grass remains an absolute priority.

According to David Thornton from Rumenco, summer grassland management is a highly complex subject however the main objectives are clear; to produce

high yields of nutritious grass and to manage it in such a way that livestock can maximise their intake for maximum gains. At the same time, producers must try and avoid wastage and diminishing nutritional value caused by under-utilisation, which introduces the issue of correct stocking rates.

“Good gains in lambs and cattle from early season grass alone are relatively easily achieved because it is very nutritious,” he points out. “Typically May/June grass might contain 20-24% crude protein (in DM) and is around 80 D-value, giving an ME value of 12.8MJ/kg DM, which are values higher than in many concentrate feeds used at this time. This introduces the concept of substitution, which is where your valuable grass asset is replaced by a more expensive feed of lower nutritional value, resulting in a lower margin and more work!

But the reality is, whilst early season grass can deliver impressive animal performance with little required in the way of feed supplements

until late June, by early summer, dry matter and fibre levels begin to increase, digestibility decreases and animal performance reduces. There is not much a producer can do about this other than consider supplementary feeding again, of which correct mineral nutrition is a key part.”

Some sheep and beef producers may not realise that there can be significant differences between the mineral content of their grazing pastures in spring and summer. “Different grasses have different mineral analyses but, in addition, soil type, clover and weed content, liming effects and fertiliser regimes can also influence mineral make-up and availability within grazing categories. The key message is: know what you are feeding and then choose your supplement based on good levels of the missing minerals.”

Rumenco has spent some time researching pasture mineral analysis on a national basis and have tailored their 4in1 grazing bucket to contain 4 key components: macro minerals, trace elements, vitamins and the plant extract oregano.

It helps optimize the base levels provided by grass but recognizes any potential deficiencies, particularly in the trace elements. Zinc is provided in a protected form to prevent lock ups and selenium is in an organic form to improve availability. The oregano is a plant essential oil that has some interesting benefits to help maintain rumen stability with the ever-changing background in grazing nutritional quality. Making sure the rumen is working efficiently is a massive plus point in helping to maintain good performance at grass.