

# BEEF SOLUTIONS

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E-Newsletter

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## Managing free-choice mineral intake

The “corner post” of any cow nutrition program should be a year-round mineral program. Every rancher knows that to build a good fence, you must have a good corner post. In the same way, building a sound beef cow nutrition program starts with a sound mineral program.

Supplemental minerals are beneficial because they are involved in several biological functions, so it is important to ensure proper intake to get the maximum benefit. If the cow eats too little, her performance may suffer. If she eats too much, extra cost will be incurred.

Mineral intake must be managed, even when offered free-choice. Hubbard Feeds mineral formulations are very appetizing to cows, but there is more to getting cattle to consume the right amount of mineral than delivering a palatable product. Many factors enter into determining the amount and frequency of free-choice minerals consumed by a cow, such as environmental conditions, pasture topography, grazing patterns, location of shade, number and placement of watering stations, and soil fertility. Too often, mineral feeders are conveniently placed near the gate, rather than considering ideal placement based on cattle behavior and traffic patterns.



## Reaching mineral targets

Most Hubbard minerals (e.g., [Stockmaster®](#) and [Blueprint®](#)) are formulated with a target intake of 4 ounces, or 0.25 pounds, per head per day. That is equivalent to 1.75 pounds per cow per week (7 pounds per cow per month) or 200 feedings per 50-pound bag. We want to manage intake so that free-choice minerals are consumed at or near that target. The following principles can help to achieve this goal:

1. A mineral feeder should be provided for every 15 to 20 head.
  - Feeders that are at ground level will encourage mineral intake.
  - Minerals fed in a feeder where the tub is off the ground (12 to 24 inches) will lower intake.

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2. The location and number of feeding stations must be adjusted to control intake.
  - Moving a feeder as little as 50 yards can sometimes make a huge difference in intake.
  - Adjust for low intake (and encourage increased intake):
    - Place feeders closer to shade, water or loafing areas.
    - Place feeders closer to the cow path or trail.
    - Remove or reduce salt.
    - Place in mineral tubs set on the ground.
    - Place additional mineral feeders in new locations.
  - Adjust for excessive intake (and encourage decreased intake):
    - Place feeders farther from water, shade or loafing area.
    - Move feeders away from the cow path or trail.
    - Mix additional white salt with the mineral.
    - Place feeders up off the ground.
3. Pastures with creeks running through them may include several watering locations, so an increase in the number of feeding stations is recommended to encourage consistent intake.
4. Most Hubbard minerals do not need added salt. However, if cows are overconsuming, additional salt can be added to control intake. Use only white salt to prevent interference with the trace mineral profile of the product.
  - When added salt is needed for controlling or reducing mineral intake, it is always advisable to mix salt with the mineral rather than feeding mineral and loose salt side by side.
  - If fed separately, some cows will tend to eat only salt and others will eat only mineral. This will become readily evident if you are feeding a mineral with fly control. Less-than-satisfactory fly control will result because some cows do not get their dose of fly control since they are eating only salt.
5. Record when and how much mineral is put out by pasture to know what the cows are consuming. Make filling mineral feeders a consistent chore and schedule time for it in the workday.

## Results will follow

Mineral feeders placed close to shade and loafing areas are convenient for the cows to visit and will encourage intake. When mineral feeders are placed near water, the cows can easily cleanse their palates and return to the mineral feeder to consume more mineral. That is comparable to a person being able to eat a lot of really salty popcorn as long as they have a large enough soft drink.

You've made a good investment when you commit to feeding minerals to beef cows on a year-round basis. Managing proper intake ensures that you get the highest return on animal performance for your investment.

