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Labour-saving bolus maximises youngstock growth rates at grass

Optimising growth rates at grass is essential in both dairy and beef youngstock but mineralising these animals post-turnout has long been a challenge on grass-based systems.

But thanks to extensive research by UK veterinarian, Les Porter, of Animax Ltd, a solution is now available in the form of a slow-release trace element bolus.

Tracesure Cu/I not only delivers six months worth of selenium, cobalt, copper and iodine but it reduces labour inputs because the boluses can be administered at the same time as cattle are wormed before turnout.

Peter Delbridge, who runs a suckler herd on the edge of Exmoor, farms in an area that lacks key trace elements and has a high rainfall level.

By using Tracesure Cu/I he says he only needs to handle the stock once at turnout. "I'm always quite keen on using things that need less labour. If we can do things more efficiently then it's bound to be better," says Mr Delbridge, of Blindwell Farm, near South Molton.

Lloyd Picton-Davies, who runs 120 Holstein Friesians and 50 Jerseys cows in Carmarthenshire, started bolusing the stock 18 months ago at the same time as he treated them for worms and fluke. "It's the complete package," says Mr Picton-Davies, of Asgood Farm, St Clears.

Every animal is given Tracesure Cu/I, including the youngstock at turnout and again at housing. "There is no red tinge on their coats any longer, black and white is black and white. They are getting copper as well as iodine, selenium and cobalt from the boluses and they stay in the cow's system for six months," says Mr Picton-Davies.

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In neighbouring Pembrokeshire, dairy producer, Robert Lawrence, who runs a herd of 230 milking cows, has seen improvements in the growth of dairy heifers since bolusing at turnout.

“Sometimes we have missed bolusing a few before turning the heifers out to grass and I always know which ones they are because the colour of their coats makes them stand out from the rest of the herd,” says Mr Lawrence.

“The heifer replacements and the cows are the most valuable animals on the farm and anything we can do to improve their health status we try to do.”

For beef producer Andy Ryder, who produces Belgian Blue cattle, Tracesure Cu/I is the ideal solution for mineralising cattle at grass.

Mr Ryder, who farms in Dumfriesshire, boluses his herd with Tracesure Cu/I before turnout and again before winter housing. If the calves are big enough – 200kg-plus – they get a bolus too.

“The Blues are heavily muscled which can leave them short of selenium so it’s important they get that supplement,” says Mr Ryder. “We had tried a competitor’s product but Tracesure Cu/I is better overall for what we want.”

Research by Les Porter in the development of Tracesure Cu/I centred on the need for heifers to be big enough at 15 months to stand the bull to ensure calving at two years old.

On 24-month spring calving systems, heifers graze for two summers before calving, firstly as calves and secondly as bulling heifers. For optimum growth rates and utilisation of feed, diets need to be supplemented with trace elements.

Mr Porter says Tracesure Cu/I allows optimum absorption over a long period of time.

Tracesure calf triple pack boluses supply calves with up to six months worth of selenium, cobalt, iodine and copper. These can be given to calves once they are ruminating, usually as they are weaned onto grass. Larger or older heifers over 200kg can be given Tracesure Cu/I.