



NON-AMP VERSION

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Phosphorus: A vital diet supplement

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Ever had difficulties preventing your cattle from eating all forms of dirt in the form of plastic bags, dry bones, cloths or even wire? Such actions by cattle are not unique to your herd only – it is a universal occurrence associated with diet-related problems.

Cattle that do not get enough food, or if their diet does not contain enough phosphorus, particularly during the dry season, are often prone to consuming every form of dirt they find.



Once the cow has eaten plastic bags or wire, the only effective treatment is an operation, which is expensive.

Prevention, which is the only viable option in most of these cases, involve feeding cattle well during winter and clearing wires and plastic bags from grazing areas.

Lower feed utilisation and intake, reduced fertility, irregular or suppressed ovulation, and lower conception rates are all symptoms of a lack of phosphorus in the cattle diet. Other symptoms include reduced milk yield, lameness, stiffness of gait – and, in severe instances, enlarged and deformed joints and bones. Phosphorus is one of the most important minerals in animal nutrition. It is the second most abundant element in an animal's body after calcium, with 80% of phosphorus found in the bones and teeth, and the remainder located in the body fluids and soft tissue.

The initial effect of a phosphorus deficiency is a fall in blood plasma phosphate levels, followed by the response mechanism of calcium and phosphorus being withdrawn from the animal's bones.

Apart from a generally lower resistance to infection, this often results in a loss of appetite and a reduction in live weight gain due to impaired feed efficiency.

There are various products such as feeds and licks that supplement phosphorus levels in cattle available on the Namibian markets. Consult your leading agriculture outlet or the local office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform's Directorate of Veterinary Affairs for more information.