



Using Blocks Properly for the Sheep Flock

By Jackie Nix

Use of blocks for mineral and/or protein supplementation has long been a popular option in the sheep industry. Blocks offer a convenient, waste-free method for supplementation. Blocks come in several different forms: pressed, poured and cooked. These forms differ in hardness, size, consumption rates, nutrient content and desired use. It is important to properly match the right block supplement with both your management needs and the nutritional needs of your sheep.

Proper block management is critical to the success of nutritional programs utilizing supplement blocks. Just putting blocks in the pasture will not ensure that your sheep receive adequate amounts of nutrients. For this reason I have composed this list of helpful block management tips:

1. Provide the recommended number of blocks (as indicated in the product label's feeding directions) for the number of animals exposed (for example 50 sheep @ 1 block per 10 head will need 5 blocks). This will allow all animals equal access to blocks, even the more timid ones. Also, allow at least 10 feet between blocks for this same reason.
2. Place blocks where animals congregate. Locate blocks throughout the pasture, placing them near watering, feeding and loafing areas (within at least 50 feet).
3. Remove all other sources of salt and minerals unless directed to do otherwise by the product label directions. If animals do not consume the recommended levels of blocks, they will not receive the necessary levels of nutrients for maximum performance.
4. Determine the block consumption rate per head per day after a period of acclimation (1 to 2 weeks). Do this by determining the amount of block consumed in one month (i.e. number of blocks) and then multiply this number by the weight of the blocks (For example 5 blocks @ 40 lb each = 200 lbs). Divide this figure by 30 days to determine the consumption per day (200 lb/30 days = 6.7 lb/day). Next, divide this figure by the number of sheep exposed to the blocks to determine consumption per head per day (6.7 lb/day/100 goats = 0.067 lb/hd/day). To convert this into ounces, multiply by 16 (0.067 lb/hd/day X 16 oz/lb = 1.1 oz/hd/day).
5. Compare actual consumption rate with the suggested consumption rate on the product label. Regulate consumption accordingly through block placement. Locate blocks closer to congregation areas to increase consumption and place farther away to decrease consumption.
6. If under-consumption occurs, locate blocks nearer to congregation areas. For example if sheep are not eating enough supplement place the blocks in shady areas where sheep lounge during the day or place blocks throughout the grazing paddocks to reduce distance to travel to blocks.
7. If over-consumption occurs for more than two weeks, locate blocks farther away from congregation area. If repositioning of the blocks does not correct the situation, remove blocks and reevaluate your overall feeding program.
8. Do not allow animals to run out of blocks. When a block is half-consumed, place a new block near it. To avoid wastage, place small pieces in a trough or feed pan.

9. During inclement weather or muddy conditions, it is desirable to place blocks in bunks or containers to maintain proper consumption levels.

These are but a few tips for proper supplement block management. For more information about **Sweetlix supplement blocks** call **1-800-325-1486** or visit our website at <http://www.sweetlix.com>. Sweetlix offers a wide variety of supplement products for sheep.

Jackie Nix is a nutritionist with Sweetlix (<http://www.sweetlix.com>). You can contact her at jnix@sweetlix.com or 1-800-325-1486 for questions or to learn more about the Sweetlix line of mineral and protein supplements for sheep, goats, cattle, horses, and wildlife.

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