

ENL The Background Story

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To give you a context for the work we do at ENL here is a brief insight into my journey.

They say that nothing happens without a reason or a why! For most companies, it is the business opportunity they see that has them enter the market. As you know, the market is awash with companies selling livestock mineral supplements that once did something else – even the fertiliser companies and vets jumped in on it.

For me, years before the ENL was conceived and while working as a farm consultant, I became increasingly interested in understanding the link between ill-health / non-performance and mineral, trace element and vitamin nutrition. I remember one spring, the dead cow man collected 65,000 cows in the Waikato alone ... it was a bad weather spring; the next year 47,000! What a waste. It annoyed me that these cows suffered due to a lack of management understanding and inadequate mineral nutrition over late pregnancy. This wastage was considered a normal part of dairying!

It must have been 1990 or thereabouts and I heard an interview with some guy who had transformed the industry he was in. Can't remember what field he was in but what got stuck in my head was him saying "You need to get clear on what grieves you about some specific aspect of your industry and relentlessly pursue the solution".

That was 25 years ago and you could say the rest is history. Back then I was well frustrated that my farmer clients were kept in the dark by "animal health professionals" who knew, or should have known better, but whose businesses would suffer if animal health was improved dramatically. And then there were industry advisors who thought mineral supplementation was the last thing to get right after you had improved the big ones (i.e. after increasing your stocking rate and the use of fertiliser/ urea).

My argument was that proactive mineral nutrition should reduce wastage and improve performance, and that it needed to be addressed in parallel with improvements in management and feeding. This applied whether it was calving and repro performance of dairy cows, lamb survival and growth rate in sheep, or any livestock production challenge for that matter. If we could understand the ill-health challenge or performance gap, then with inputs and management we could prevent, solve or improve it.

This led to close to 10 years of researching the scientific literature and having my clients experiment with inputs and dosages that were unheard of. It was an exciting time – working out what responses were possible and what the optimal levels were. What the industry offered by way of reference ranges or requirement tables was of little help – at the time this was mostly concerned with absolute deficiency,

The majority of what I recommended was against the flow of advice they were getting elsewhere. I remember having to promise one couple that if any of the test animals died I'd buy them. It was frustrating, but I realised that if the industry "experts" understood it as I did, I would not have a job.

Results spread by word of mouth; my advisory work grew throughout the South Island and to Tasmania, but what I was recommending worked too well. I recall several clients telling me that their vets had approached them asking if they had changed vets (which they hadn't). However, what I was recommending got "up the nose" of one – his complaint ended up with an investigation warrant being issued against me by the ARB. I was investigated.

Fortunately I wasn't supplying anything – just giving the recommendation and giving the farmers some contacts as to where to get the ingredients. So the detective and I had an interesting time; he was on a mission to catch me as a law breaker ... me telling him he would be better reporting back to the authorities that the lack of mineral nutrition is doing far more harm and what a disgrace it was. Something like \$300M per annum in calving related wastage and ill health, not to mention the thousands of lambs dying each year from ill-health, scouring, flystrike directly related to a lack of dietary copper and B12 etc. This event was a "defining moment" as they say.

It made sense to get some of my formulations registered with the Animal Remedies Board. It would mean I could legally recommend them as made up combinations - my consultancy work in part relied on the results they produced. What happened over this period may be the subject of a book one day ... at the start they suggested I deleted several of the active ingredients and reduce levels of others by 3-4 fold, or alternatively discontinue with the applications! That wound me up even more.

At the end of two and half year technical battle I eventually was successful and new benchmarks were created and ingredients never before used in ruminant nutrition were now accepted. I wasn't interested in just adequacy or maintaining adequate bloods, I wanted to see measureable results from strategically targeted elevated input levels.

ENL was set up out of the need for a manufacturer that I could trust with my ideas, and the formulations I had developed.

Our initial products started as formulations designed to solve livestock health problems or performance gaps for consultancy clients of mine. Where they made noticeable differences, and especially if they worked the same for more than one farmer, it encouraged me to further refine them and many became standardised products. In addition to these widely known products, we still produce a number of niche, issue or customer specific solutions.

Ironically in 2003 the ARB was replaced by the ACVM Act and "oral nutritional compounds" no longer required registration. What followed was a proliferation of new entrants in the trace element market ... "every man and his dog" started selling the stuff! Minimum input levels I established became the basis for all the commodity trace element products now in the NZ market.

Our work at ENL has remained focused on results beyond just maintaining adequate bloods and we continue to work on solutions to problems that bother the industry; for example calving metabolics, under weight heifers, bearings, low lamb growth rate.