



Salt Blocks and Your Horse

By Jackie Nix

Many horse owners unwittingly sabotage their mineral supplement program by providing plain white or yellow salt blocks in place of, or in addition to, loose mineral supplements or mineral blocks. For years popular wisdom was to provide salt blocks to horses. However, now complete mineral and vitamin supplement products specifically designed for horses are available that contain salt. This article is meant to educate horse owners on proper mineral management and nutrition.

Consumption of a mineral supplement is regulated by several different factors including: salt content, hardness, molasses content, and “other” factors. Salt is added to a mineral mix not only to meet the salt needs of the horse, but also to mask other bad tasting ingredients and to maintain proper consumption. For instance, phosphorus is very unpalatable. Salt, along with other ingredients are often added to cover the unpleasant taste and to boost consumption.

Salt is added to a mineral mix to encourage consumption, but it is also added to limit consumption. As an example, think about an order of french fries, doesn't some added salt make it taste better and encourage you to eat more? What happens if you accidentally spill an open saltshaker on these same french fries? When they have too much salt, you will tend to eat less of them and may forgo eating them at all. The same principles apply for mineral supplements for horses.

Now you ask, what does this have to do with salt blocks? When white, blue or yellow salt blocks or red trace mineral salt blocks are provided along with a complete mineral supplement, your horse may get all of his or her salt from the salt blocks and consume none of the complete mineral supplement. Or, more likely, he or she will consume some of both. While your horse does get some mineral supplement in this instance, it usually will not receive as much as it needs. When you buy a mineral supplement, you will find a set of feeding instructions on the label. The desired consumption rate listed on the label is the rate that is formulated to deliver the full compliment of mineral and vitamin supplement. For example, if the desired consumption of a mineral is 6 oz. per head per day, the presence of salt blocks may decrease consumption of this mineral to 2 or 3 oz per head per day. Let's also say that this mineral is designed to deliver 100% of the daily-recommended allowances for trace minerals. In this case, your horse would only receive half of its trace mineral needs by this feeding scenario and in time could develop mineral deficiencies.

In all cases, it is important that you read and follow the label directions for any equine supplement. NEVER provide additional sources of salt to horses receiving free choice complete mineral supplements unless the product label specifically instructs you to do so. In rare instances, some supplements do recommend that you provide additional salt.

The cost of a good complete mineral supplement represents a significant cost. You invest this money with the knowledge that your investment will pay off in improved health and performance for your horse. To add salt blocks that decrease the effectiveness of your complete mineral supplement significantly decreases the value of your investment.

Sweetlix[®] offers several complete mineral and vitamin supplements for horses including:

Equine Mineral Equalizer (4500)

Equine Mineral Equalizer Block (4501)

Equine Pasture & Hay Balancer (4503)

Rabon[®] Fly Control Block for Horses (4504)

Equine Pasture & Hay Balancer Tub (4505)

The Sweetlix[®] line of equine supplements helps horses attain maximum health and performance by providing a complete vitamin and trace mineral package designed especially for the unique nutritional needs of horses. These products will deliver 100% of the daily trace mineral needs when fed according to label directions. Ask for Sweetlix[®] by name at your local dealer. Call 1-800-325-1486 or visit www.sweetlix.com to find the nearest Sweetlix[®] dealer near you.

No matter what mineral supplement you choose to purchase and utilize, protect your investment dollars by reading and following the label feeding directions. Avoid allowing your horse access to white or yellow salt blocks unless the mineral supplement specifically states to do so.

Jackie Nix is a nutritionist with Sweetlix (<http://www.sweetlix.com>) and has been an active part of the goat industry since 1995. 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 goats.

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