Choosing your salt

Last month we talked about how much salt your horse may need. But what may be the best option for the form of salt? When you go to the feed store, there may be an entire shelf devoted to meeting your horse’s salt needs. White, red or yellow, which should you choose?

Block or loose?

First you may want to consider the form in which you feed salt. Many horses will consume enough salt by licking a block but many will not. Horses typically will consume more salt in the loose form and it is easier to monitor their intake than it is with a block. A maintenance horse should consume around 25 to 50 g of salt per day. Let’s assume you purchase a small block that can be placed in your horse’s feeder. Therefore, you should have to replace your salt block every 1 to 2 months. If they aren’t disappearing that fast, your horse may not be getting enough salt. Additionally, you can easily supplement with regular table salt top dressed on their feed when their salt needs increase in the warmer months.

What color?

In general, white salt blocks are just that - salt. Other colors are typically trace mineralized salt blocks, and contain various concentrations of minerals your horse needs in its diet. Obviously the consumption rate of the salt block will determine how much mineral your horse receives. Let’s look at some examples. A generic red salt block intended for cattle and horses is listed as containing 3500 ppm of Zn and 375 ppm of Cu. If that horse consumes his salt requirement – 25 g of the salt block – he would also receive about 88 mg of Zn and 9 mg of Cu. That would be 22% of its Zn requirement but just 9% of their copper requirement. Therefore, it would be important that the horse receives the rest of its mineral requirement from its feed sources, rather than relying on the presence of the salt block.

Let’s look at another example. This salt block contains 0.5% Ca, 0.5% P, 2000 ppm of Zn 1000 ppm of Cu and 20 ppm of selenium. It is intended for the horse to consume 3 ounces of the block per day, or 85 grams. If the horse does as the label suggests, it would receive 0.4 g of Ca and P, 170 mg of Zn and Cu, and 1.7 mg of Se. The contribution of Ca and P is insignificant, the horse has consumed 43 % of its Zn requirement, 170% of its Cu requirement and has met its selenium requirement. If the horse “licked” as suggested, you should have to replace the salt block every 21 days.

Bottom line – make sure your horse always has access to salt. Loose salt encourages intake, and regular table salt can be used to increase your horse’s salt requirements. Relying on your salt block to provide the correct minerals can be chancy – because it is all up to your horse on how much it consumes.