



Horses require more than a block of white salt to meet mineral

Horses need minerals.

Newcomers to the horse business often have no clue exactly what

For the love of horses
By Frank J. Buchman

that means. First and foremost, every animal must have salt, the most basic mineral there is. That mineral does come in limited amounts in certain feedstuffs, but not typically in adequate amounts to meet nutritional requirements of the horse.

Salt can be added to the feed to insure adequate consumption, but the best method is supplying it for free choice. In other words, salt is made available to the horse at all times, so it can be consumed whenever the horse has a need or craving.

There are different philosophies in what form the salt should be provided. Many people prefer to place a 50-pound block of white salt for the horses, while others would rather give their horses loose salt in a pan or trough.

Consumption is faster

and more readily available with loose salt, because the horse isn't required to lick the hard

block to get the amount desired. Many salt sources are available with additional additives, including other minerals and sometimes vitamin, proteins, etc.

The science of equine nutrition recognizes that horses need a wide variety of vitamins and minerals to maintain overall health, performance levels, proper growth and reproductive health.

Jack Grogan, certified equine nutritionist in Blissfield, Michigan, has worked extensively in the fields of biology, biochemistry and nutrition. He is an expert in tissue mineral balancing, and has experienced notable success in balancing mineral chemistry to strengthen the basic metabolism and improve efficiency in horses.

"The specific types and amounts of nu-

trients required can vary widely from horse to horse and breed to breed," Grogan emphasizes. "Special needs factors must also be considered for horses that are pregnant, suffer from Cushing's syndrome, insulin resistance or founder.

"A comprehensive vitamin and mineral supplement can provide key nutrients that are deficient or imbalanced in the horse's diet to help maintain health, vitality and reduce the risk of future health issues," Grogan continues. "There are a variety of formulas for your horse's needs, whether they are maintenance horses, moderately worked, sport horses or have special nutritional needs."

Product choice can also be based on various stages of life: foal, mare, adult and senior. Grogan cites many causes for the need for supplementation.

One is that the amount of fortified grain fed to a horse may not provide enough nu-

trients to meet his or her needs, even though it is appropriate to his energy and workload.

To meet minimal nutritional requirements, the type of hay, age, workload and the amount of fortified grain fed to the horse needs to be taken into account.

Some horses may have increased nutritional needs based on stress and activity levels, such as horses under stress, competitive horses, those that travel and older horses.

In addition, no grass or alfalfa hay or grain will provide the exact levels of optimal nutrition for horses.

"The mineral content can change markedly from hay to hay, and the vitamin content of grain and forages can decline rapidly during periods of transport and storage," Grogan states. "Heat, humidity, and rainfall can also affect nutrient content of hay and pastures."

With today's modern farming practices, the pastures and hay contain substantially different levels of any number of nutrients. Even the highest qual-



Free choice salt helps provide mineral needs of horses, but supplemental minerals are usually essential for optimum nutritional health.

ity grass or alfalfa hay has a wide variability in nutrient content.

"Diets high in grass hay, which is low in calcium, can lead to calcium deficiency if calcium is not supplemented," Grogan explains. "Alfalfa hay diets are high in calcium, but may cause imbalances in phosphorus and/or magnesium.

"Selenium should be supplemented in areas of the country where it is naturally low in the soil to prevent deficiency and those consequences," Grogan points out.

Horse diets that rely solely on pasture, hay and grain seldom, if ever, completely meet optimal equine nutritional requirements.

"Complete feeds attempt to supply adequate levels of nutrients for horses, but often only include the minimum amount to maintain the basic NRC (National Research Council) recommendations, and the levels of nutrients ingested are limited by the amount of grain fed," Grogan comments.

"Any consumption above or below the

recommended serving can lead to an over- or under-consumption of nutrients that can contribute to nutritional excesses, deficiencies or imbalances," he says. "Many horses on low-grain diets can become overweight if they consume enough vitamin/mineral fortified grain products to meet their supplement needs.

"As equine nutritional science progresses, it is clear that all horses can benefit by sensible use of high quality vitamin, mineral and digestive aid supplements to support the health and structure of all the body's tissues, prevent deficiencies, compensate for stresses and support life, health, growth and reproduction," Grogan concludes.