

No More Salt Blocks!



by Joe Camp

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I had never been licked by a horse before. Lots of sniffing, nudging, lip nibbling, and just hanging out close by. But never a full-blown, full-tongue lick on the arm. Especially by a mustang who's never even had a lead rope on. But one day, back when we lived in California, Noelle gave me several licks on the arm. This was back when she was not yet living out with the rest of the

herd. It was a particularly hot day and I wondered aloud if it might be a salt issue. Then, I suddenly realized that when we set up her paddock we had forgotten the salt.

One of the many things I asked about when our first three horses landed in our yard was, "Aren't we supposed to have a salt block?" "Of course," was the unanimous answer. "Can't hurt." The reason it's in a block, we were told, is so the horse can't get too much. *You know how bad salt can be for high blood pressure and other things.* We bought it because that's all the information we had. That was before we learned that horses are quite good at monitoring what they need and ingesting enough to cover their needs if given the option to do so. And it was before we learned how much horses need their salt, especially under certain pasture conditions. And before we discovered that there isn't even a smidgen of proven truth to the wives tale about salt and high blood pressure. And before we discovered that the problem with salt and/or minerals in a block is that with blocks is that there is no way horses can "lick" enough of what he needs from a block because the horse, unlike the cow, does not have a sandpaper tongue to scrape away the goodies locked in the block. These blocks were originally designed for cattle and they more or less migrated into the horse world. A horse simply cannot do enough licking to serve the needs of his body. Now I've discovered that even the cow can't get enough out of a block during times of acute need. Dr W. W. Swerczek, DVM, PhD says: *"Most cattlemen assume they have adequate sodium if cattle are exposed to salt blocks. Cattle and other herbivores cannot obtain enough salt or*

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sodium from hard salt blocks during periods of acute needs. The most dominant animals in a herd will horde a salt block and the remainder will leave without any salt. Even the animals that horde the block cannot consume enough salt to neutralize the acute excessive dietary nitrate during periods of acute stress to forages, like frosts and freezes to high nitrogenous forages."

Dr. Matt, our vet in California, said that he'd seen many a small block chewed to pieces because that's the only way the horse can get enough of what he needs from the block. Also he sees a lot of folks depending upon the ingredients in sacked feeds to supply what their horses need. The problem with that is: a standard portion of any sack feed doesn't take into consideration the differences in the metabolism of each animal, the differences in the way they are living, their stress levels, or the differences in times of the calendar year. Never mind the high sugar grains with which most of them are made.

Study after study says it's best to leave it up to the horses. They will know when they need salt and how much they need. So I would definitely recommend that yours have access to free-choice-all-the-time granular salt and/or mineral mix, preferably unprocessed. We have a big bucket hanging in the barn. Our herd of eight, including Noelle, have access to it 24/7. We never let it run out. We use Dr. Dan Moore's (The Natural Vet) formulation called [Red Cal](#) because we like what we read about the product, (it's unprocessed ancient sea salt from where oceans used to be, plus trace minerals), and we liked most of what we read about Dr. Dan (except for feeding oats). It's been interesting to watch the value of the free choice point that was made above being proven. We'll go for days sometimes with little or no Red Cal gone from the bucket. Other times they'll empty it in a day or two. They know what they need, and when. But then our bodies can do that as well ([check this out](#)). Bottom line: It should be free choice 24/7 and it should be granular, never forcing your horse to attempt to supply his needs by licking on a block. Or your wrist :)

Joe

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