

SALT OF THE EARTH: NOT JUST A SUMMER ESSENTIAL!

From the St. Louis Zoo Nutrition Department



Except for desert plants, most other plants that animals eat -- including fresh browses and hays -- are deficient in sodium (Na). That's why we absolutely have to provide salt blocks to our herbivores. Additionally, most plants don't have enough phosphorus (P) and other specific trace minerals, depending upon the region of the country in which forages are harvested. Formulated feeds and pellets contain added sodium, but not at a level that would balance out the total dietary needs recommended for most livestock species (about 0.2% of dry matter).

White salt blocks, bricks, or wheels/spools should be available to all herbivores, the size of the salt supplement depending upon the size of the herbivore. The salt can be iodized or not. In this country, iodine is routinely added to salt to provide this essential nutrient, since seafood products (high in iodine) comprise a minor part of the human diet. Bag salt (loose) can also be used for Zoo species, but more care must be used in protecting the salt from the elements.

Trace mineralized salt blocks (generally colored) can also be provided. Diets should be evaluated to determine whether the need for additional trace elements is real, as possible mineral imbalances can result from misuse. Specific mineral blocks containing higher concentrations of elements such as selenium (Se), sulfur (S), and cobalt (Co) are available and should be considered in herd situations when forage sources are from areas containing known deficiencies of these specific elements. Even apple-flavored salt is available commercially to encourage consumption!