

## Salt Statistics

One grain of salt, one grain of gold. That's how the salt trade worked. As one Roman remarked, "Some seek gold, but there lives not a man who does not need salt."

Your body contains about eight ounces of salt—enough to fill several salt shakers. It keeps you alive. Salt helps muscles, including your heart, to contract. It keeps nerve cells firing. It regulates the exchange of fluids between cells. Without salt, your blood cells would explode.

Because people need salt, the salt trade that fueled the West African empires has survived. Even today, camel caravans travel from Timbuktu to the salt mines of Taoudenni, located in the far north of Mali. The numbers in this quote by a modern-day salt trader reveal the value of salt to the people of Mali. Read it carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.

The salt trade remains very important for all of us in Timbuktu. I would say one third of the population of Timbuktu depends on it. The salt is carried on camels from Taoudenni to Timbuktu, a journey of about 700 miles. In a salt train, each camel carries four slabs of salt, each weighing about 25 kilos. Each piece would fetch about 5000 CFAs in Timbuktu, . . . depending upon its quality. Before leaving, each trader marks each slab with his family symbol.

Source: <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet>

### Questions

1. The most recent population figures for Timbuktu show the city's population at around 32,000. According to the salt trader, how many people might depend on the salt trade?  
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2. One mile equals 1.6093 kilometers. How many kilometers does a caravan travel between the salt mines and Timbuktu?  
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3. A kilogram equals about 2.2 pounds. How many pounds of salt does a camel carry?  
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4. Mali's currency is the CFA franc, or CFA. It's the unit of money used in 14 African countries formerly ruled by France. In 2004, one U.S. dollar was worth 537 CFAs. How much would each slab of salt be worth in U.S. dollars?  
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5. What conclusions can you draw about the value of salt for Mali? Is it still worth its weight in gold? Explain.  
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### Project

With a group of classmates, research salt production by leading salt producers, including the United States.

- 1 Show your findings in the form of a table.
- 2 Discuss with the class what this table shows about the role of salt in the global economy.