

Feeding Animals at the Zoo

What would you feed a troop of snow monkeys for a week? Where would you order vittles for a musk ox? How would you ensure a Siberian tiger was fed a balanced diet?

Designing and delivering the enormous menu needed by animals at the Minnesota Zoo is all about math! The menu choices, recipes and preparation will fascinate your students.

A sign of a healthy animal is “eager eating”. Zookeepers, curators, veterinarians, nutritionists, and other staff work hard as a team to ensure healthy eaters by making tasty diets, which sometimes carry vitamins or needed medicines. New menus are tested constantly and occasionally exotic foods are ordered from other parts of the world. The team chooses food based on its nutritional quality, and monitors each animal’s health closely.

The amount of food eaten is often just as important as the type of food. Sick animals instinctively hide signs of their illness from potential predators. A drop in food consumption could indicate a progressing illness.

Zoo diets will always be improving to promote good health, longer lives and successful reproduction in captivity. Many animals have become very rare in the wild. Zoo staff use proper diet management to raise healthy animals in captivity, which will hopefully produce further generations some day. Nutrition has become a science to save captive populations of animals from extinction. It is the pride of a zoo team when an animal feeds well, is active and is in good condition.

By using a variety of different math skills students will be able to develop a clearer understanding of the effort that goes into preparing diets for the hundreds of animals that are cared for at the Minnesota Zoo.