

Feeding Management 101

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When determining the feeding program for your horse herd, there are many factors that can affect the type and amount of feed to use. As a general rule of thumb, consult your local veterinarian if at any time your horse shows a lack of appetite or upset stomach. As we all know, horses have much more sensitive stomachs than that of other livestock. The University of Arkansas – Division of Agriculture has put together some basic points to keep in mind when feeding horses.

1. Feed at regular times (at least twice daily) with three daily feedings preferred. Research has shown that horses that are fed 2 – 3 smaller feedings, will digest feed more successfully.
 - Any feed changes should be made gradually over a period of 7 to 10 days. When making a feeding change, start with only a very small amount. A general rule of thumb is to begin with only a handful and work your way up over a 10 day process.
 - Changes in the rate of feeding should not exceed one pound per day for each horse.
 - Horses that are fed on a consistent schedule are less likely to go off their feed or develop undesirable stall habits (vices).
 - Horses that are fed on inconsistent schedules may get hungry and bolt to their feed, possibly resulting in digestive disorders.
2. Feed along with at least 1-1.5% of horse's body weight of good quality hay or the equivalent in pasture to make a complete ration.
3. Have plenty of fresh, clean water available at all times. Horses will typically drink less water during the winter, thus it is imperative to ensure that water troughs are kept clean, especially during the winter. Troughs should be emptied and scrubbed twice a week at a minimum.
4. Prevent the rapid eating by the horse of any feed stuffs. Horses have the tendency of eating much faster than their stomachs can digest. It is crucial to maintain consistent feeding times and amounts to ensure that rapid eating does not take place.

5. Use only top quality feeds

- Avoid dust and mold, and keep the feed manger clean
- Proper feed storage reduces feed waste
- Horses' digestive systems are not equipped to deal with dust, mold, etc., so poor quality hay or grain will not be digested efficiently, and may cause health problems for the horse
- Store feed in a dry, well ventilated area protected from rodents and insects.
- Do not feed moldy or insect-infested feed to animals as it may cause illness or death. When opening a new bag of feed, always examine the grain thoroughly. Moldy or insect-infested feed can be found in any part of the feed bag.



6. The product should be fed to the animal species as directed on the label. The vast majority of feed companies offer a label on each bag of feed as to how to feed their product. Each of these labels is tested through research conducted by those companies.
7. Reduce and/or delay feeding a horse which is hot, excited, showing pain, fever, or diarrhea. Horses that have just finished being worked should be allowed time to cool off before being fed.
8. Let horses eat in a natural position from troughs with large bottoms, placed at normal head height or lower. The optimal feeding program for horses includes troughs that are low to the ground and large enough so that if feed is spilled, it will remain in the trough.



9. In the winter, the amount fed may need to be increased about 10-15% to offset increased body heat losses.
10. Exercise horses regularly. Daily exercise helps maintain regular eating habits, desirable stall behavior and general health.
11. Check teeth regularly. Sharp points can develop on the teeth, which can cause problems with eating and also performance, as they may interfere with the action of the bit.
 - The veterinarian can remove the sharp points by floating (rasping).

As a general rule of thumb, have a good working relationship with your local veterinarian. Routine maintenance on your horse is the best prevention possible.

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