

The U&A Bulletin

U N I O N V I L L E E Q U I N E A S S O C I A T E S , P . C .

How is Your Hay?

In this region, many of us are fortunate to have excellent pastures to graze horses on through the late spring, summer and early fall. Even better, some have access to quality fields to make hay on. High-quality hay and pasture are an important source of essential nutrients in your horse's diet. However, the green pastures that surround us will be turning brown with the onset of cold nights and shorter days and most horses will need to eat hay and concentrates to maintain body condition through the late fall and winter. The quality of hay that you feed can make a large difference in how much you need to feed and in turn, the amount of money spent on hay through the winter. Additionally, high quality hay may decrease the incidence of impaction colic, especially through the colder months.

A horse's protein and energy requirements depend on age, stage of development, metabolism and workload. A mature horse will eat 2 to 2.5% of its body weight a day, and for optimum health, nutritionists recommend that at least half of this should be roughage such as hay. For a 1000-pound horse, that means at least 10 to 15 pounds of roughage each day.

Hay generally falls into one of two categories – grasses or legumes. Legume hay is higher in protein, energy, calcium and vitamin A than grass hays. While hay alone may not meet the total dietary requirements of young, growing horses or those used for high levels of performance, high-quality hay may supply ample nutrition for less active adult horses.

Once you've determined the best category of hay for your horse, most people select hay based on how it looks, smells and feels. Use the following tips from the American Association of Equine Practitioners to select the best hay for your horse:

1. It's what's inside that counts. Ask that one or several bales are opened so you can evaluate the hay inside the bales. Do not worry about slight discoloration on the outside, especially in stacked hay.
2. Choose hay that is as fine-stemmed, green and leafy as possible, and is soft to the touch.
3. Avoid hay that is over cured, excessively sun-bleached, or smells moldy, musty, dusty or fermented.
4. Select hay that has been harvested when the plants are in early bloom for legume hay or before seed heads have formed in grasses. Examine the leaves, stems and flowers or seed pods to determine the level of maturity.
5. Avoid hay that contains significant amounts of weeds, dirt, trash or debris.



Over

How is Your Hay Continued

6. Examine hay for signs of insect infestation or disease. Ask the grower about any potential problems in the region.
7. Reject bales that seem excessively heavy for their size or feel warm to the touch, as they could contain excess moisture that could cause mold, or worse, spontaneous combustion.
8. When possible, purchase and feed hay within a year of harvest to preserve its nutritional value.
9. Store hay in a dry, sheltered area out of the rain, snow and sun, raised off the ground or cover the stack to protect it from the elements.
10. When buying in quantity, have the hay analyzed by a certified forage laboratory to determine its actual nutrient content.

Remember that horses at different ages and stages of growth, development and activity have different dietary requirements.

Feel free to contact the UEA office at 610-932-6800 if you have any questions when formulating your horse's ration. We can schedule an appointment to help you put together a balanced diet that is safe, nutritious and cost-effective.

If you would like to submit your hay for forage analysis, collect a sampling of handfuls of hay from multiple bales and place in a 1 quart ziplock bag, labeled with your name and phone number. Make sure the bag is full; in the process of analyzing the hay, it is ground down, and the lab requires a relatively large sample. You may drop the bag off at the office or give it to your veterinarian. We will determine which analysis (breeding stock vs. pleasure etc.) is necessary, submit the sample and help you interpret the results.

More information about nutrition also can be found online at the AAEP's horse health Web site, www.myHorseMatters.com.

Portions of this article were obtained from the AAEP website.

Don't forget October's Special Events

2nd Annual Castration Day ~ October 7, 2008

Gastrosocopy Day ~ October 23, 2008

Call our office for more information.



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