RESPONSIBILITY OF HORSEOWNERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

The number of horse owners has increased drastically in recent years, and at present the equine population in the U.S. is approximately seven million horses. It is important that prospective horse owners be aware of the responsibility and commitment in time, money and other resources critical to horse ownership. Whether you board your horse at a commercial boarding facility, or stable it at your residence, there are many horse management factors that must be considered for the well-being of the horse.

NUTRITION

Feeding horses is a science and art wherein the old adage “small frequent feedings” must be followed. As the horse evolved prior to domestication it was a continuous grazer, consequently the horse's stomach is relatively small as compared to its size. Although the horse has adapted well to domestication and its meal eating life-style, feeding small amounts of feed 2, 3 or more times per day provides for better digestive function. At least 50% of the horse's diet should be pasture or hay. Good quality pasture grass is an ideal feed for non-working adult horses, young growing horses and lactating mares need additional nutrient supplementation when pastured.

In many areas pasture is not available. Therefore good quality legume or grass hay should be fed. Horses will generally consume feed at the rate of 1.5-3.0% of their body weight per day. In many situations an all forage diet will not provide sufficient nutrient intake. Then grains or concentrates should also be provided (Table 1). Grain should be used to provide additional energy, or to balance the nutrients of the forage portion of the diet. Many commercial feeds are available. Selection should be based depending upon the intended use, type and intensity of activity and body condition of your horse. These feeds may be in "pelleted" or "textured" forms. They are formulated to satisfy nutrient needs of different life stages, i.e. (growing, mature, senior, or lactating) as well as level of activity (light, moderate, or hard). When fed the appropriate commercial feed at the recommended amounts along with their hay allowance, most horses will not require additional mineral or vitamin supplementation. Keep in mind that it is important to provide frequent small feedings, do not over feed, and do not allow the horse to get too fat. Obesity in horses leads to serious health conditions including respiratory, digestive, and skeletal problems. Colic, laminitis (founder), gastric ulcers, and metabolic disorders are the result of poor feeding practices.

The physical condition of the horse is influenced by the person feeding the horse. Should the ribs be showing and the back bone stick out, the horse is probably not getting enough to eat (assuming it is not parasitized). On the other hand, if the horse is fat, he's getting too much. All horses should be fed on an individual basis to insure proper nutrition.

Horses should always have plenty of clean fresh water available. In cool weather they will consume less than on hot days. A good rule of thumb is that a horse at maintenance will consume about 4-8 gal. per day. Work and hot weather will increase consumption 60% or more. It is also recommended that horses have access to a trace mineral salt block at all times.

HEALTH CARE

When selecting a veterinarian, choose one whose primary practice is concerned with the equine. It is possible to check with your local veterinary association or a local horse owner for a referral.

Your veterinarian should be consulted to set-up an annual health maintenance and
parasite control program. Your immunization program will vary depending upon the area in which you live and whether or not you will be hauling your horse(s) to various areas for recreational or competitive purpose. Keep in mind that you must protect your horse against many serious diseases.

Internal parasites continue to be an important factor in the morbidity and mortality of the equine. However, the effects of parasites can be prevented by periodic de-worming, daily stall and paddock cleaning, and good pasture management. Check with your veterinarian for guidelines in the development of an appropriate parasite control and sanitation program for your area. It is important to reduce the worm load in the environment as well as in your horses. Pastures should be well drained and properly maintained including regular mowing or clipping, dragging and rotation. Signs of parasites in the horse include loss of body condition, poor hair coat, tail rubbing, diarrhea or constipation. There are many approved products that are effective against different types of parasites.

You should also have your veterinarian check the condition of your horse's teeth on an annual basis. The tables of equine molar teeth wear at an angle resulting in "points" or rough edges that can cut the cheek or tongue. Consequently they prevent the horse from chewing its feed completely. Should you notice feed dropping from your horse's mouth while eating, it may be an indication that his teeth need care.

FARRIER CARE

When selecting a farrier (blacksmith), it is like selecting a veterinarian. It is important to choose one who is knowledgeable with a good reputation. Ask your veterinarian or a horse owner for a referral. Keep in mind the old saying "no foot, no horse". The feet of the horse must be trimmed every 6-8 weeks, depending upon age, use, and growth rate of the foot and environmental factors. Shoeing is important to protect the foot when riding on abrasive surfaces. Shoeing will also prevent cracks, chips, and breaking. The environment and specific conditions of the horse influence the use of hoof dressing.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Provide functional safe shelters and fences
• Barns and stalls should always be clean and well ventilated.
• Be sure there are no objects in areas where horses can be injured. Always remove glass, wire, twine, pitchforks, etc. that may cause problems.
• Properly store any substances that may be toxic, and guard against poisonous plants or trees within the horse's reach.
• Groom horse and pick out the feet at least daily to insure a good hair coat and to prevent foot problems.
• Provide daily exercise or turnout time.
• Horses are herding animals so they enjoy company. Horses in isolation do not do well. If you have only one horse provide a companion.
• Learn the normal vital signs of your horse and learn to recognize signs of sickness.
• Horses evolved as creatures of habit. Once you develop a routine stay with it. Feed horses at approximately the same times each day.
• Call your veterinarian whenever your horse doesn't look right.
Table 1. Horse Feeding Guide\(^{(a)}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Hay %</th>
<th>Concentrate %</th>
<th>Total Intake %</th>
<th>Body Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.50 - 3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant Mare</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.50 - 3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactating Mare</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.50 - 3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>90 - 100</td>
<td>0 - 10</td>
<td>1.50 - 3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>70 - 80</td>
<td>20 - 30</td>
<td>1.50 - 3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>50 - 60</td>
<td>40 - 50</td>
<td>1.50 - 3.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{(a)}\) Adapted from NRC. 1989.

REFERENCES