

## CARING FOR YOUR HORSE

### About the Horse's Digestive System:

Horses have an extremely delicate digestive system. They have a small stomach and are unable to throw up if they've overeaten. Horses should not receive large quantities of food at one time. Grains should be fed in small quantities two to three times a day, with hay or grass available most of the day. Horses need higher quality hay that is easily digested.

The goal in feeding horses is to achieve or maintain appropriate body weight and condition, while minimizing the risk of digestive system upset, or *Colic*.

It is crucial to feed each horse separately; otherwise, more assertive horses will force the timid horses away from feed. When feeding hay to a group of horses, place it in separate piles so that each horse has its own. They will often move from pile to pile, so keep the piles spread far enough apart that the more timid horses can easily get out of the way of the aggressive horses and move to a new pile.

A 1000 pound horse will need approximately 15 to 20 pounds of hay and grain daily. Nutrient quality of different types of hay varies.

### Components of the Diet:

#### Grain

Good quality commercially prepared horse feeds, preferably either in pelleted form or as sweet (molasses-coated) feed, is the best choice, and preferable to a diet of plain oats. Commercially-prepared feeds are supplemented with necessary vitamins and minerals in an appropriate balance, and have known concentrations of protein, fat, and fiber stated on the label.

An important thing to consider in feeding grain is to feed by weight, not by volume! Sweet grain weighs more than plain oats and pellets are heavier still.

Grain is much more easily digested than hay, so it's much easier to overfeed, and therefore make a horse sick, with grain than it is with hay. Start

gradually, with about a half a pound twice a day of good quality pelleted feed.

### Hay

You will never save money by trying to cut corners on hay. Good quality roughage, either hay or grass, is the most important component of the horse's diet. Grass is a better choice than hay in most cases.

### Water

As for any animal, water should be clean, easy to get to, and available at all times. Failure to consume adequate volumes of water can result in colic or dehydration. Horses can be very choosy about their water sources, and may reduce their water consumption if there is an off taste in the water. Horses consume, on average, 4 gallons for an average 1000 pound horse. Lactating mares will need 50% to 80% more water.

### Vitamins

Horses require the same vitamins as people, but unlike people, they do not need to receive all vitamins from their food. In a healthy horse, Vitamin K and all the B vitamins are produced in sufficient quantities by the intestinal bacteria. Vitamin C is synthesized in the liver. Vitamins A, D, and E must be provided in the diet. Good quality feed sources, such as green grass or commercially prepared feed will provide adequate amounts of these vitamins.

Horses that are ill, debilitated, or starved may lack normal function of intestinal bacteria, may not synthesize Vitamin C, or may not adequately absorb other vitamins from their feed. Therefore, it is appropriate to provide a vitamin-mineral supplement in these cases.

### Minerals

All horses should have available a trace mineral (red colored) salt block, or a loose trace mineral salt mixture. When salt is available, and the horse is receiving good quality feed, mineral imbalances are rare.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any concerns about your horse or see a horse in need of attention!

