

# Hay Quality, Quality Hay?

Due to increased precipitation and lack of sunshine this summer a lot of the baled hay has suffered. However, until recently, we didn't realize just how much the armyworm infestation has also contributed to the lack of hay quality. In many cases, even 'nice' hay (ie. Green, immature, soft hay), when tested is showing very little feed value for your horse. The only way to know for sure is to have your hay analyzed. The winter season approaches quickly and with the lack of energy and protein available in the hay keeping your horse in good condition this year can be a real challenge.

Dr. Lawrence, Dr. Pagan and Dr. Andrews agree, research has shown a link between diets consisting primarily of grain and many health disorders including colic, ulcers, founder, tying up as well as the condition of horse's hair coat, skin and hooves. So, what can you do to help maintain condition?

Dr. Pagan states that a horse's diet should be 60% forage. A minimum 1% of your horse's body weight should be fed in the form of quality forages to maintain gut health. Supplement the hay with feeds (such as *Equi-MAX* or *Equi-HAY STRETCHER*) containing highly digestible forms of fibre such as soyhulls or beetpulp. A good fat supplement is another option. Ground flax and rice bran are good fats containing fibre as well. However, take caution in feeding too much. Limit these to 2 pounds per day.

Remember, horses are grazers; they should be offered a maximum of 5 pounds of feed per feeding. If more feed is required- increase the number of feedings per day. Feeding an excess of 0.5% of body weight can cause spill over of the stomach acids causing subsequent damage to the digestive tract. Also, the faster a horse eats, the faster feed passes through the stomach to the small intestine. If overfed grain, this poorly digested grain causes production of lactic acid resulting in the loss of beneficial bacteria in the colon and consequently, over production of "bad bacteria" producing endotoxins which are toxic to the horse and can result in laminitis. This hindgut acidosis can make your horse uncomfortable to the point of cribbing or stall weaving. In cases that are not habitual, a stomach buffer may relieve these symptoms.

Water is still the most important nutrient for your horse. For every pound of hay your horse consumes, a half-pound of water is necessary. This requirement is increased with exercise, lactation and warmer summer temperatures. Feeding a small amount of loose salt will help ensure adequate water intake. Remember, during winter months, freezing can impede regular consumption of water increasing the risk of digestive upsets including colic.

Any changes you make to your horse's ration should take 7-10 days. This allows the microbial populations in the gut to build as the composition of the ration changes. Begin with 90% of their original feed and 10% of the feed you would like them to get. In a week you should have them nearly converted to the new ration.