

Weanlings and Yearlings

Nutrition during gestation has substantial impact on the development of your foal. The weanling and yearling also have very important nutritional requirements. Water, not only but particularly because of cell function, is of course the most important nutrient in a growing horses' diet. All other nutrients must be supplied in the correct balance and a good quality forage should be the primary ingredient in your horses' ration.

At weaning, foals should continue to receive the same feed avoiding another feed change. This should contain as much as 18% protein with the desired mineral balance. Feed *Equi-MAX* with *Equi-BALANCER* for balanced minerals and quality proteins for your foals, weanlings and yearlings. Your foal may be fed in a separate feeder in the stall with the mare, however, the mare may need to be tied at her feeder to prevent her from eating the creep feed.

Weanlings and yearlings require increased protein levels for optimal growth and development to build, not only muscles, enzymes and hormones but also bones, skin, organs and even hair. In fact, there are indications that some foals are capable of increased growth rate but they require higher levels of protein and energy than the NRC recommendations.

Too little protein can affect body function. Protein is necessary for skeletal development as well as hormone production and more. Insufficient protein in the ration reduces feed intake causing greater protein deficiency. Abnormal skeletal development, reduced hoof growth and dull, rough haircoat are indications of this deficiency. Correctly balanced rations with protein supplements containing soymeal or even flax can balance rations deficient in protein. Although flax is more expensive, it has additional antihistamine properties that can be very beneficial as well.

Too much protein can be a concern where caloric intake is too low. This can be detected by increased ammonia smell in the stable as well as wetter stalls. The body converts the nitrogen in protein to ammonia. This will increase the intake of water to flush the ammonia out of the body increasing urine production as well as increasing the bedding and labour costs. Also, the ammonia in the stable can be detrimental to young foals, which are closer to the stall floor, increasing the possibility of pneumonia.

More important than the amount of protein is the type of protein. High-quality proteins such as soymeal, canola and alfalfa contain the amino acid, lysine. Lysine is the number one limiting amino acid in growing horses. Threonine may be the second, although no established requirements have been determined. Suppling these proteins will show the desired weight gain, skeletal development and muscular development in foals.

Protein is an important nutrient in the growing horses ration but quality is as important as quantity and the appropriate balance of all nutrients is important as well. All nutrients work together at a cellular level. Water is the most important for cell function. If unsure of the ration you are providing your growing horses have your hay analyzed and your ration balanced appropriately.