

Extension Notes

Personal Column for September 29, 2009

By Gary Hall, Iowa State University Regional Extension Education Director for Cerro Gordo, Floyd, Franklin, Mitchell and Worth County, Iowa

Diet for Horse Health

You have heard the old saying, “hungry as a horse,” or, “eat like a horse.” Providing feed for your horse is an important operation and not as simple as just feeding the horses as much as they will eat. Choosing the correct diet for your horse can go a long way for its nourishment. It is important to feed horses based on age and weight.

Many horses don't need to be fed any grain. A colt would be the exception. Owners should feed younger horses more grain because they are growing and developing muscles and bones.

Depending on the type of hay that a horse eats, there are a couple of different grain mixes horse owners can use. If feeding alfalfa hay, use a mix lower in calcium and higher in phosphorus. If owners are using grass hay, which has a naturally lower amount of calcium, the grain can contain similar amounts of phosphorus and calcium.

Using grass hay will provide drier food and less chance of mold, but it sacrifices protein, vitamins and minerals. Using alfalfa hay will provide more minerals than grass hay but it also runs the risk of becoming moldy because it is harder to properly prepare and takes longer to dry out.

Regardless of what hay you decide to use for your horse, it is important to have enough food for the animal. Otherwise horses will chew on things to keep their teeth busy. You have seen those disfigured boards in the corral that have been the target of the horse's teeth.

Search for hay that has a lot of leaves and little stem to get the most nutrition from the forage to make for a healthy horse.

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