

## **MEETING THE RIGHT REQUIREMENTS - WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BALANCING MY HORSE'S DIET?**

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Owning horses can be expensive, whether you own a backyard pleasure animal or an elite level athlete. When it comes to what you're feeding your horse, are you meeting their daily nutritional requirements? How can you improve the quality of your horse's diet and get the biggest bang for your buck? Balancing your horse's diet shouldn't be a balancing act. We all know that forage is the most important component to any horse's diet, and we should be optimizing our use of forage, but how do we do that?

### **What do horses need to be healthy?**

Horses are non-ruminant herbivores, also known as a "hindgut fermenters." Their digestive tract is made up of a simple stomach, small intestine and large intestine. The natural feeding habit of the horse is to eat small amounts of forages continually. Given access, horses will graze for approximately 17 hours per day. Modern management practices of horses incorporate stabling, increased grain-based concentrate consumption, meal feeding and limited access to pasture. This has led to a myriad of problems by undermining the horses' digestive capabilities.

### **Optimizing a horse's diet with forage**

Forage contains all the essential nutrients required by horses: water, energy, protein, vitamins and minerals. However, based on the horse's exercise level or physiological stage, e.g. pregnant, lactating and the quality of forage being provided, there may not be enough of these nutrients to meet the horse's daily requirements. We need to make sure horses are provided frequent access to forage, whether it is pasture access or more constant access to hay when stabled or housed in paddocks with no grass. Horses require an absolute minimum of 1.0% of their body weight in dry forage per day. For a 1000lb horse, this equates to 10lbs per day. A safer guideline is to provide horses with a minimum of 2.0% of their body weight in dry forage per day (20lbs of dry forage per day for a 1000lb horse). Using slow feed hay nets or other slow feeders makes hay last longer, simulating "trickle feeding" and can also prevent boredom. If pasture is the sole means of forage for the horse, they need to have access to a minimum 2 acres per horse with a minimum of 75% forage cover.



### **Balanced horse feed program examples**

Most pasture and forages will be deficient in copper, zinc and selenium, and therefore, must be complemented with a vitamin and mineral supplement pellet. High quality alfalfa-based forages can often support the protein, energy, calcium and phosphorus requirements of pregnant mares and heavily exercising horses. An alfalfa blend forage can often meet the energy and protein demands of light to moderate exercising horses. Forage grown in consistent, ideal growing conditions, with ample supply and wide availability, along with guaranteed analyses right on the packaging is convenient and offers peace of mind when feeding your animals.

Vet care costs can get expensive, but what if you can improve the overall diet and gut health of your horse to help minimize the impact of those ailing conditions?

Colic is a generic term that refers to abdominal pain that can result from many different causes. Among domesticated horses, colic is a major cause of premature death. The incidence of colic in the general horse population has been estimated between 10 and 11% per year. In a recent study, colic was second only to old age as the leading cause of death in horses.

Most colic problems involve the gastrointestinal tract. Colic symptoms have been associated with composition of diet, changes in diet, feeding practices, exercise patterns, housing and inappropriate parasite control programs. With nutrition related disorders being the top 3 causes of colic in otherwise healthy horses, we should carefully consider our horse's feeding program.

### **Availability of forage – where can you find consistent, quality forage?**

One Standlee Premium Western Forage key non-negotiable is 'Assured Supply.' Assured supply means that customers and consumers must be able to access Standlee products 'wherever' and 'whenever' desired. This responsibility is taken seriously regardless of the circumstances!

Over the past year, and more recently, we have taken several steps to assure an ample supply of Standlee Premium Western Forage products at the shelf, including:

- Improved production capabilities and distribution tactics. These actions help Standlee to respond to spikes in demand in a more timely and effective manner.
- Increased retail and distribution partner communications and stocking level coaching to keep awareness high at distribution centers and shelves fully stocked.

In summary, to keep our horses happy and healthy on the inside and out, we need to maximize the use of quality forage in their diets. For us as owners and caretakers of horses to do this, we need to be able to rely on a consistent supply of forage that is readily available. Standlee Premium Western Forage® checks all the boxes!

#### References:

1. <https://horses.extension.org/how-much-land-do-i-need-for-a-horse/>
2. Geor, R.J. 2007. How to Feed Horses Recovering from Colic. AAEP Proceedings. Pp 196.