

(Continued from Page 59)

adapted to eating these foods, and as you might expect, their teeth are a lot different than ours. In fact, their teeth have some special features that are unique among the domesticated species. I have provided dental care for thousands of horses and my experience has told me this: Any horse, if he lives long enough, will outlive the usefulness of his teeth. Let me explain why.

Hay and grasses are very abrasive food sources. Try eating a few stalks of timothy hay and you'll see what I mean! Horses have highly specialized grinding teeth that make quick work of chewing hay and grass. Still, the abrasive nature of the food slowly wears down their teeth. In fact, if horses had teeth like humans, this abrasive diet would wear down their teeth in just a few year! Instead, horses have what we call a hypsodont dentition. This is a really nice feature that allows the horse to slowly push out an extra tooth as the teeth wear down.

Think of each tooth in the horse's mouth like it was the lead in a mechanical pencil: The small piece of 'working lead' is projecting out of the end of the pencil and attached to it is a long reserve piece of lead that is slowly pushed out over time to replace the lead that is worn off. The 'working lead' is like the exposed tooth we see in the horses' mouth. The reverse crown of the tooth is just waiting to push out as needed. As the lead in the pencil wears down, more lead is pushed out to keep writing. What a great system! However, there is one catch...

In the case of the mechanical pencil, we all know that if

you use the pencil long enough, the day will come when you ask the pencil for more lead and the last little nub of lead falls out and the pencil no longer works. Well, as you might have guessed, pretty much the same thing happens in the horse's mouth. When the horse is young, he starts out with very long teeth that are stored in his head. There is a short part of each tooth exposed in the mouth, with the reserve part of the teeth hidden in the head. Slowly, about one eighth of an inch a year, the tooth is pushed out to replace the tooth lost to all that food he's eaten. Pretty clever huh? Until you get to the part where you run out of lead!

Let's look at the math on this. The average sized horse starts out with about three inches of reserve tooth as a youngster. OK, if he uses one eighth inch a year, I figure he's got about twenty four years worth of tooth saved up. It just so happens that, all things being equal, most horses' teeth start to fail at about this age. Of course this is a bit of a simplification, but it's a reasonably accurate description of what happens. As a horse approaches old age, he begins to lose his ability to grind up that coarse diet. How could this be? Well it seems that nobody ever figured that horses would live this long!

Life out in the wild for horses is a lot more challenging than life on the farm is today. In fact, the maximum life expectancy of 'wild' horses is about fifteen years. This makes sense. In their natural habitat, they would never have to worry about outliving the function of their teeth. Inconsist-

(Turn to Page 61)

Barn Floor Groovers

- Free Stalls
- Feed Lots
- Stalls



- Pens
- Holding Areas
- Walkways

Dick Meyer Company, Inc.

N214 3rd Ct. Coloma, WI 54930-9000

1-800-228-5471

- Split Rail
- Post & Board
- Hi-Tensile Supplies
- P.V.C. & Vinyl Coated
- Poly Coated Centaur
- Electric Safe Fence
- Wood & Tube Gates
- Woven Horse Wire
- Locust & Pressure Treated Post

• Installation Available

ESCH'S FENCING

Since 1987

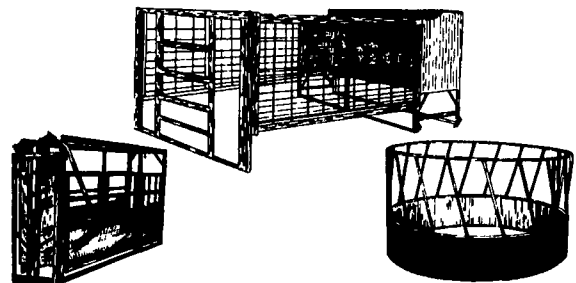
185 Octorara Trail, Rt. 10, Gap, PA

610-857-1676

We Care About The Safety Of Your Animals

LIVESTOCK EQUIPMENT SPECIALIST FREY BROS. MFG.

If cattlemen use it, Frey Bros. makes it. Check with us for your livestock needs.



- Free Stalls
- Automatic Head Locks
- Work Chutes
- Squeeze Chutes
- Trailers For Chutes
- Head Gates
- Dressing Chutes
- Loading Chutes
- Creep Feeders
- Horse Paddocks
- Grain & Hay Bunks
- Round Bale Feeders
- Panels & Gates 4-5-6 Bar
- Panel Frame/Wire Gates
- Portable Corrals
- Alley Panels/Arches
- Slide or Regular Arches
- Portable Horse Stalls
- Foot Trimming Tables
- Show/Sale Barns
- Portable Scales

"CUSTOM MADE PRODUCTS A SPECIALTY"

David J. Wylie, Salesman

717/786-2146 Office

717/786-7509 Fax

FREY BROS. INC.

372 Puseyville Road

Quarryville, PA 17566

www.freybrothersinc.com