

Feeding Horses

Ann Swinker
State Extension
Horse Specialist
Penn State

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — Daily feed required for the average adult 1,000-pound horse, approximately, is:

- No work
20-25 pounds hay, no grain
- Light (1-2 hours work/day)
15-20 pounds hay,
1-3 pounds grain
(1-1.5 pounds grain/
hour of work)
- Medium (2-4 hours/day)
15-20 pounds hay,
3-8 pounds grain
(1.5-2 lbs. grain/hour of work)
- Heavy (Four or more hrs./
day)
15-20 pounds hay,
5-10 pounds grain
(1.5-2.5 pounds grain/
hour of work)

Only a horse that is worked extremely hard would ever receive half of its ration in grain. A racehorse in heavy training is an example of a horse requiring half of its ration in grain. So never feed your pleasure horse more than it needs.

Younger horses require special rations, talk to your veterinarian. The above chart can be used as a rule of thumb, or you can be more exact and balance your horse's ration. There are many books available to show you how to balance a horse's ration or contact your local Penn State Cooperative Extension Agent for help.

When balancing or evaluating a ration, use the National Research Council tables as a guideline to determine available nutrients to meet your horse's requirements.

When you balance a ration, determine the age, weight and level of activity or work of the horse, and determine the actual nutrient content of the available feed by sending your feed to a commercial feed-test-laboratory. Contact your local Penn State Cooperative Extension agent for the name of the laboratory nearest you.

Always be careful not to create an excess of other nutrients when increasing feed ingredient levels. Excesses of

some nutrients can interact with other nutrients. For example, excess calcium can prevent complete utilization of phosphorus. Check National Research Council tables for calcium to phosphorus ratios; however, a good rule of thumb is a 2:1 ratio.

Metabolic disorders, such as laminitis, osteochondrosis and epiphysitis, stem from an imbalance in nutrients. Many disorders can be avoided by giving your horse a balanced ration. Remember, each horse has to be fed as an individual.

Feed an amount that is adequate to maintain a body condition similar to that of an athlete. The National Re-

Daily Intake and Typical Diets for Several Categories of Horses

Type of Horse	Digestible Energy Requirement (Mcal)	Daily Intake Lbs DM	Typical Ration	
			Alfalfa (lb)	Grain (lb)
Weaning	15.0	11	6	5
Yearling	18.9	14	8	6
2 year old-training	26.3	15	10	5
Mature horse (1100 lb)				
Maintenance	16.4	16	9	4
Moderate Work	24.6	25	10	9

search Council requirements are suggested values; individual horses may require adjustments to these nutrients.

Constantly assess the body condition of your horse. A properly conditioned horse will have enough fat so its ribs don't show, but you should still be able to feel the ribs when you run your fingers over them.

Feeding Tips

These helpful hints will help you care for your horse nutritionally.

- Provide high quality alfalfa or grass roughage with a complementing grain to balance the horse's diet. Feed by weight, not by volume.
- Always maintain at least half of the ration as roughage, such as hay or grass.
- Never feed moldy or dusty hay, grass or grain.
- Never feed lawn grass clippings.
- Have fresh, clean water available at all times — except to a hot horse. A hot horse needs to be given water slowly.
- Watch your horse while it eats and inspect feed con-

tainers daily to detect abnormal eating or drinking behaviors.

• Check horse's teeth annually for sharp points that interfere with chewing. Floating sharp edges of teeth will increase feed efficacy. If a horse dips mouth in water while eating, it may have a sharp tooth. Tilting head to one side while eating grain may indicate a tooth problem.

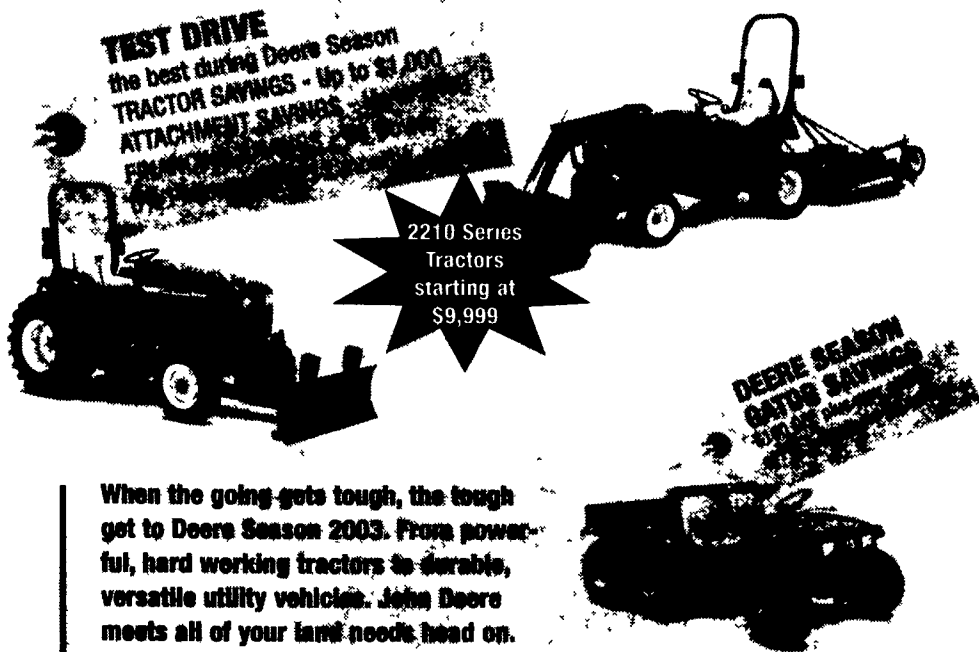
• Ration changes should be gradual, over a minimum of five days to prevent digestive disturbances.

• Because a horse's stomach is very small and cannot hold a large amount of feed at one time, it should be fed at least twice a day on a regular schedule. Some horses benefit from three or more feedings per day. But don't overfeed your horse; too much feed at one time can cause founder.

Estimate your horse's body weight. Multiply the girth (in inches) times itself (heart girth 2) times the body length (in inches) and divide by 330. Example: Heart Girth = 74.8 inches Body length = 63 inches 74.8 x 74.8 x 63 330 Equals 1,068 pounds.

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