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Nutritional Management of Horses in a Drought



Nutritional management of horses during a drought can be a difficult task to accomplish. Short feed supplies and higher prices must be considered. Therefore, high feed costs become one of the most important aspects of nutritional management of horses in a drought.

None of us have a crystal ball to predict the effects of the drought or how much the cost of feed will increase. However, we can consider current prices and predictions for future availability of hay and grain. We can then proactively prepare for the future nutritional management of our horses. It becomes a matter of supply and demand. Increased feed costs and limited supply of the available feed mean higher feed costs and could very well increase the monthly costs at boarding facilities. The question is do I buy my feed now or wait? Consistency of feed is imperative; therefore it is important not to change hay every four of five days. If at all possible, buy all of your hay at one time from one source. This

will help to prevent colic. The responsible horse owner needs to proactively evaluate the various scenarios to determine what is best for them.

When buying hay from a feed store, you can expect to pay more simply because there are more middle men involved. Buying hay directly from the producer most likely will be more reasonable. It is important to know what quality of hay you are buying. A reputable laboratory can do an analysis of the hay you desire to purchase assuring you of the quality of the hay. Your extension agent can usually provide you with the information that you need to find a reputable laboratory for analysis of hay samples. Many people establish a relationship with hay producers and purchase their hay yearly from the same individual. Consequently, you know the quality of hay you are getting and the farmer knows that he will have repeat buyers. This is a favorable situation for both the seller and the buyer. An excellent source for Colorado Hay Producers can be found on the Markets Division of the Colorado Department of Agriculture's web page. [Colorado Hay Directory](#)

Individuals who feed alfalfa hay should be cognizant of blister beetle problems. Blister beetles produce a toxin that can be lethal to horses. As a general rule first and fourth cutting alfalfa hay is safe to feed. Due to their life cycle, the beetles are usually not in the hay at this time. It is best to avoid alfalfa that has been harvested with heavy bloom. Blister beetles are more likely to be in hay that is harvested with excess bloom. More in depth information on Blister Beetle Poisoning can be found at http://www.aaep.org/health_articles_view.php?id=254.

Horse owners who have specific questions about the nutritional needs of their horse can contact their extension agent, veterinarian, or equine nutrition expert at various feed stores. These professionals can help address your horse's individual nutritional needs, with respect to maintenance, exercise, type of hay or grain and vitamin mineral supplementation.

For more information on the nutritional management of a horse during a drought you can go <http://www.thehorse.com/ViewArticle.aspx?ID=18996>.