

THIS OLD HORSE  
VOLUNTEER  
TRAINING

Welcome to our  
community of  
horse lovers.

Feeding the herd



THIS OLD  
HORSE

# **BEST PRACTICES: FEEDING OUR DIVERSE HERD**

- There are many diverse and effective ways to feed horses. If you have had your own horses or worked in or visited other barns, you may be familiar with the wide variety of practices and methods around nutrition and feeding.
- At This Old Horse, we have established ‘best practice standards’ for our horses developed in conjunction with equine health and nutrition specialist and we expect all employees and volunteers to carefully follow each horse’s plan.

# NUTRITION PLANS

- A nutrition plan for each horse is developed and monitored by a professional equine nutritionist.
- When a new horse joins the herd, the nutritionist is consulted and establishes the plan based on that horse's body condition, weight, health conditions and goals.
- These nutrition plans change regularly and are communicated to the feed crews through charts located near the feed storage at each barn.

# FORAGE FIRST

- In general, we practice a 'forage first' diet. With some exceptions due to medical issues, our horses are offered free choice hay or forage (pasture grazing in summer is forage) which means it is available to them most of the time.
- Typically, hay is fed in nets to manage the rate of consumption—so the same amount of hay lasts longer and reduces waste. Some hay nets are integrated into the hay feeders and some hay is fed in hanging hay nets.
- Hay is fed 'by weight'. A horse should consume 1.5%-2% of their body weight in forage each day. Therefore, a 1,000 pound horse will consume between 15-20 lbs. a day. We weigh our hay as we distribute it. There is a great deal of variance in the weight of hay bales so we cannot assume that three 'flakes' is the proper amount unless we know the weight of the bale.
- Horses are fed more hay in the winter than the summer so hay feeding rates go up when the weather gets cooler. The barn manager will establish and communicate the amount of hay fed during feed shifts.

# HAY

- Hay is considered a 'complete' diet for horses, proper access to quality hay is a sufficient diet. However, there can be variances in the composition of hay so we provide supplemental pelleted feed called a 'diet balancer' that provides vitamins and minerals that may be missing in the hay. This is the equivalent of a multi-vitamin that you might take daily for the same reason.
- Horses depend upon a constant supply of hay to stay warm in the winter. The high fiber content produces heat during digestion that keeps them warm from the inside out.
- They need two pounds of hay for every 100 pounds of body weight. A 1200 pound horse requires 24 pounds of good grass hay daily.
- The average square hay bale weighs 50 pounds. A 1200 pound horse requires half a bale daily to satisfy its forage requirements. This can vary depending upon a variety of factors.

# HAY MANAGEMENT

- Hay is stored in protected, well ventilated area. Bales are tied with twine.
- Twine can be very dangerous when consumed by a horse:
- When breaking open a bale, remove the twine immediately and discard it. Twine is easily lost in the hay so be deliberate about throwing it out immediately.
- When breaking open a bale in the pasture, tie the twine up in a knot-like bundle and place it in your pocket until you can dispose of it.
- Twine is treated with chemicals to keep pests from chewing through it. When it is consumed by horses it can be toxic and can cause a horse to colic.
- Never break open a bale of hay and leave the twine behind.

# MOLDY HAY

- Moldy hay can cause respiratory problems in horses.
- If there is visible mold, excess dust or a musty smell, set the hay aside and select a new bale.
- Notify the barn manager. We can get credit for bales that cannot be fed so once the manager has accounted for the bale, it can be discarded with the manure.

# SUPPLEMENTAL FEED

- Horses with specific nutrition requirements or health considerations may also be fed supplemental feed that may be more easily chewed, digested or contain supplemental fat and calories based on their goals. There are many brands and varieties so the feed chart will identify the product and quantity.
- Feed is also fed by weight. Our scoops and cups are calibrated for each feed type so make sure you are using the proper corresponding scoop to assure the amount fed is correct.
- Sometimes medications or supplements are also added to the horse's feed. They are stored in the feed rooms, identified by their label and have their own scoop or container.

# FEEDING

- During the morning and evening feed shifts, the horses are given supplemental nutrition. Horses will spend from 12 to 24 hours a day in turnout, depending upon whether the forage is pasture or hay.
- As the horses are fed twice daily, we take the opportunity to observe them for overall health, looking for changes in physical condition and demeanor. With many pairs of eyes doing this twice daily, we can resolve issues early and save horses from unnecessary pain or illness.
- Anyone noting a change of condition for any horse reports the observation to the barn manager.
- Horses are fed in pans, hanging buckets or feed bags.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- In some cases, we ask the feed crew to document the amount of feed consumed (or left over) after each meal. This is particularly important for horses that have trouble keeping weight on or who have poor appetites. The nutrition log helps the nutrition expert gather information and make changes.
- Some older horses have poor or missing teeth and cannot properly chew hay or grass. After they chew it, rather than swallowing it, they let it fall out of their mouth and you may see wet clumps of chewed hay in the feeding area. This is called 'quidding' and these wet plugs in the ground are called 'quids'.
- The act of chewing forage, even if it is not swallowed is still essential for horses since the chewing motion produces saliva which is essential for digestion and also, since horses are grazing animals, the chewing replicates grazing and is a healthy behavior to encourage. Even horses that quid are given fresh hay to chew on.

# **MINERALS & SALTS**

- Like humans, horses depend upon minerals and salt to maintain health and balance. There are minerals and salts daily nutritional feedings and the horses also have access to minerals and salt in the stalls or turnouts.

# TREATS

- Do not feed or bring treats for the horses. They are on carefully developed feed plans and some horses have specific dietary restrictions. There are also horses that are prone to choking and treats could cause a medical emergency.
- A horse can smell a treat in a pocket, and this can cause aggressive behavior toward the person who has the treat or to other horses who are vying for the treat. All in all, treats can create unsafe circumstances and are not allowed at our barns. Give the horse an extra scratch on the forehead or shoulder as a treat instead!

# WATER

- Clean, fresh water at an appropriate temperature should always be accessible to horses.
- The average adult horse drinks five to 10 gallons of water per day. This can vary depending upon a variety of factors. Horses generally drink after eating and may drink a large amount of water at one time and go several hours between drinking.
- Water buckets in occupied stalls should be checked and filled before ending a shift. Sometimes two buckets are necessary depending upon the size of the horse and other factors.
- When clipping the handle of the bucket to the snap, be sure the snap mechanism is swiveled away from the horse. It is possible for the horse to catch an eyelid on the snap.
- Water buckets should be checked throughout the feed shift in order to make sure that the horses have access to clean water.
- Heated water buckets are used when the temperature is below freezing. Be careful to avoid spilling water when plugging in or moving buckets. Most of our barns are not heated and spilled water creates ice and hazards during freezing temperatures.

## **FILLING WATER BUCKETS:**

- After replacing the buckets into the stalls, all are filled to the lip below the top of the bucket. It can be difficult to maintain dry floors, but it cuts the flies in summer and slippery aisles in winter.
- Keeping the water 3" below the top will allow the horse to dip in without spilling.

## **CLEANING WATER BUCKETS:**

- Water buckets are cleaned, when necessary, during each feed shift.
- Water is emptied and the buckets are washed with water and a scrub brush.
- Vinegar is used once a week or as needed to disinfect the buckets.
- To avoid contamination, don't submerge the end of the water hose into water containers. Hold the nozzle above the water line.

# CLEANING HEATED WATER BUCKETS

- When replacing water buckets with power cords, secure the bucket in such a way that it will be possible for the cord to reach the outlet.
- Cords and plugs are damaged when care is not taken to remount the water bucket at the appropriate height.

# FEED BOWLS

- Feed bowls are rinsed and sanitized after each use, they are emptied, rinsed, disinfected and rinsed again.
- Feed pans are rinsed and disinfected in a designated area. Floor drains are used for water only. Any feed, mud, hay, grass remaining in containers should be dumped in the manure containers before rinsing the containers. Septic systems and drains are very sensitive so avoid putting any solids, whatsoever, down the drain.
- Tools and wheelbarrows used for cleaning feed bowls, buckets and cups **should not be used to haul hay or manure.**
- In the cold winter months, the floor can be slippery with water or ice, so any remaining clean water should be swept towards the drain. Draining feed pans and buckets should be stacked so as not to freeze together and the hose should be stored in a heated area to keep it from freezing. At the end of the feed shift the wash stall door should be closed.
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# LEFTOVERS

Any feed that is left over is discarded at the end of the feed shift. It is not saved, stored or re-fed.

Leftover feed and dirty bowls and buckets attract pests and insects.

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