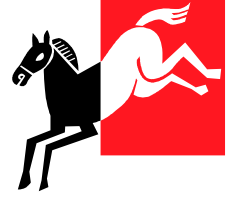


Hoofmaiden News



A publication of Hoofmaiden Performance Barefoot Hoofcare

<http://www.blue-heron-farm.com/hoofmaiden>

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Welcome to the 1st issue of the Hoofmaiden News!

We hope to produce the newsletter on a more-or-less monthly basis. If you have questions about hoof care or related issues you'd like answered, please **email** Elizabeth with your suggestions!

This month, our topic is **Natural Feeding**.

GRAIN

Like stabling, grain became the norm not because it was better for horses, but because it was more convenient for human beings. When horses were in work (as carthorses, cab horses, etc) 8-12 hours a day, they could not graze naturally, and hay was difficult to transport and store in downtown London or New York. Grain provided the calories needed in a smaller, more convenient package. But that convenience came with a price. As animals who have evolved to eat very low-quality forage almost constantly throughout a 24-hour period, horses and other equines really cannot handle the nutritional richness of grain. The almost epidemic incidence of laminitis, founder, and colic in modern horses attests to this fact. These conditions are unheard of in wild horses and are very rare in those who live truly natural lifestyles (including a properly balanced trim, no grain, plenty of forage, and 24/7 turnout (avoiding rich grass)).

Sweet feed is the most serious culprit, as it is high in molasses (the sweet!) and hence, extremely high in soluble carbohydrates. But ALL grain—corn, oats, barley, wheat, and various mixtures and pellets containing any or all—is high in soluble carbohydrates, whereas forage (hay and grass) is high in insoluble carbohydrate. Since the GI tract of the equine is set up for insoluble carbs and has a hard time dealing with soluble carbs, grain is the opposite of what horses need.

More info on all of this here: <http://www.ecmagazine.net/Summer07/CarbConfusion.htm>
And here: <http://www.thehorse.com/ViewArticle.aspx?ID=10216&kw=grain>

And a more technical paper, for those who want all the gory details!
<http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/HOR/07-158.pdf>

THE PROOF IS IN THE FOOT!

I see the results of feeding grain to equines all too often. White line stretching, laminitic rings, inflammation of the white line, and poor, weak, thrushy frogs are all linked to, among other causes, grain in the diet. When the trim is corrected, things improve, but as long as the horse is continuing to consume grain, there is, in many cases, only limited improvement. When my clients have taken the plunge and eliminated grain from their horses' diets, in addition to getting their horses on 24/7 turnout and having them trimmed properly, the improvement is often miraculous. But when even one part of this trifecta is not complied with, that is never the case.

The horse below had, when I began trimming her in August, a great deal of white line stretching (that big gap around the entire hoof, just inside the wall). Her heels were high and forward, and her frog was thrushy. The photo on the left was taken just after her first trim. The arrow points to the deep cleft in the central sulcus of her frog, indicating contraction of the heels. This horse lived at a barn where she was stalled 12 hours a day (more in "bad" weather) and was being fed a grain mixture containing corn, oats, etc. In addition to her poor trim, her lifestyle was simply not conducive to healthy feet.

In October, the horse was moved to a new barn. Since then, she has been on 24/7 turnout and a ration balancer. Her improvement before the move was good; her improvement since the move has been phenomenal!



In the photo on the right, taken just this week, you can see that not only have the heels decontracted and the crack in the central sulcus filled in, but the white line stretching is greatly reduced. We still have a few months to go until all the stretched foot has grown down, but already this horse has, for all intents and purposes, 4 new feet. Her frog is now strong and firm, her base of support (heels) is secure and stays back where it belongs, her bars no longer grow in a curve, and her feet are chip-free between trims. My trim may earn some of the

credit, but the owner gets much of it. Her willingness to change her horse's lifestyle (against the advice of her dressage trainer) speaks volumes about her love for her horse. And it has paid off in spades!

SO WHAT SHOULD YOU FEED?

For all the reasons stated above, I cannot in good conscience recommend that my clients feed grain products at all, other than, in some situations, a ration balancer.

My own horses no longer get any grain products. For some time I used a ration balancer, but I have eliminated that as well. I feed a LOT of hay. My horses EACH go through close to one bale of hay (50-60 pounds) every day. Now, I'm sure that some of you are thinking, "Feeding that much hay would bankrupt me!" But remember that if you are feeding primarily hay, you are NOT purchasing grain. In the past, I spent \$100 a month on hay and \$150-200 a month on grain products and supplements for 2 horses. I now spend \$250 a month on grass hay, minerals and salt. I still feed some beet pulp to my hard-keeper as well, and both my horses get BOSS (black oil sunflower seeds, fed as they come in their shells). BOSS is a great source of fat and horses love it!

Lisa Huhn, of [Equinextion](#), feeds some whole (NOT processed) oats to her horses. She doesn't do it every day or even regularly, but rather tosses some oats and BOSS out on top of her hay as she spreads it. This way the horses have to search and "graze" for it.

Note: I mention Buckeye primarily in what follows because we are fortunate to have a very dedicated Buckeye rep in our area. Dee Plunkett (deeplunkett@yahoo.com) is an exceptionally nice person and a well-informed rep. He lives in the Brentwood area, and you can either pick product up at his home, arrange to meet him someplace convenient, or in some cases he can deliver.

RATION BALANCERS

Buckeye Gro N' Win (<http://www.buckeyenutrition.com/equine/gronwin.html>) is a ration balancer. It is fed in very small amounts (a pound or so a day) to provide the vitamins and minerals needed to balance a diet of grass and grass hay. For folks whose horses are in boarding situations, this is by far the best bet. If your horse is receiving adequate hay (and horses on pasture will need supplemental hay in the winter at least!), a ration balancer will probably be all you will need to provide.

Other ration balancers on the market include:

Purina's Born to Win (http://horse.purinamills.com/products/born_to_win.asp)
 Progressive's ProAdvantage Grass Formula
 (<http://prognutrition.com/ProAdvGrassFormula.htm>)

MINERALS and SALT

For those who keep their horses at home, it is possible to eliminate grain entirely. Rather than feeding a ration balancer, minerals can be offered free choice. Believe it or not, equines know when they need something and will consume it until they do not need it anymore. Sometimes when minerals are offered, the horses will consume a great deal for a week or so, and then slack off. This is normal. They balance their systems and then are able to consume only small amounts to balance their grass intake.

Many folks are familiar with the brown/red mineral blocks at the Co-op or TSC; these may be fine, and some people do use them for horses. But since they are intended for cattle, the ingredients are less high-quality than what I wish to give my horses. They are balanced for cattle, not equines.

A better choice is a mineral mix intended for horses. There are several companies online that sell these, but none has dealers in this area. You can order online, however, from My Fine Equine (ABCs minerals, at <http://www.myfineequine.com/Minerals1.htm>), or Dynamite (<http://www.dynamitemarketing.com/>).

More convenient for most of us in Middle Tennessee, however, is Buckeye Nutrition's Grass Plus Mineral Mix (<http://www.buckeyenutrition.com/equine/grassplusmineralmix.html>), which can be offered free choice to horses on pasture or grass hay. Here is another page on their use: http://www.buckeyenutrition.com/equinetechical/tech1_93.html.

Likewise, Buckeye Harvest Salt (<http://www.buckeyenutrition.com/equine/harvestsalt.html>) is better than the block salt for sale at the co-op b/c it is balanced for horses. It is important to offer both minerals AND salt.

You can offer granular minerals and salt in small double-welled "sheep feeders," available at any farm supply store for a few dollars. Keep the minerals separated from the salt so the horses can choose which one they need, and be sure to protect them from rain. Keeping them in the run-in shed is a great option.

Buckeye also offers blocks of both the Grass Plus Minerals and the Harvest Salt, but evidence does tend to suggest that horses prefer nibbling to licking, so I recommend the granular products over the blocks.

For horses who are not keeping their weight up on minerals or a ration balancer + hay alone, consider adding beet pulp (without molasses if possible) and possibly plain soybean oil to the diet. However, always try increasing hay first before looking at other options!

Until next time,

Put your best hoof forward!