



Ration Balancer: What is it and when to use it

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Ration balancers are commercially prepared horse feeds that are designed to provide the trace minerals and vitamins a horse requires. The minerals and vitamins are concentrated so that only a small amount of the ration balancer needs to be fed, typically 1 to 2 pounds a day for a 1,000 pound horse, depending on the product.

Ration balancers are commonly fed when a horse can meet its energy/calorie needs by consuming forages (i.e. pasture and/or hay). For example, if you have a horse that has access to a round bale of hay and is able to maintain its body weight on hay alone, then a ration balancer would be an excellent choice to provide the vitamins and minerals not found in sufficient quantities in the hay. Another example would be when a horse is fed hay and also supplemental cereal grains (i.e. oats, corn) in order to meet the horse's energy/caloric needs. In that case, the addition of a ration balancer would be warranted since cereal grains are also not good sources of the required trace minerals and vitamins a horse needs.

So when wouldn't someone need to feed a ration balancer? If you are feeding your horse a commercially prepared feedstuff that is designed to provide all of the essential vitamins and trace minerals **AND** you are feeding it according to the manufacturer's recommendations, a ration balancer would not be needed. Commercially prepared feeds are formulated such that the trace minerals and vitamins are provided as long as the product is fed according to the directions; the amount that needs to be fed is listed on the feed tag or feed bag. Keep in mind that you must match the commercially prepared feedstuff to the type of horse you are feeding. For example, a performance horse should be fed a feed prepared for a performance horse while a broodmare should be fed a feed prepared for a broodmare. However, if you do not feed according to the manufacturer's recommendations and reduce the amount fed, the energy content of your horse's diet will be reduced, but you will also reduce the amount of trace minerals and vitamins the horse is consuming. In that circumstance, the horse's diet would now be deficient in those trace minerals and vitamins. Not following the manufacturer's instructions are common when people are trying to cut costs or if a horse starts gaining excess weight.

If you decide that feeding a ration balancer is appropriate for your horse, how do you choose which one to feed? There are two basic types of ration balancers. One is designed to be fed with grass hay or a grass legume (i.e. alfalfa, clover) mix, and the other type is designed to be fed with legume hay. Choose the ration balancer that best matches the type of hay you are feeding. When feeding a ration balancer, keep in mind that you will want to follow the manufacturer's recommendations. While the cost may seem higher compared to other types of commercially prepared horse feeds (on a pound per pound basis), keep in mind that you will be feeding much less each day. Calculate the cost per day for an accurate comparison.