



U of M Horse Newsletter

Providing research-based information to Minnesota Horse Owners

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EXTENSION

The Real Issue is Unwanted Horses

To slaughter or not to slaughter is the question, but is it that simple? On the surface is what self respecting horse person would want to slaughter horses for human consumption? But, unfortunately, that is not the real question or problem. The problem is the unwanted horse; horses that have lost their usefulness or have sustained an injury, or simply the horse that an owner can no longer care for. Owning a horse is not only a huge responsibility but it is also a substantial expense. Estimates suggest that there are 80,000-100,000 unwanted horses that are sent to slaughter each year. The purpose of this article is to provide the facts concerning this issue so you can come to your own conclusions.

What horses are going to slaughter? Horses sent to slaughter are a small cross section of horses in America. There is no one breed or type over represented. Some websites and anti-slaughter advocates suggest that different types of horses are over represented due to their use. However, close scrutiny of the types of horses that are sent to slaughter show this to be untrue.

Is the slaughter process cruel? There are laws already in existence requiring that horses be shipped and slaughtered in a humane manner. Through research the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has determined there are 3 humane methods of euthanizing a horse; 1. a barbiturate overdose, 2. bullet to the brain, or 3. captive bolt to the brain. The captive bolt is the method employed for slaughter. So is slaughter cruel? No, it is not the end I want for my horses, but it is not cruel. Another thing to think very seriously about is if slaughter is cruel to horses, then it is cruel to cattle, pigs, sheep, and chickens too?

If we are not going to slaughter these horses, than what are we going to do with them? Frankly, there are not enough retirement facilities to house all of the

unwanted horses. The average capacity of a horse adoption facility in the U.S. is 30 animals. This means in the first year alone, the U.S. would need an additional 2,700 adoption facilities, according to the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP). It is estimated that the care for these horses will cost about \$1,900 per year per horse or \$115 million to \$130 million depending on the number of horses. There are simply too many unwanted horses to adopt out. Currently, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) program for "wild horse adoption" can find homes for only 5,000 mustangs per year. There are horses currently standing in BLM collection facilities for over a year waiting adoption, and 70,000 more horses would simply overload the system.

Why not just euthanize them all? Then what do you do with the remains? Burial is a possibility, but no one knows what the environmental impact of the barbituates from 70,000 euthanized horses would have on ground water.

What about the horse? If an owner has no alternative, one worry is that the horses may be simply turned loose to fend for themselves. So what happens to the horse that is released into the wild? Considering the domestication of the horse and their complete dependency on human caretakers, slow starvation would be their end. Which is more humane, a quick painless death or slow one?

It has been suggested that we should stop breeding so many horses. A good idea, however, who is supposed to stop their breeding programs? Breeders I know attempt to produce outstanding horses in their disciplines, which discipline should stop breeding? Should the government control equestrian breeding programs by mandating how we utilize and develop the horse, or should this be an industry issue?

Next month we will continue our discussion on the unwanted horse.

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RESEARCH

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Many horse owners wonder whether they need to be concerned about the amount of sugar in their horse's hay when managing horses with laminitis, tying-up, and metabolic syndrome.

Do you have an "easy keeper" overweight horse with a cresty neck? Has your horse been diagnosed with insulin resistance?

To participate, horses must have a body condition score of at least 7 and be between 3 and 20 years old.

Horses selected will be tested for insulin resistance (IR), Cushing's, have blood samples taken for hormone tests, and participate in a two-week nutritional trial at the Equine Center. In return, owners will receive consultation on nutritional and medical management of obesity, IR and associated health problems.

For more information, and to find out whether your horse may be suitable for the project, please contact Dr. Christie Ward at malaz002@umn.edu or 612-625-6733.



Anticipate Higher Hay Prices

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released several crop reports that indicate the number of hay acres will be down (2%) in 2008. The USDA also reported that the existing hay supply is lower than previous years. This information combined with higher input costs (fuel, fertilizer, land rent, etc...) and higher grain demand and prices (corn, soybean, etc...) will likely lead to increased hay prices.

Through the fall of 2007 to the spring of 2008, the Sauk Center Quality Tested Hay Auction

recorded record hay prices. Average hay prices were \$100 a ton higher in 2007-2008 than the previous five year average.

To prepare for higher prices, horse owners should:

1. Remember, quality forage should be the backbone of your horse's diet (forage should be a minimum of 2/3 of their nutritional needs).
2. Have a good working relationship with a hay supplier to ensure a consistent and reliable source of hay.

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3. Consider adding hay storage space to reduce the effects of price and seasonal fluctuations (i.e. hay is sometimes more expensive in the winter vs. the summer).
4. Buy hay early. Do not wait until late summer or fall to buy hay.
5. Plan in advance. Budget for the price increase and re-evaluate how many horse you can afford to feed.
6. Finally, try to keep your hay type (i.e. grass or alfalfa) consistent. Constantly changing hay types can lead to horse health problems, specifically colic.

Research Update: Pelleted Bedding

Controlling ammonia and dust in barns can be a challenge. A study at North Dakota State Univ. recently looked into different bedding types and their ability to reduce ammonia smell and dust.

Bedding treatments consisted of an aspen and wheat based pellet and wood shavings. Ammonia levels were lower for stalls bedded with the pelleted product (3.9 ppm) than with the shavings (8.4 ppm). Also, ammonia levels increased to a greater degree over the length of the treatment period in stalls bedded with shavings compared to stalls bedded with pellets. Stalls

bedded with pellets were easier to clean than stalls bedded with shavings, however, they were dustier.

Stalls bedded with pellets tended to have more waste removed during the trial period. Also, the amount removed remained similar each day for stalls bedded with shavings, while in contrast, bedding removed from stalls bedded with pellets increased throughout the trial period. Its was hypothesized that this was due to increased absorbency of the pelleted product.

Stalls bedded with shavings

required additional bedding to be added sooner than stalls bedded with the pelleted product. A substantial difference in total bedding used was observed, with an average total weight of 45 kg/stall for shaving and 136 kg/stall for the pelleted product. This could possibly be a hindrance to horse owners who have limited storage capacity. However, a benefit of the pelleted bedding is that it did not require additional bedding through the trial period.

Overall, the pelleted product performed well. Researchers thought it was easy to clean and handle, and no adverse affects were observed in any of the horses bedded on this material. *Authors: J. Thorson & C. Hammer, NDSU.*

Preventing Hay Fires Continued

Most hay fires usually occur within two to six weeks of baling, but may occur in hay several years old if the hay is rewetted or mixed with newly baled hay. To reduce the risk of hay fires:

- If buying hay out of the field, the moisture content must be known.
- Storage of hay prior to purchase reduces the risk of a hay fire for the buyer.

Buying hay out of the field is a

common practice, and has minimal fire risk if the hay has been baled at 15% moisture or less.

Additional steps to reduce the risk of hay fires include:

- Hay should be stacked to encourage air circulation. The hay storage area should be protected from rain.
- Do not mix piles of newly baled and previously cured hay.
- Forage moisture testers can be

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used to estimate in-field moisture. However, testers vary in accuracy and several samples need to be taken.

- Propionic acid can help prevent molding when hay is baled between 17 to 25% moisture, depending on bale size.
- If possible, store hay in a separate area or building from where animals are housed. This will limit animal loss if a fire occurs.