

Triple Crown Options to Remedy Poor Forage Situations

Drought in most areas of the country this year can mean some serious problems finding good quality hay for our horses. Fortunately, there have been improvements in forage alternatives. In the past, manufacturers offered alfalfa cubes and just one or two complete feeds. Now, there are blended cube options, chopped forages and a broader spectrum of complete feeds on the market.

Key considerations when choosing the best alternative forage option for your feeding program are:

1. Fiber Length - Most nutritionists agree that fiber length of 1" to 1 ½" is most desirable. Fiber length is important to assure good gut motility and to provide "scratch factor."
2. Digestibility - Overly mature hay and straw is high in lignin and not very digestible. Feed ingredients such as beet pulp, soy hulls, wheat midds and alfalfa meal are low in lignin and very digestible while peanut hulls and rice hulls are high in lignin and not very digestible.
3. Consistency – Grain and forage changes to a diet should always be gradual.
4. Your specific need- Do you need to replace all of your hay or supplement what you already have? If you are supplementing for fiber, are you supplementing to improve poor quality, do you want to stretch out your supply? Or a combination of both?

Complete feeds, such as Triple Crown's Complete, TLC, and Senior feeds, provide a diet that supplies all the protein, vitamins and minerals required for proper nutrition and sufficient amounts of fiber. These products work great for extending or improving hay resources, but typically lack sufficient fiber length to act as a complete replacement. Therefore, some long stem fiber is also recommended.

Cubes work very well to supplement hay and can also serve as a total hay replacement because of their proper fiber length.

*Alfalfa pellets are a less desirable option because they lack fiber length and pelleted hays are eaten much quicker, leaving the horse looking for something more to do.

Chopped forages are a great option to supplement or replace hay. They have the necessary fiber length and can offer grass or alfalfa options.

Fiber products designed for horses with metabolic issues, such as Triple Crown's Safe Starch Forage or Timothy Balance Cubes, work very well for this group of horses since both are a hay source lower in carbohydrates.

The bottom line is that many horse owners will struggle to find a good source of forage due to the drought this year. However, there are now more products available to help horse owners supplement or improve forage intake for optimal horse health.