Getting The Best Horse Care Nutrition Information. Avoiding Common Horse Feeding Misconceptions

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The internet contains a plethora of information about every topic under the sun. It takes a bit of skill and knowledge to determine what information is accurate and what is not. When it comes to information about feeding horses, the internet can be a very confusing. To feed your horse properly, you need current practical and scientific information from a qualified source. To help set things straight, here's the scoop on a few feeding myths and inaccuracies.

MYTH: Molasses is a big contributor to the overall sugar content of horse feed.
TRUTH: Molasses is the syrup made from processing various products such as sugar beets, and sugarcane. Sugarcane molasses is commonly used in equine feed products. Recently, with the awareness that too much starch and sugar can lead to metabolic disorders such as Insulin Resistance (IR), Equine Polysaccharide Storage Myopathy (PSSM) and Cushing's disease, many people question whether molasses should be included in horse feeds.

In reality, the amount of molasses added to horse feed (between 3-10% maximum) is generally not high enough to affect the total starch and sugar content of the ration. For example, a horse consuming 8 lbs. of horse feed with 5% molasses (typical inclusion rate of most feeds) is only getting 182 g of molasses. Most commercial molasses products only contain 40% sugar, so a horse is eating only an additional 73 g or 2.6 oz. of sugar from the molasses.

In comparison, how do other feedstuffs affect the carbohydrate (sugar + starch) load of the total equine ration? Horses eating large amounts of hay typically consume as much as four times more sugar and starch compared to horses eating feed with 5% molasses. Oats and other grains, such as corn and barley, contribute over three times more carbohydrates than molasses, and fresh pasture is even higher in sugar content than hay. Therefore, molasses contributes less sugar and starch in horse feed than oats and other grains. So don't be afraid of molasses in horse feed; it helps with palatability and moistens the feed.

MYTH: Feeding a protein, vitamin and mineral supplement that contains 30% protein is too much for any horse.
Truth: A 30% supplement is designed to provide protein (amino acids), vitamins and minerals with no extra calories from fat, fiber or starch. It is used when a horse is too heavy, a growing horse is having skeletal developmental problems, or a horse, in good condition and getting enough calories from hay and/or pasture, simply needs nutrient fortification. Any supplement formulated for this use should be fed at a rate of 1-3 lbs. per day, so the actual grams of protein, vitamins and minerals are the same as that when fed in a concentrate fed at a higher rate.

Using just protein as an example, which seems to be the one nutrient people are the most confused about, a horse consuming 2 lbs. (908 g) of a 30% protein supplement daily is eating

only 272.4 g of protein per day (supplied from the supplement). The same horse eating 6 lbs. of a 12% protein grain ration actually gets more grams of protein (326.9 g) than if he only consumed 2 lbs. of 30% supplement. It is simple math – 30% from 2 lbs. versus 12% from 6 lbs.

MYTH: Joint supplements should be pre-added to the feed by the manufacturer.
TRUTH: Putting joint supplements in a feedbag is a bad idea. Joint supplements are needed in specific amounts to be effective, but not all horses need to eat the same amount of feed. Therefore, if a bag of feed already contained a joint supplement, each horse must eat the exact same amount of feed to get the correct amount of supplement. This is impossible to regulate so it is best to individually add the supplement to each horse's feed.

MYTH: Feeds should not contain added amounts of certain minerals or other nutrients because they naturally occur in forages and grains.
TRUTH: Unfortunately, nature isn't perfect and not all the minerals in natural feedstuffs are available and usable. Some minerals, such as iron, are only 25% available in inorganic form. So, even though forage appears to provide plenty of iron, in reality a horse needs to consume more iron to meet its daily requirement. For this reason, it is prudent that a good feed manufacturer add more iron and other nutrients to feed formulations to help balance out what nature cannot provide.