

Problems With Feeding Practices
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When I visit a new client for the first time, I let them know that we will not even look at their horse(s) hooves right off the bat. Among the many questions in collecting information on the horse's history, the first item is the horse's diet. We look at the pasture, hay, grain, supplements and I will also ask about the water source. Often, I am fortunate enough to get a feed tag label, and we will go over all the ingredients one by one. I will ask if they know what they are, and/or what they are for? One thing everyone knows for certain is the percentage of protein. Why? Because that is the way the product is marketed. It is usually indicated in large bold letters somewhere on the front of the bag. Ask a little further, like, what is protein? Why do you feed 10, 12 or 14%? And I often get a blank look. A victim of successful marketing, instead of true knowledge. No one's pointing fingers. I was there once too.

I have a client, relatively new to horses, who took her horses change to natural horse care very seriously, and made all the necessary changes. She read, asked questions, took notes when I was there, and did a lot of her own research. She had a friend who believes that conventional horse keeping is the only way to go, and that making this change to barefoot hooves and a handful of hay pellets in a bucket of "dirt" (my recommended mineral supplement is the "dirt") was going to kill her horse. This friend said that there is horse feed for horses, and people food for people and we all do just fine. As a matter of fact, their long time friendship suddenly came to an end over this. How did this happen? Well, opinions are strong when it comes to longstanding traditions, and this friend had been feeding her horses the same way for many years. Processed horse feed 2 times a day with some hay and turnout during the day when not riding and stalled at night. This friend also made out a worming and vaccination schedule and tried to dictate everything that must be

done. That's just the way it's done, been done that way forever was more important than friendship. A strong opinion for sure.

Along with these longstanding traditions come some longstanding sicknesses, lameness and ailments, with classic symptoms nearly every horse owner can identify and has most likely experienced in conventional keeping practices. All these symptoms have additional products to address them as well. Every horse supply magazine or catalog lists many options with each ailment sometimes covering several pages. Here comes the marketing thing again. I have another client who had 3 shelves of supplements for 4 horses that most likely cost a small fortune addressing all these "symptoms". When I told her that she could throw most of them away, she stood there in disbelief. Why do people think more is better? The M-word again. We can be such suckers. If you really think about it, WE are what drives the Equine Market, and they know that. We are dazzled by those products used by our favorite clinicians, and are convinced that our horses will behave, perform and be better with them. We are conditioned to believe that our horse needs X, Y or Z, and we become part of the marketing game. We have the power to change more than we know, by voting with common sense, informed choices and our wallets.

Let's get back to the feed tag and look at some of these ingredients. Among the first are: Wheat Middlings, Soy Bean Hulls, Distillers Grain Products or simply Grain Products and Molasses. Do you think that if a horse were able to choose to eat those things (not including the molasses) he would? Would a horse find any of these things foraging in a natural environment? What are these ingredients anyway? Wheat middling's are an inexpensive by-product from human food processing commonly referred to as "floor sweepings". It is an inexpensive filler in animal food with no real nutritional value. That's a fancy way of saying "garbage" in my opinion. I don't know about you, but when I sweep the floor, it goes in the garbage. What about soy hulls? They are a by product of the soy industry and are the shell that surrounds the bean, not the husk. It was originally marketed for dairy cows, cattle, sheep and swine for fiber. Most people think that soy is a health food because it has been successfully marketed as one, but this is far from the truth. For a real eye opening learning experience go to www.mercola.com and search the article section on soy, and remember, it's what's left over on the floor of the factory that goes into our stock, horse and pet foods. OK, next on the list is Distillers Grain Products. A by-product of the Ethanol Industry. All corn grown for ethanol is GMO. Each bushel of corn processed produces 2.65 gallons of ethanol and 17 air dry pounds of distiller grains. 755 million bushels of corn= 2 billion gallons of ethanol= 17 million tons of distillers grain. That's a lot of floor sweepings. It costs money for them to dispose of the waste- yes, waste! But with successful marketing we are lead to believe it is good and healthy for our animals, and many people never even question that it could be detrimental to their health. They just trust the guy or girl at the counter at the feed store, who know what they know about the feed from the feed company representative.

Just as a side note- this is not one of the ingredients mentioned, but I am compelled to relate this true story here. When my husband lived in MD many years ago, before

he knew me, he worked at a corrugated paperboard manufacturing plant in Baltimore. He was bringing large strapped bales of shredded paper to the loading dock to be loaded onto a truck. He happened to ask the head foreman what they did with all this wasted paper. The foreman told him that they shred most of it and mix it with molasses and feed it to beef cattle. The rest is recycled.

These by-products are actually called co-products in the literature that promotes them since the term "by-product" has a bad connotation. Word games and euphemisms to make us feel better about what we are buying and to hide reality. These by-products are about as palatable as saw dust, so in comes the molasses. Molasses is a by-product of the processing of sugar cane or sugar beets into sugar. It is often preserved with either sulfur dioxide or propylene glycol, which is never disclosed on the feed tag. Propylene glycol is a cosmetic form of mineral oil found in automatic brake and hydraulic fluid and industrial antifreeze. In the skin and hair, propylene glycol works as a humescent, which causes retention of moisture content of skin or cosmetic products by preventing the escape of moisture or water. The Material Safety Data Sheet warns users to **avoid skin contact** with propylene glycol as this **strong skin irritant** can cause liver abnormalities and kidney damage. It is added to some of our processed foods as well as our animal food! Blackstrap molasses is what is used in cattle feed and is mostly sugar by dry weight. It is the same molasses used for horses. I call processed feed "Horsey McDonalds". If anyone has watched the movie "Supersize Me", they quickly get the picture.

So what does all this have to do with making horses sick or lame? It's not just what we feed them. It is how we feed them, how much and how often. Horses have small stomachs for their size because they evolved to forage continually on natural plants, shrubs and herbs. Their digestive tract is designed to be in constant use, and when it is able to work this way there are few problems. But, in domestication and with our longstanding traditions that I spoke of earlier we treat horses like we treat ourselves. We feed them meals once, twice, maybe 3 times a day, a grain meal, which most often includes the ingredients I just mentioned earlier with a few flakes of hay. When they are done, they often have to wait long periods of time in a paddock or a stall before someone comes to feed them again. This is not always the case as some do have pasture turnout, but that does not exempt them from problems either. We'll get to that in a moment. Empty stomachs cause stress and can lead to gastric ulcers. Empty parts of the digestive tract can lead to various forms of colic. Every part of the horse's digestive tract has acids and it's own ecosystem of beneficial bacteria and microbes that thrive when all is working according to plan. When chemicals, preservatives, foodstuffs they were not designed to eat enter the digestive tract at infrequent intervals, the imbalance sets off a host of problems including: ulcers, colic, laminitis, founder, Insulin Resistance, behavioral problems, diarrhea and the list goes on and on. Some of these issues are life threatening. Colic is the #1 killer of domestic horses! Free choice pasture for many horses is also a recipe for disaster. The majority of our pasture land was created for cows, cattle and sheep to make them fat and keep them producing. This does not work well for horses, ponies or donkeys. They often become obese and insulin resistant and suffer bouts of chronic laminitis and/or founder. Many wind up fat, but are natural salt and

mineral starving. I find strange looks on many faces when I tell them that the majority of hooves I see have some degree of laminitis. It is inescapable as we take the horse further and further away from its nature.

Now you ask, well, what can we do to change this? First of all knowledge is power. We need to break the unhealthy cycle these traditions have kept our horses in. There are many people researching and publishing their findings on the benefits of natural horse care in the barefoot hoof care movement. The more we can provide our horses with what is more in tune with their physiological and biological make up, the better off they will be. A diet that includes free choice forage in the way of hay and grass in an environment that promotes movement. Organic naturally occurring mineral supplements like the one I use and recommend to clients, Power Horse Trace Minerals and free choice loose salt are among the first changes. When I feed a supplement like Power Horse, I put it in a handful of Timothy hay pellets with a little water. It's really a snack, not a meal. When more is necessary because of weight loss problems, adding fat and fiber over the protein and sugar found in the majority of processed feed bags, and in small, frequent feedings will go a lot further. I often recommend pre/probiotics or a detox with calcilite bentonite clay. It depends on the issue(s) we are facing. Each horse is different. This **especially** needs to be realized. There can be no cookie cutter approach.

Obese and IR horses, ponies or donkeys, especially need mineral supplements, and also benefit tremendously with a grazing muzzle. Some need it throughout the grass growing season while others just need to wear it in the spring and early summer. Research the Paddock Paradise links online. There is even a Paddock Paradise Yahoo Group. I keep my own horses in this type of environment.

The horse's environment is equally important . 24/7 turnout with a herd (at least 1 other equine companion – more is better) with enough room to move at speed, shelter, clean water, a diet consisting mostly of forage, free choice loose granular sea salt, supplementation for each individual, and plenty of time to just be a horse. These alone can change a horse's health and life. One of my clients had a horse by himself. He was eating quite a bit of hay, and she asked if he needed more grain because he looks like he is losing weight. I said the best medicine for him will be another horse. Within 2 weeks, they found another horse. She called me to tell me that he is eating less and his weight looks better. Solo horses are stressed horses.

So where does barefoot hoof care come in? I thought you were a hoof trimmer. I answer this question the same way each time. A healthy hoof comes from a healthy horse. The hoof is a newspaper or indicator of what is or is not happening in the body. If we can give the horse the foundation of what he needs to be healthy, he will in most cases (barring any past hoof damage, or disease) grow a healthy hoof. While we are on the road to health addressing diet and environment and other concerns, we also provide a regular trim schedule for the horse with whatever protection it needs in the form of hoof boots/ pads or casts during the transition to

better health. What you will need more than anything is the patience to allow time and the healing forces within your horse to make it all happen.

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