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*NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:  
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### **Winter Feeding of Horses**

Feeding livestock this winter is a challenge for producers. Two years of extreme drought has contributed to an extremely short hay crop. Many producers have had to resort to having hay hauled in from other states, greatly increase the winter feeding cost.

Horse owners must pay careful attention to the nutrient requirements of their horses and select the proper feeds to meet the requirements. A certain amount of skill and sound judgement must be employed in developing a feeding management program.

As a non ruminant herbivore, the horse must have adequate long-stemmed roughage, a minimum of .75% -1.00% of a horses body weight generally satisfies a horses's roughage needs and allows normal activity of the digestive tract. One way to stretch your existing hay supply is to actually weigh each block or portion of hay prior to feeding. This is a simple management practice that can help stretch hay supply while meeting a horse's daily roughage needs.

Concentrate feeds that are higher in fiber than a horse owner might normally feed can be used to help decrease the need for long stem roughage. Feeds that are 14% crude fiber or higher will help, allowing horse owners to cut back to as little as 1/2 % of body weight per day in hay. Some of the senior feeds on the market are being fed to old horses that have had a problem with chewing and processing long-stem hay. These senior feeds are designed with enough fiber included so that older horses can eat the feed and actually do not have to be provided any hay at all. Younger, mature horses fed these senior feeds can likely get by in the short term without any hay, however, a good recommendation is to still provide some roughage if at all possible.

Some feeds on the market now exceed 20% crude fiber and this is enough fiber to keep the horse's digestive tract healthy, particularly if the feed is extruded. These feeds can sometimes be successful in also slowing intake, getting horses to take longer to complete a meal. So in the short term, these high fiber feeds can essentially remove the requirement for hay or grazing. However, it is always possible that some horses may show increased tendencies to chew wood or other horses' manes/tales, in the absence of any long stem hay being provided. This depends on several factors, and consequently, some companies will still recommend providing a little long stem hay or grazing to the horse's daily diet if at all possible.

Taking time to plan and develop a quality feeding program and continually monitoring horses' consumption patterns can assure owners that their horses are receiving the best diets possible. Never make a rapid change in feeding any animal. A sudden change in a feed program could result in digestive problems, colic or other nutritional stress. Remember, the owner is legally responsible for the nutrition and condition of their horses.

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