



## Tips for Horse Owners Seeking to Reduce Costs in their Feeding Program

*Jason L. Turner, Extension Horse Specialist*

Unfortunately, we are experiencing another tough time like 2011-2013 where we have a “perfect storm” of drought, high fuel and fertilizer prices, and economic uncertainty, not to mention inflation across the board. This puts a squeeze on livestock owners as they seek to manage feed costs. Over the past couple of months, I’ve had several inquiries from horse owners that are reviewing their feeding programs to seek cost-reducing alternatives. For those agents receiving similar inquiries, I wanted to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts and resources that may help you as you advise horse owners in your county.

*Some typical questions have included:*

1. My hay supply is running short, and I am looking at ways to help stretch the hay that I have to go further until this year’s crop is available.
2. The price of the bagged feed that I have been feeding has increased significantly over the past year. How do you recommend I choose an alternative product?

### **Question #1**

There are a few different methods to help “stretch” the hay supply on hand. First, we could seek to minimize overfeeding nutrients. For all horses, doing a thorough estimate of their nutrient requirements, and then seeking to develop a diet to supply those nutrients is the best approach to ensure that requirements are met without overfeeding hay and other feedstuffs. A mature horse will typically consume around 2-3% of their body weight in dry matter intake per day, and we should never offer less than 1% of their body weight in long-stem forage to minimize digestive problems.

One way to improve hay feeding efficiency is to minimize waste of hay fed. More information on this can be found in the recently published Guide B-721: Hay Feeding Management Strategies as Cost-control Measures on Horse Farms (<https://pubs.nmsu.edu/b/B721/index.html>).

Another good example might be the case where a horse is over their desired body condition score (BCS). In this case a weight reduction plan would help bring the horse down to a healthier BCS through reducing the daily amount of hay fed (e.g., instead of feeding 20 lbs/day, feed 10% less—or 18 lbs/day). Some of our recent Horse Owners Minute videos cover body condition scoring, as well as practical methods on

how to weigh feed and hay for horses (<https://www.youtube.com/@nmsuaces>). These videos may help show owners a few steps they can take to improve efficiency in their feeding program.

Alternatives to traditional long-stem hay are another option for stretching the hay supply in the barn. These include using high-fiber feedstuffs, such as beet pulp or pelleted soy hulls, as a replacement for no more than 50% of the long-stem hay in the traditional diet. Remember that changes in the horse's diet should be made gradually over a 10 to 14 days. The Colorado State University Extension publication, *Stretching Your Horse's Hay Supply During Drought*, does an excellent job describing these options in greater detail (<https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/agriculture/stretching-your-horses-hay-supply-during-drought-1-625/>).

## **Question #2**

For this question, I would first visit with the horse owner on what bagged product they are currently feeding and why? Does the horse need the bagged feed to meet nutrient requirements or is it simply a habit or traditional practice. Many mature, adult horses under low to moderate work conditions can perform well while being fed hay only with a good mineral supplementation program. The money saved by removing the bagged feed from the diet could go towards purchasing more hay that may be needed relative to Question #1 above. Often times, locally sourced good quality hay is the cheaper means of meeting nutrient requirements for adult horses. Of course, lactating mares and growing horses will likely require a commercially prepared, or bagged feed, to meet their specific nutrient needs.

If the horse does need the added nutrients from the bagged feed, then I would see if they have investigated cost-saving measures from their supplier. Can they realize discounts from purchasing the feed in bulk, does the retailer have a cost-matching program on their products relative to their competitors, etc.? If so, I would investigate those means of savings on the bagged feed product. For comparing bagged feed products, the owner should visit with their feed supplier to see what product alternatives might be a more economical fit for their situation. The best source of nutrient information on a specific product will come from the manufacturer and retailer of that product.

If owners want to do some preliminary investigation on their own, then I recommend they obtain the feed tags or labels and the costs on the products that they are interested in. Then, they can lay them out and do some comparisons that may eliminate some options from further consideration. There is much information listed on the feed tag, and some crucial information is not. Generally, bagged feed is fed to increase the amount of energy and/or protein in the overall diet while also providing vitamins and trace minerals. We can directly compare the protein content of bagged feeds by looking at the level of crude protein listed in the guaranteed analysis on the tag. However, the energy content of the feed is not listed on the tag, so you must gather that information from the manufacturer or make comparisons based on estimates from the feed tag. This comparison can be based on the amount of crude fat and crude fiber listed on the feed tag. As the level of crude fat increases, the energy content of the feed also increases. However, there is an inverse relationship between energy and crude fiber, where an increase in fiber results in a decrease in energy content of the feed. Beyond the comparisons between feeds for energy and protein, the ingredient information may also give some idea about "quality differences" between feeds. The University of Nebraska Extension Guide, *Basics of Feeding Horses: Reading the Feed Tag*, covers the above comparisons and more in greater detail (<https://alec.unl.edu/documents/cde/2017/livestock-management/2017-basics-of-feeding-horses-reading-the-feed-tag.pdf>).

In closing, the practices above are relatively simple, yet they have substantial impact on enhanced efficiency in feeding programs not currently practicing them. It is important to understand these general concepts may need to be tailored to fit the horse owner's specific situation and nutrient needs for their horses. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions on equine nutrition concerns with your local horse owners.

## **NMSU to host beginner horse judging workshop April 15**

DATE: March 7, 2023

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New Mexico State University Rio Arriba County Cooperative Extension Service will host a beginner horse judging workshop from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, April 15. This event will be held at the Rural Event Center, State Road 554 House No. 122-A, in Abiquiú, New Mexico.

Tracy Drummond and Sid Gordon, NMSU Extension agriculture agents; Jason Turner, NMSU Extension horse specialist; and Don Martinez, NMSU Extension agriculture agent and Rio Arriba County Extension program director, will present at the workshop. All beginning 4-H members are welcome to attend.

The workshop cost is \$20 per participant, but chaperones are free. Register for the workshop at <https://horseclinic.ezregister.com>. The deadline to register is 8 p.m. March 31, and limited to the first 30 individuals. Participants are encouraged to bring a pencil, notebook and lunch. Participants also have the opportunity to purchase lunch at an on-site food truck.

Presentations will be given to benefit young beginners in learning the ropes around horse judging, including halter and performance classes. Martinez said that local horse owners were happy to help by lending their horses for the workshop. Covering the basics, workshop sessions will focus on improving the participants' skills.

**Register Today for Four Corners Stockmanship & Stewardship Event**  
**McGee Park**  
**Farmington, NM- May 10-12, 2023**

Registration is now open for the Four Corners Stockmanship & Stewardship event, May 10-12, 2023, in Farmington, New Mexico. Stockmanship & Stewardship is a unique educational experience for cattle producers featuring low-stress cattle handling demonstrations, Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) educational sessions, cattle preventative health care and value-added programming sessions and industry updates.

The BQA program is a Beef Checkoff-funded educational program that helps guide producers towards continuous improvement using science-based production practices that assure cattle well-being, beef quality and safety. Attendees can become BQA certified during the event. “Those who become BQA certified, and meet requirements for re-certification, show their commitment of striving to produce the highest quality, safest beef products for consumers, and educational programs like this event focus on the BQA program and practices that help producers elevate this commitment” says Dr. John Wenzel, Extension Veterinarian with New Mexico State University.

Industry experts including Dr. Lily Edwards-Callaway, Colorado State University; Dr. John Wenzel, New Mexico State University; Leann Saunders, IMI Global; and others, will cover topics such as cattle behavior, vaccines, reproductive efficiency and value-added calf programs. Stockmanship experts Dr. Ron Gill, Dr. Dean Fish and Curt Pate will provide hands-on live animal handling demonstrations. The event will be held in conjunction with Indian Livestock Days and for the first time, the BQA training will be offered in the Navajo language, Diné. The program is sponsored by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), Merck Animal Health, and the Beef Checkoff-funded National Beef Quality Assurance program.

“At Merck Animal Health, we are committed to continuously improving animal health and well-being through our investments in research and development, our comprehensive portfolio of innovative products and technologies, the expertise of our people and in supporting the cattle industry and its causes,” said Kevin Mobley, executive director of sales at Merck Animal Health. “We are proud to have a long-standing partnership with NCBA on its Stockmanship & Stewardship program to provide cattle producers with animal care training and education to help them be more profitable and sustainable in their operations.”

For more information, complete agenda, fees and to register, visit [www.StockmanshipAndStewardship.org](http://www.StockmanshipAndStewardship.org). Cattle producers attending Stockmanship & Stewardship are eligible for reimbursement through the Rancher Resilience Grant. To apply for a grant to cover registration costs and two nights hotel, visit [www.ncba.org/producers/rancher-resilience-grant](http://www.ncba.org/producers/rancher-resilience-grant).

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