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SAFETY FIRST

With the cost of owning and keeping a performance horse it is vital that owners have the required information to make informed decisions. It's commonly understood that it is important to feed a product designed specifically for horses. However, what is not often realised is that not all manufacturing processes are created equal, and not all manufacturers take the same measures to ensure feed safety.

Owners need to know that their horses' feed is made from good quality, safe ingredients whilst those riding at a competitive level need to know it is free from banned substances, especially if they compete under Jockey Club or FEI rules.

For many years Epol have had many systems in place to ensure the quality and safety of horse products throughout the mills. Epol is a fully registered AFMA member and we fully uphold the values of Act 36.

At Epol we uphold these standards to ensure that not only are they suitable for sale within South Africa but that we also are compliant with international export certification. To ensure the codes of conduct are upheld across all these organisations we submit to a yearly auditing process as well as a quarterly visit from the state vet giving users of our products peace of mind.

So how does this relate to the full manufacturing of our horse feeds? To reduce the risk of contamination we have removed all specific

banned substances from our horse feed plant, to ensure that our safety is upheld.

However, as we cannot guarantee this for all our suppliers, we ensure that we test routinely for such substances in case they have entered our mill via other channels.

We also include further regular testing for mixture quality, mycotoxins, heavy metals, pesticides, polychlorinated Biphenyls, Dioxins, Melamine, B-Agonists and Steroid Hormones, microbiological contaminants (mainly salmonella) and the quality of our fats and oils to ensure stability.

From the moment raw materials enter our plant we sample each delivery before offloading. This is done by Near-Infrared Spectroscopy (NIR). What this enables us to see is that each raw material meets the nutritional specifications that we indicated on purchase. If nutritional standards are not met then we reject the delivery, ensuring each time our raw materials are of the same standard.

All our raw materials are fully traceable and sourced from mainly local suppliers when possible.

1. *Once these raw materials have been accepted large bulk items (such as sunflower, maize, bran and soya) are stored within our bulk bins. These bins are checked hourly to ensure compliance of storage, at this point we also check for cross contamination, and ensure nutritional values are still in line with formulated values.*
2. *Once we are satisfied with this, we move onto the manufacturing process. Smaller stored raw materials such as Lucerne and vitamin and mineral premixes are captured per batch via our tipping sheets. These ensure that these items are set out in the correct quantities per product and are signed off by management to ensure you receive the same levels within each product made every time.*
3. *All the raw materials are then brought together into our milling machines via computer systems to ensure that our formulations are upheld. It also allows us to check that the formulations are kept within set bounds and cannot therefore contain different ingredients accidentally.*
4. *During manufacturing multiple batches are produced.*
 - *The first batch produced is sampled and taken off for NIR testing. If this test confirms that the product is meeting all specifications, then the subsequent batches are produced.*
 - *The following batches are made and then tested for visual look.*
 - *A composition from all batches is made and then re mixed. A sample is made, and the sample is stored in our feed archive for reference should we receive complaints regarding any product. All samples are kept for 4 months, should we need to we can trace back any batch produced. Therefore, it's vital to keep hold of your label in case you need to contact us as it provides you with all the information needed such as batch and manufacture date.*
 - *We then re test via NIR and the durability of pellets is assessed.*
5. *Once the tests have confirmed the specifications of the final product are met the batch will be signed off and the product is released for distribution/sale.*

Within our products we also include mould inhibitors and mycotoxin binders to further enhance our service. These products have no known impact on equine health and we select options that are certified safe for the use in horse feed.

What these exceptional extras do, is help give the user peace of mind that even if storage and transportation guidelines are not upheld by retailers that the products can still be safely used and arrive free of issues such a mould and toxins.

Salmonella

Salmonella is a bacterial infection that affects most mammals, including horses and humans, birds and reptiles. Salmonella usually affects the gut and may cause severe diarrhoea in adult horses. In some cases, usually foals, the bacteria can travel around the body (systemic disease) and could be fatal. Horses can get salmonella through contaminated feed.

Epol feeds have a comprehensive hygiene program in place to eliminate/reduce the risk of salmonella and can demonstrate due diligence in our mill and transport vehicles. Feed, equipment and transportation vehicles all undergo rigorous tests for salmonella under this program.

We ensure that we routinely test for salmonella via our internal Rainbow vet labs as well as accredited outside labs. We can attest to the accuracy of all ingredient declarations made on product labels.

How do you review GMOs?

At Epol we ensure 100% compliance with all legislation applicable to the animal feed industry, including all applicable GMO regulations. We keep abreast and study thoroughly the latest developments and scientific research on the effect of GMO's on the health and performance of equines. However, in South Africa it is extremely difficult to ensure that all ingredients are GM free as the prevention of cross contamination between GMO and non-GMO raw materials (eg. Maize and soya) are not actively encouraged by legislation and government and therefore are not always pursued by the grain and raw material handling industry.

Our clients can rest assured, however, that should any research show the possibility of adverse effects in equines, we would take immediate action against the inclusion of GM ingredients in our feeds.

Foreign objects

At our horse mills we do have policies in place for the checking of foreign objects within our bagging lines to try and minimise the occurrence of such issues. However, this is a big task, especially in ingredients such as hays, as not all farmers ensure their fields are always free of objects. At every junction we aim to reduce the incidence of objects found within our feeds and continually monitor and review our policies to reduce levels.

All manufacturers in South Africa are plagued by this issue but you can be assured that action is always taken when issues are reported.

Conclusion

Epol sets World Standards to ensure safe food supply chains internationally. The use of Near-Infrared Spectroscopy (NIR) allows

us to analyse raw materials, in processed products, as well as finished products. This facilitates stringent controls of incoming raw materials and ingredients to maximise quality and to assist in achieving a strict consistency in all our finished products.

On-going research and development ensure that our products remain at the forefront of feed technology, giving owners economical input costs with maximum yield. With a committed team of expert nutritionists and highly motivated staff, who continually strive for excellence, our equine range can cater for a wide variety of needs.

TESTIMONIALS

JAILI NICOLAOU

I started my horses Epol Journey 2 years ago when I moved up to Limpopo. With the knowledgeable guidance from Leigh and Debbie, who assisted in personalising each horses meal plan, my horses have transformed mentally and physically.

My two young warmblood mares really blossomed within 6 months and we have been competing successfully in the middle grades. What has been most rewarding is seeing my THB, who has battled for over 10 years with maintaining weight, finally bulk up and who has developed a wonderful top line.

My three staples in the feed room have to be Epol Balancer (this is a real deal and a must for any horse), Epol cool rider and Nice & Easy!

Feeding good quality grass is part of the feeding plan. My competitive girls all have the feel good vibes, the condition and the right energy levels for their work. The trail ponies are all on a epol cool rider meal appropriate to their levels of work. I can boast and say my yard of 12 horses are healthy, happy and looking great.

A Big thanks to Epol and to Leigh and Debbie, thank you for your personal interest. It's been a pleasure working with people who are passionate and invested in the wellbeing of horses and in their product.

