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UNDERSTANDING FORAGE EXTENDERS

All horses should have a diet based around forage, and while some will need more than others, this part of the diet should never be overlooked. Forage includes sources such as hay, grazing, high fibre cubes, chaffs, and even super fibres such as soya hulls and beet products.

The main nutritional element of any form of forage is fibre, which helps meet the need for energy (calories) and for bulk, without which the digestive system would not function optimally.

Fibre is broken down by the population of bacteria predominantly in the horse's hind gut and energy derived in this way is released slowly and therefore provides a more sustainable energy without creating "hotness" making it ideal for many horses.

Another great benefit of forage, particularly to stabled horses, is the length of time and the number of chews it takes to eat both long stemmed (hay) and short stemmed forages (chaffs, cubes). This not only helps to satisfy their physiological need to chew and help to mirror natural grazing behaviours, but this can also help to reduce stereotypical behaviours, such as cribbing. Saliva is a natural gastric acid buffer, but horses only produce saliva when they chew. This means the longer they are kept chewing the more buffering capacity there is. This is especially important in horses struggling with gastric ulcers.

In South Africa the quality of grazing can fluctuate and at certain times of the year, grazing within paddocks may be reduced and/or it may be harder to find good quality hay.

Therefore, incorporating a consistent highly digestible forage alternative (also known as forage extenders) such as hay cubes or chaff to support the amount and quality of forage the horse receives may be worthwhile.

Hay cubes are an ideal alternative for many horses as they can be used in situations where large amounts of long-stemmed hay is not ideal. For example,

- they can be used for horses with respiratory issues as it limits their exposure to inhalation of dust and spores.
- They are ideal for horses struggling with inflammatory disorders of the bowel, as long-stemmed hay can irritate the gut.
- Older horses or those struggling with dental issues particularly benefit from hay cubes as they often struggle to chew and digest long stemmed hay and chaffs fully.
- Hard working horses can sometimes lose their appetites during competition leading to a reduced intake of forage. This may expose horses to digestive upsets and lead to under performance and loss of condition. Hay cubes can be ideal under these circumstances as they can provide that additional fibre support for all round digestive health.
- They are also easy to store and transport making them a great option for performances horses.

When looking at chaffs they also have a variety of benefits.

- Chaffs are particularly useful for adding bulk and thus chew time to a horses diet. This can be particularly useful for horses that rush their concentrate feed, as it means more chew per bite ultimately slowly them down.
- They are also useful for good doers as the bulk from a chaff provides something for the bucket, which satisfies the horses chewing need without adding large amounts of calories.
- For the high-performance horse, chaff can be a useful way of adding a little extra fibre to each meal. By reducing the concentrate amount per meal and adding in a small amount of chaff, it allows the starch and sugar levels to be reduced per meal which helps to avoid an overload of starch into the hindgut which can cause colic and hindgut acidosis. No more than 2.5kg should be fed per meal and so those needing higher levels of concentrates will need to provide more small meals throughout the day. It has also been demonstrated that a fibre within the diet encourages better utilisation of any concentrate feed that may be fed as the gut is helped to remain stable and healthy.

In general both hay cubes and chaffs are relatively low in sugars and starch (Non Structural Carbohydrates NSC) making them ideal for all horses however should a horse require a diet low in NSC ie due to laminitis, do check the chosen brand as some manufactures choice

to use larger amounts of molasses, bran or fillers to reduce costs on these types of forage products, so rather look towards companies that use high quality grasses and additional oils which is safer for sensitive horses.

How much can I feed?

The answer to this question is dictated by the circumstances in which the horse finds itself as they are all individual. The advice of a nutritional advisor is recommended, and we suggest you contact us for a Free diet consultation before adding these into the diet. However, the following three points should be considered for the use of forage extenders:

1. If the grazing is not of good quality, but hay is, then the need to use forage extenders is reduced as more hay can be fed. 500g-1kg per day of a hay extender should be more than adequate especially if concentrates are also being used.
2. If hay and grazing is not of good quality then 1-4kg per day of a forage extender can be fed together with concentrate feed (if needed)
3. If no grazing and hay is available, forage extenders are used as a replacement and can be fed up to 1% of body weight for short periods of time. However do note that forage extenders should not replace long stemmed hay on a long term basis and so a traditional hay should be sourced even if its not of good quality.

TESTIMONIALS

At Kincardine Equestrian Centre we have a mixture of 20 Ponies and horses on Epol/Equus Nice n Easy and the applications are endless. It's versatile because it can be added to their concentrates to help keep condition using additional fibre, it can be used as a standalone maintenance meal for horses on box rest or those not needing a traditional high energy concentrate but still wanting something in their feed bowls.

We love this product and its many applications. All our horses and Ponies keep condition throughout the year. We are very impressed with this feed and it has become a dependable go-to product we rely on for a host of differing meal plan requirements and tailor-made solutions depending on the needs of the horse.

Thank you for your range of fantastic products.

