

Nutrition Day Feedback

Dr Tom Shurlock gave us a huge amount of technical background to how to feed our horses, why to feed them and when to feed them. Some of it we do already, but it was good to hear why it was important to do so.

So for those who never came to the Open day here are some of the things he told us....(please remember that I am not a scientist and I am trying to put these as simple as possible...Tom baffled me with some of the science on the Saturday work sessions we had!!)

Do you know that eating starts with your horse's brain?....he knows in his consciousness that he needs to eat, and his DNA has programmed him to know that eating 24/7 in a trickle feed way is important to the way his digestive system is built, that bitter things in the field most likely are poisonous and shouldn't be eaten, and that if his system is needing something particular, to go search for it, eg blackjacks when there is a mild infection somewhere. Can you see how keeping your horse in a mono-cultured grass paddock (eg kikuyu only), stabled at night and not having sufficient hay (or having hay in a very easily accessible pile so he scoffs the entire night's ration in 3 hours due to boredom instead of pacing himself) and giving him all his nutrients all in 2 big meals might just work in opposition to how nature designed the horse to exist. But that is modern life for a modern horse, especially those of us not lucky enough to have our own land and having to fit into a livery set up, so he then showed us how to feed the right types of goodies to counteract the negatives of modern stable life.

FIBRE FIBRE FIBRE.....horses are designed to eat grasses, and they get all the nutrients they need from that...IF they live on the prairies! So when we need to feed out of a bucket, we need to find substitutes that are low in the dangerous sugars, high in fibres and good carbohydrates, and feed them as the bulk of their feed. And this is where the Speedi Beet and Fibre Beet products come in....a good slow release carbohydrate, low in sugar and high in fibre.

MICRONIZING ... so because our horses don't have all day to eat their rations in a bucket, and the bucket feed comes in only a few meals a day, most getting breakfast and supper, it would be important for the nutrients in the feed to be as easily and quickly available so that by the time the feed has been eaten and then pooped out, the nutrients have all been absorbed. Micronizing is a way of cooking the feed at low temps that doesn't destroy the nutrients at all, but makes that the cell walls are easily broken the minute they get into contact with the bacteria and probiotics in the digestive system. By micronizing the feed, you can pretty much guarantee 90 to 100% use of all the nutrients in the feed. And this is why Speedi Beet, which is the ONLY MICRONIZED sugar beet pulp in the world, is better for your horse than the other beets out there. Micronizing is an expensive process and that is why Speedi Beet is more expensive than the other beet products, but you get 30% more nutrition out of it than the other product that is R40 cheaper :-). The other products are also cooked at high temps which damages a fair percentage of the nutrients available in sugar beet pulp.

BACTERIA AND PROBIOTICS IN THE GUT....I was amazed to hear that in a human digestive system (DS) when you aren't eating, the acid quits being produced. In a horse, the acid is produced all the time and if it is being starved in a worst case scenario or only living on grass that might not be

holistically nutritious, the acid then damages the bacteria and probiotics in the DS. And so when the horse eventually gets food, it can't process the feed properly and it kind of explains why rescue horses take so long to fix when feeding them copious amounts of feed. Speedi beet promotes the health of the bacteria etc in the gut and keeps them functioning at maximum efficiency. And in doing so, you make sure your horse's system is good enough to absorb as much nutrients from not only his beet, but his concentrates, his hay and his grazing. I have always maintained that it is not great to stop the beet in summer (fat horses are not always healthy horses), as by the time you get to winter and you want to improve your horse's nutrition, you have to start with a bit of a lag in efficient digestive system. I feed my horses 320g dry weight beet all summer (feeding is also one way of keeping tabs of bilary etc...if they don't eat with gusto, you know something is brewing), and I very seldom have to increase their feed in winter. I add hay to their regime, but the stuff in their nosebags remains the same for the past 2 winters. So I might be spending money on feed in summer while they are knee deep in grass, but I save in winter by feeding a minimal amount. And I now know, thanks to Tom's explanation, why from a scientific stand I have fat horses on minimal feed in winter!

This also explains why if you feed beet as 10-20% only of the ration and the rest of the ration is made up of a concentrate that is loaded with bran, molasses and un-micronized feed, you don't see the great results that horses on 80% beet ration exhibit. The nutrients are not as easily available to the horse and so those horses need more than 2 to 6kgs of concentrate to maintain basic condition. So consider slowly changing the ratio around (never switch overnight) and you will be amazed at the changes in your horse.

THE NEW NATURAL COUNTRY MIXES: VETERAN FOR THE OLDIES, HORSE&PONY FOR THE MEDIUM WORKED HORSES, COOL&CALM FOR THE LEISURE RIDING HORSES, AND ULTIMATE PERFORMANCE FOR THE COMPETITION HORSES

We also learnt that most horses can survive perfectly on a beet only basic with a good vitamin and mineral top up, which can come in many forms. For your average paddock ornament that does Sunday outings, his energy requirements are low, and he won't need much in a top up. Your performance horse on the other hand will have different requirements.

British Horse Feeds has made a new range of feeds called the Natural Country mixes that have top quality ingredients in a set recipe with a complete range of vitamins and minerals. Because all of the bag is micronized, not just a few ingredients, and those ingredients are the best they can source, they are not cheap, but you will need to use very little to get maximum results. The shelf life is 6 months due mainly to the herbal ingredients (the cereal ones are longer), so I will not be keeping extra stock of these products...if you are interested in using them, please contact me and we will work out how much you need for 2 months, and I will order them specially for you (you only have to pay for one month's order at a time, but the processing of my order at BHF takes 10 days...they make the orders even for the beet up only on orders so they are all fresh...and the ship takes 5 to 7 weeks depending on weather, strikes, and queues in the harbour).

The other thing I learnt is that not all feeds are the same from month to month...a manufacturer can develop a recipe that uses certain ingredients to make up a nutrient profile. If the price of for example soya goes up, they will change the recipe to exclude that ingredient and source some other

that has the same nutrients, or use soya from another source, and one can only hope that the quality is as high. BHF doesn't do this. They research their supplies based on eco- friendly grounds, quality control etc and they stick with them regardless of the price...so every bag throughout the year contains the same ingredients with the same quality from the same sources. (And I also found out they only use shipping agents who have smaller carbon footprint practices!!)

THE MINERAL BLOCK

During all our discussions I mention that I use a mineral block and lo and behold if it isn't manufactured with exactly the same high quality ingredients as BHF uses in their Country mix range! I have been using them since March 2011, and because my horses have a low energy requirement, the beet is sufficient and I just needed a vitamin and mineral top up, and I wasn't really satisfied with the concentrates that I was using, and now my horses have never looked or felt so good as they do now. The one main reason for using a block rather than putting something in their feedbag was that each horse is an individual with different requirements and if they could source what they needed on their own, that would be first prize. So the way I see it, is the horses get the beet, grazing and hay for their fibre and carbohydrates, they get the vitamin and mineral block for their different needs, and if I start to feel any of the horses need something more, I will top it up with one of the natural country mix range...250g to 500g on average for the average horse. Or for those you use the local feeds 500g to 2kgs max.

DIATOMACEOUS EARTH

When we stopped at my Pietermaritzburg depot, Tom spotted my bags of DE, and confirmed all the good things about using it...the trace elements, the deworming properties...

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM HORSEPLAY PRODUCTS

Speedi beet 20kg

Fibre beet 20kg

Natural Country mix range:

Veteran mix 20kg

Horse& pony mix 20kg

Cool and calm mix 20kg

Diatomaceous earth Livestock 10kg

Diatomaceous earth Rolling Compound 25kg

Primeline Mineral block 15kg

Eragrostis and Redgrass Hay