Alfalfa: The High Quality Hay for Horses

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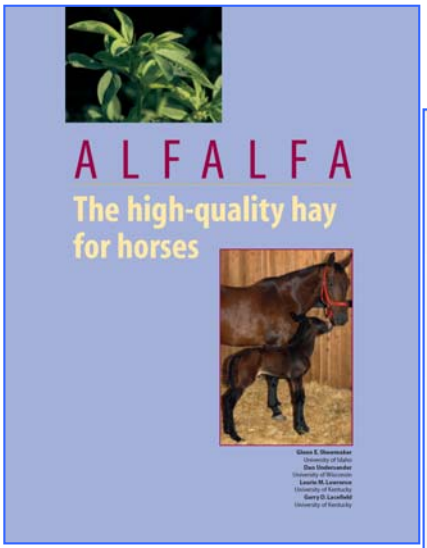
Rationale

- Publications and web sites on feeding horses give anecdotal opinions from one extreme to another.
- Many of these are based on biases from a limited number of animals (1 or 2) which are generalized on a particular forage.
- This publication emphasizes the forage and hay quality is largely dependant on the maturity of the forage, and thus should be matched to the proper class of horse.
- A team of forage agronomists and animal nutritionists focused on the correct use of alfalfa hay and forage for horses.
- Objectives:
  1. Science, rather than myth, is used to guide the use of alfalfa products for varying needs of horses.
  2. The proper diet for horses of different ages, class, and activity are given in practical rations.



Meeting the Nutritional Needs of Horses

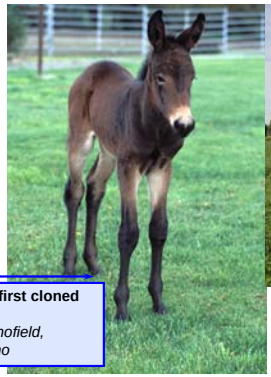
- Affected by age and production state.
- Young horses usually require the most nutrient-dense diets.
- As horses age, diets that are less nutrient dense.
- Lactating mares and horses with strenuous physical activities have much higher requirements than horses used for light recreational riding.

Lawrence:

The publication includes easy-to-use tables of example diets for recreational horses, lactating mares, weanlings, yearlings and horses that perform moderate or intense work. “People generally believe that all hay is the same,” says Lawrence. “They don’t realize that different horses have different requirements for different kinds of hay.”

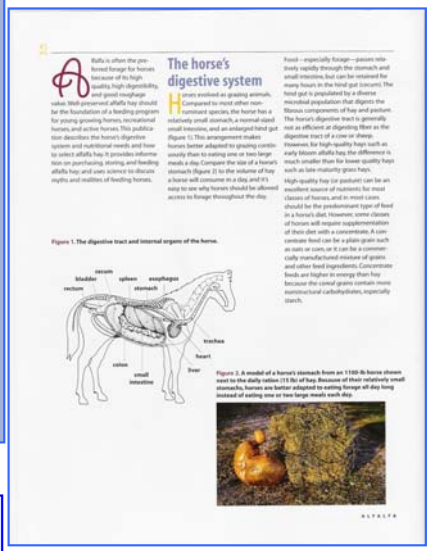
Science versus Myth

Alfalfa is a high quality, highly digestible feed for horses, but so many myths surround its use that many of the nation’s horse owners either underutilize or misuse it. A concise, scientifically based, user-friendly publication by the National Alfalfa Alliance clarifies to owners of one or many horses how to match the characteristics of alfalfa hay to the age, class and activity level of their equines.



Idaho Gem, the first cloned equine, a mule
Photo by Phil Schofield, University of Idaho

Sampson & Goliath cut hay for Jim Knight
Photo by Glenn Shewmaker



The publication:

- Describes the horse’s digestive system
- Specific nutritional needs of horses used for:
  - Recreational activities
  - Broodmares
  - Growing horses
  - Performance horses
- Explains how growth stages of alfalfa affect forage quality
- Discusses how alfalfa hay is classified
- Defines terms used to describe alfalfa characteristics and quality
- Reviews several types of forage products
- Addresses preservatives and blister beetles
- Buying, transporting and storing alfalfa hay.

Lacefield:

Calls the publication an attempt to bring the “best scientific information on feeding alfalfa to horses into one aesthetically pleasing publication that is applicable from Florida to New York to California.”

Available from the National Alfalfa Alliance:

Single copies of the 12-page publication can be downloaded from the NAA’s Web site at
www.alfalfa.org
Multiple copies can be purchased in lots of 25 for $50, plus shipping and handling.

“Alfalfa is often the preferred forage for horses because of its high quality, high digestibility, and good roughage value.

Well-preserved alfalfa hay should be the foundation of a feeding program for young growing horses and active horses.

This publication describes the horse’s digestive system and nutritional needs and how to select alfalfa hay.

It provides information on purchasing, storing, and feeding alfalfa hay; and uses science to discuss myths and realities of feeding horses.”

Amounts of several nutrients required by horses in different physiological stages on a daily basis

Class	DE Mcal/day	Crude protein	
		Lb/day	% in diet
Recreational	20	1.8	10
Pregnant	20	1.9	11
Lactating	28	3.1	13
Weanling	16	1.9	14
Yearling	20	2.1	13
Performance			
-- Moderate	26	2.2	11
-- Heavy	32	2.9	12