

BASIC HORSE NUTRITION
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Horses are forage feeders, just as other livestock like cattle and sheep and even hogs. Their digestive system is designed to process roughages. When horses are managed to maximize forage utilization, fewer digestive and nutrition problems occur. Limited roughage intake, high levels of grain or concentrate, limited exercise, all contribute to many of the digestive health problems experienced.

To understand basic nutrition and livestock feeding, a few terms are necessary to master:

DRY MATTER (DM) – 100% dry feed. All of the feed available contain some moisture or water. Dry Matter consideration is necessary in feeding, because an animal's stomach or stomach compartments can only hold a certain amount of Dry Matter. If the quality of feed is insufficient to supply adequate nutrition, no quantity, no matter how much is fed, will balance a diet.

CRUDE PROTEIN (CP) – The total protein available within a feed or required by an animal, both digestible and indigestible. Crude Protein is one of three feed components listed on a bag tag. The others are Crude Fiber and Fat.

TOTAL DIGESTIBLE NUTRIENTS (TDN) – All of the digestible portions of a feed and a measure of **ENERGY**. This very important nutrient measurement is not required to be listed on a bag tag and is only determined through feed or forage analysis.

SALT / MINERAL – Minor and Trace element supplementation to ration. Critical to body function and skeletal formation. Always provide, free choice, Trace mineral salt supplement.

WATER – Clean, Fresh water is necessary, at all times, to maintain life.

Now let's look at some terms that have varying degrees of importance and relevance to feeding a horse:

PAD, CHARGE, FLAKE, HALF-A-BALE, SOME – these are terms that we use to “MEASURE” hay. They have absolutely no value nor do they measure anything.

CAN, SCOOP, HAND-FULL, HALF-A-BUCKET – These are terms of “MEASURE” grains or concentrates. They also have absolutely no value nor do they measure anything.

POUND – The American standard of weight. The only true weight measurement of anything (except the metric system).

SCALES – A device which will, if used, closely estimate the POUND.

CONTROLLED GRAZING – Managing the amount of time and/or the space an animal is allowed to graze growing forage.

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