

# Nutritional Priorities For the Stallion



One of the most common problem for stallion owners is maintaining optimal body condition score (BCS) year-round. During the breeding season, depending on how much the stallion is used, the BCS can drop quickly due to the energy expenditure and stress. For many, the stallion then becomes obese during the rest of the year, carrying too much condition for health. The goal of the stallion manager therefore, is to monitor the condition of the stallion and to develop a

nutritional program that is flexible to the needs of the stallion throughout the year to ensure that a health BCS and fitness is maintained no matter the season.

- Regular monitoring of BCS and provision of regular exercise throughout the whole year will be an important tool to ensure optimal condition. The breeding season can be physically taxing on the stallion, just as regular training would be. Fitness and proper BCS is needed for proper breeding function and to reduce strain on joints and skeletal system. A stallion needs proper turnout for good health.
- Some stallions are more laid back, or are only used for a low number of breedings during the season, whereas other stallions will experience heightened stress and anxiety (and may display nervousness by stall walking, fence walking, circling and other stress-related behaviours) or may be used more frequently per day in the breeding shed. Adjustments in nutritional intake and other management issues will have to be made to accommodate this.
- A balanced diet is as important for the stallion as for the mare and growing foal. A high forage diet of 1.5 to 2% of body weight per day should be provided and a vitamin/mineral supplement added to balance the forage, whether pasture or hay. Provide concentrates only as necessary to balance the forage. If the stallion is hard to keep weight on during the breeding season, then consult with an equine nutritionist about adding in more calories in a safe and progressive way to correspond to decreasing or increasing BCS
- Regular turnout and exercise is needed for the stallion both for his mind and body. Stallions kept in isolation are more likely to display behavioural problems. Nervous or anxious stallions will sometimes go off their feed and will quickly lose weight. Smaller, more frequent feedings may help. Adding in apple or carrot pieces can help to entice the anxious stallion to eat, but monitor for other health issues such as ulcers as well.
- During the breeding season, it may be appropriate to add a concentrate or source of energy-dense feed to compensate for the extra work being done, and to maintain BCS of 5 or 6 on the Henneke scale and a consistent weight.
- For stallions that drop weight quickly during the breeding season, consult with your equine nutritionist to determine the best course of action for your stallion. If all basic

# Nutritional Priorities For the Stallion



nutritional requirements are being met, it may be advisable to add a fat supplement such as vegetable oil to help meet extra energy needs that cannot be met by the forage and concentrates alone. Consider other management changes that may need to be altered to reduce the stress on the stallion.

- The overweight stallion is a common problem for many and overfeeding and lack of regular exercise will increase this problem. Soundness problems due to the stress of breeding and laminitis are typical risks. There may be a lowered libido as well in the obese stallion. Add regular exercise at the appropriate workload to the daily management plan, increase turnout time and cut back on the energy (calories) in the diet. Ensure that you have a diet based on forage with a ration balancer added as needed to ensure optimal levels of vitamins and minerals.
- Clean, fresh water and free-choice salt or a salt block should be provided at all times.

For more information sign up for Equine Guelph's 12 week online course on Management of the Mare, Stallions and Foal. Check the Education pages of Equine Guelph for more information.