



Nutrition Excellence!

December 2009

Winterize Your Horse

Now that winter is approaching and the temperatures are dropping, horse owners need to consider how to winterize their horses. During the cold season, horse owners must make sure that their animals receive proper feed, water and shelter to stay healthy and comfortable. Further, since riders usually put a lot of time and effort into getting their horses ready for shows, trail rides, or other events during the warm months, if they maintain their horses over the winter, all that effort won't go to waste and have to be started over in the spring.

Cold temperatures increase the amount of calories a horse needs to maintain body weight, produce body heat and to support activity or reproduction. Because a horse requires more energy to help maintain body temperature when the outside temperature drops, additional feed may be required to maintain body weight and condition. Two ways to increase calories are to feed more grain, or to feed more hay.

Many horse owners believe that when the weather is cold, horses need to be fed rations containing more corn, because they think of corn as a heating feed. However, corn and other cereal grains do not cause the horse to become warmer; they simply provide more energy (calories) per pound to the horse. This can result in weight gain and therefore more body fat, it may help a horse stay warmer but it doesn't produce added body heat. Hay, which contains more fiber than grain, provides more of a warming effect internally, as more heat is produced during the digestion of fiber than of starch from grain. Therefore, horses are more able to maintain body heat if adequate hay is provided in the diet. Further, good quality hay is important during cool weather and winter months when pasture grasses are short or are not growing.

Horses need at least 1 to 1.5 lbs. of hay per 100 lbs. of body weight per day in roughages to maintain a healthy

GI tract, but 2 lbs per 100 lbs or even more may be appropriate during cold weather, especially when the horse lives outdoors.

During the cold months, higher calorie feeds such as Omolene 200®, Omolene 500®, Strategy® or Ultium® may be beneficial to meet the horse's increased calorie requirements without having to feed a substantially higher volume of feed.

When hay quality is poor or horses cannot adequately chew or digest long-stemmed hay, or possibly have respiratory problems due to dust and mold sensitivities, then complete feeds with hay and quality fibers built in may be a great option. Omolene 400®, Horse Chow and the Equine Family products are available for different lifestyles of horses.

Water should always be readily available to the horse. Snow is not a sufficient substitute for water, as the horse cannot physically eat enough snow to meet its water requirement. Ideally, the temperature of the available water should be between 45 degrees and 65 degrees Fahrenheit.

If the water is too cold, the horse may drink less, thereby decreasing water and lubrication in the gut and increasing the chance of impaction colic. Further, if the horse drinks less water, it may also eat less feed, resulting in loss of body weight and condition. Finally, if a horse is forced to drink very cold water, its energy requirement will increase, because more calories are required to warm the water to body temperature inside the digestive tract. Often, the best, easiest, and most cost-effective solution is to provide heated water to the horse using a stock tank or bucket heater.

For more information about the Purina horse feed products, check out www.purinamills.com or contact your local WFS location.

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WFS • PO Box 68 • Truman, MN 56088
507.776.2831 • www.wfsag.com



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