



# EQUINE LIFE

PREMIUM HORSE FEED  
FOR EVERY LIFE STAGE

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## Horse Talk

Dear Horse Enthusiast:

This month's **Horse Talk** focuses on hay—how to determine good quality hay vs. poor quality hay. We spend so much time talking about what grain to feed, it is equally important to talk about the hay you are feeding your horses. Hay actually represents 75% of your horses' total daily intake and it is critical to the good health and well-being of your animals to feed the best quality possible.

We offer free testing of hay. If you are interested in setting up an appointment to learn more about Equine Life Premium Horse Feeds or having your hay tested, please give me a call at (800) 345-0419.

Thank you for your interest,

*Jim Elias*

Equine Nutrition and Sales

### Hay!! Another Bad Year?

Since hay accounts for 75% or more of most horses' diets, it is very important to pay close attention to quality, especially for growing and performance horses. Spring has been very wet with very little sun. As a result, most farmers have not been able to make hay when the growth stage of the plant was optimum. Farmers were able to cut some hay; however, a lot of the cut crop got rained on, which may lower the nutritional content of the plant.

What should you look for when buying hay this season?

**STAGE OF MATURITY:** Timothy harvested in the Early Head stage (when the head is about an inch or shorter) will test about 12% protein. Unfortunately, most of the Timothy this year will have been cut in the Full Flower stage (head several inches long) and will test below 6% protein. Hay that tests low in protein will usually be very low in caloric value too.

**WEEDS & OTHER FOREIGN OBJECTS:** The presence of weeds reduces the quality of the hay. Some of the weeds will not be consumed and end up as bedding. Watch for weeds as some are poisonous.

**LEAFINESS:** Most of the protein is located in the leaf structure of the plant. Leafiness is effected by the maturity of the plant. As the plant matures there is more stem versus leaf and quality declines. Leaves can be lost at harvest time when the hay is cut and cured.

**COLOR & ODOR:** Rain damage from hay laying in fields waiting for baling will reduce quality. Many of these "rained on" hays will be black or dark brown. Hay will also appear brown if it was not sufficiently dried in the field. Hay should be baled when the moisture content is below 20% (less than 18% for those big rectangular bales). Hay will mold and can be noticed by color and a "moldy smell". When the bale is opened mold is often visible and should never be fed. Hay that was baled wet can also "heat" to

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## Horse Talk *continued*

extremely high temperatures in your loft to the point where spontaneous combustion may take place. Hay that is baled over 20% moisture may actually start a fire. When the temperature of the hay in the loft goes above 130°F, a reaction takes place that produces a flammable gas. If the temperature continues to rise inside the bales, the gas can ignite and cause a disastrous fire. Normally, hay that is baled at 15% moisture will heat to about 125°F, then drop to safest levels by eight weeks or less. Normally hay fires will take place about six weeks after baling.

So what should you do if you suspect your hay is high moisture (above 18-20%)? Take the temperature of the hay with a probe. Be sure to get to the bales that are deep inside the stack.

150°F - This is the start of the danger zone. Take the temperature daily.

160°F - You are now in the danger zone--take the temperature every four hours.

175°F - Call the Fire Department, remove the hay from the barn and wet it down.

185°F - Fire will begin to start when the hay reaches this temperature when exposed to air.

212°F - Temperature will continue to rise when the hay is hot--ignition will take place.

Hay fires will happen and are very dangerous. Do not walk on the hay if it is heated as bales below may be burning and creating a pocket.

Bright green hay was probably cut at an early, ideal stage. It was probably not rained on, and was cured and stored properly. This type of hay will be of high nutritional value and will be readily consumed by horses. Yellow grass hay was probably harvested when the plants were past their mature state, and will be lower in protein and caloric value. Sun bleached bales are usually the bales that are stored on the outside of the haystack, exposed to sunlight. The middle of these bales should appear green in color.

In summary, the hay farmer faces tremendous challenges, especially in our area. He must consider all of the stages of the plant and deal with the weather, which will hopefully allow time for cutting, drying and baling. Here are a few tips:

1. Buy the best hay you can afford.
2. Never feed moldy or dusty hay.
3. Adjust your grain ration to balance the quality of hay you are feeding. If your hay is over-mature, you may want to raise the protein content of the grain portion of your ration to make up for some of the lack of nutrients being provided by the hay. This could mean feeding a 12% or 14% pellet or sweet feed to your maintenance horse that would normally receive a 10% feed.
4. Feed a higher fat grain mix to make up for the lack of caloric value from your hay. Provided you are getting adequate hay consumption, which is about 1.5% of body weight, you will need to feed about 13-15 lbs. per day for the 1,000 lb. horse.
5. You can supplement the diet with alfalfa cubes, if preferred.
6. Watch for a decrease in hay intake. Horses prefer good hay and will sometimes refuse poor quality. Equine Life has three "high fiber" rations that are designed to be fed to horses that eat small amounts of hay:
  - Bright Horizon - a textured sweet feed containing large amounts of beet pulp.
  - Equine Life 12.5% Complete - a pelleted feed high in fiber for horses that do not eat a lot of hay.
  - Equine Life Senior - a 14%, high fiber and high fat for older horses, or any horse that needs a high fat and high fiber diet.
7. Monitor the condition of your horse - watch for a loss in weight and make adjustments as noted.

Remember, it's the TOTAL DIET that you need to be watching . . . to be sure your horse is getting all the requirements he needs on a daily basis.

*I am always available to answer any questions you may have regarding Equine Life Premium Horse Feed. I can be reached at 800-345-0419, ext. 2208 or via E-mail at [equinelife@emoyer.com](mailto:equinelife@emoyer.com).*