

New Program Provides Continuing Education Possibilities at Kentucky Equine Research

By ROBIN STANBACK

Kentucky Equine Research (KER) has begun a new chapter in its quest to promote the understanding of equine nutrition. In conjunction with colleges and universities throughout the world, KER has instituted internships and continuing education possibilities for students and recent graduates who are interested in furthering their knowledge in this field. Founder Dr. Joe D. Pagan stated, "One of KER's primary goals is to expand the industry's knowledge of equine nutrition and exercise physiology. Having young, enthusiastic students involved in the process will provide greater exposure for the field of equine nutrition research, and we hope that some of these interns will become the top researchers of the future."

The early summer of 1998 sees KER with four exceptional young women who bring a wide scope of experience and education to the program. Kari Hoekstra, M.S., from Michigan State University has joined the staff on a full-time basis as the farm manager and research associate. A yearlong joint effort with the Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition has brought in Meganne Kennedy from Nottingham University. Waltham, based in Leicestershire, England, is a major collaborator and sponsor of scientific and practical equine research. KER and



Kari Hoekstra and one of the seventeen horses in the KER research herd.

Waltham have worked together on equine nutrition and exercise physiology research for several years. There will be more about the Waltham and KER collaboration in future issues of *Equine News*. Erika Langfoss of the University of Wisconsin at Platteville and Christin Heiderscheidt from the University of Minnesota have also joined the KER staff for summer-long internships.

"I am very excited to have the opportunity to work with such a well-established program. I had heard Drs. Pagan, Steve Duren and Kathleen Crandell speak at ENPS and other conferences and was most impressed with their knowledge and their approachability. I am looking forward to working with them on the research farm," said Ms. Hoekstra. She has completed her master's degree with an area of concentration in equine exercise physiology and nutrition. Her responsibilities at the research farm will include overseeing the current projects as well as developing new areas of research with the staff.

Dr. Pagan said, "Kari is without a doubt one of the top recent graduates in the field of equine nutrition. Her research at Michigan State on skeletal development in young horses during early training was outstanding and it has greatly increased our knowledge of how to manage horses during a very critical point in their development. KER is very fortunate to have Kari on staff and she will be a tremendous asset to our research program."



Meganne Kennedy in the KER computer analysis center.



Christin Heiderscheidt and Erika Langfoss with "Vinnie" on his way to the paddock.

Because of its expertise in equine nutrition, KER was chosen by the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) as the official horse feed supplier for the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games. It was in this capacity that Dr. Pagan first met Ms. Kennedy who had traveled to Atlanta as a groom for Right On Time, the mount for Japanese Olympic team member Takeaki Tsuchiya. Ms. Kennedy said, "Dr. Pagan was very kind when we were here for the Olympics and I had the opportunity to talk to him then about the possibility of coming to work for KER on a future internship. I had applied to college right before leaving for Atlanta and I knew then what it was I was going to want to do. Last year when I was considering an internship, my college applied for me to have an internship with Waltham. We were able to combine a program for me with Waltham and KER. I was to work six months on research for KER and six months on research for Waltham at the KER facility here in Kentucky. The projects have evolved during my year here. I was given the opportunity to present posters at the KER nutrition symposium, and I am working on a paper for the research I have done on the Waltham project. I feel I have learned a great deal and I certainly have Dr. Pagan to thank for always taking the time to look over my work and provide ideas and suggestions."

Ms. Kennedy is finishing her yearlong program in August and sees this time spent in the United States as "a great learning experience." One research project Ms. Kennedy did with KER involved feed palatability and another centered on the theory that horses would prefer block salt to loose salt if given the choice. She said, "I think one of the most interesting aspects of this work is that we can debunk theories people have held forever. There are ideas that are held sacred because someone's grandparent or uncle or some other horse person did this and this is how it has always

been done. The salt study is an example. I have always been told that horses would prefer block salt to loose salt and our study, done on horses at rest, did not show this to be true."

Ms. Kennedy is looking forward to returning to England and continuing her collegiate career with a focus on equine nutrition. She said, "I feel I will be taking back with me a greater knowledge of writing protocols and building randomization charts. I will also have the contacts I have developed through KER with Dr. Pagan, Dr. Duren and Dr. Crandell."

Like the other two interns in the program, Ms. Langfoss has had a long association with horses beginning on her family farm in Wisconsin. She is concentrating her studies at the University in animal science with a pre-veterinary focus. Working at KER is something that she felt "would help me to learn more about equine nutrition, obviously, and would also provide me with research experience. I am very happy to have been given this chance. I'm sure it is something I will greatly value."

Ms. Heiderscheidt has an extensive knowledge of horses and has spent many years in the top levels of 4-H competition in Minnesota. Her focus in college is agricultural science with an emphasis on animal science. Her long-term goals are to concentrate on equine chiropractic and muscular therapy. She said she was particularly interested in coming to KER "to experience something that would not have been available to me in Minnesota. I've never been to this part of the country and, with my interest in horses, it certainly had a huge pull for me. KER also has an excellent reputation for turning out quality research and I wanted very much to be a part of that. I really wanted to learn about how the nutritionists here conduct their research, and I wanted to be a part of this program."

KER's research program focuses on answering practical questions related to equine nutrition and exercise physiology. Much of this research deals with the exercised horse and utilizes KER's state-of-the-art high-speed treadmill which is capable of speeds of up to 40 miles per hour. While much of this information is reported in magazines such as *Equine News*, which are directed towards horse owners, most is also published in scientific journals and presented at scientific meetings. For example, five studies which were either conducted at KER's research facility or in collaboration with another facility will be presented at the upcoming 5th International Conference on Equine Exercise Physiology in Utsunomiya, Japan in September.

KER is currently taking applications for future internships. If you are a college student enrolled in an animal science program at this time and would like to apply for a summer internship, please contact Anna Kjellström at Kentucky Equine Research, 3910 Delaney Ferry Road, Versailles, KY 40383. ☺