

Q & A—Find an Accommodating Facility for Your Horse

Q In evaluating boarding facilities recently, I found they often use a single feed for all of the horses maintained on the farm. Is it acceptable to offer horses of all ages and uses the same feed but in slightly varying quantities?

A An individualized approach to feeding horses is no doubt the best way to nourish them, but it takes considerable time, research, and perhaps consultation with an equine nutritionist or knowledgeable veterinarian to formulate a diet that is best for a horse in a particular situation.

Remember, boarding stables deal in numbers. The more horses on the premises, the greater the likelihood for profit. By supplying one all-purpose concentrate to horses, the farm manager can likely keep feed costs at a minimum by purchasing feed in bulk. Additionally, the use of a single concentrate also makes feeding time more efficient for those assigned to dole out the grain. Imagine how time-consuming it would be if every horse in a 50-stall operation required a different feed.

Though this “cookie-cutter” management style is prevalent, it is certainly not the case at every boarding facility. Many farm managers will cater to their boarders’ needs if asked, understanding fully the specific needs of certain horses.

Acknowledgement of individualism among horses is a prerequisite when faced with feeding horses of varying types. Deciding what and how much to feed a horse depends on numerous factors, the most basic of which are outlined briefly here.

- **Nutritional differences.** Horses of various ages have dissimilar nutritional needs. For instance, weanlings, yearlings, and other young horses have a physiological demand for certain nutrients that will promote the development of a strong, sound skeleton. Conversely, a retired horse that spends its days lazing about in a pasture has fewer nutritional requirements.

- **Work.** Two horses of the same age and breeding may have completely different nutritional needs based on the type and amount of work that is asked of them. A middle-aged gelding that is ridden or driven lightly once or twice a week may require far fewer calories than a middle-aged gelding that is asked to do strenuous work several times a week.
- **Metabolism.** Some horses are easy keepers, some are hard keepers. Easy keepers maintain appropriate body condition and health on a basic, minimal diet. Hard keepers, on the other hand, have difficulty maintaining their body condition, and weight fluctuations may occur between seasons or during stressful times. Hard keepers must be managed more intensely.
- **Health concerns.** The ill effects of particular health problems often diminish when veterinary care is coupled with appropriate diets. A horse diagnosed with Cushing’s syndrome, certain muscle disorders, or heaves, for example, can often continue its athletic career if offered a specific diet.
- **Temperament.** Disposition may also affect feeding choices. A “hot” horse, for example, may be given a feed that is low in starch and rich in fat and fiber in an attempt to direct his energy on his performance rather than on his nervousness.

These five factors are just a sampling of what must be thought about when formulating an appropriate diet for a horse. If boarding is the only option you have for owning and enjoying a horse, find a facility that will work with you in meeting your horse’s specific nutritional needs. ☺

Choose a boarding facility wisely. Ask as many questions as you feel necessary to gain a perspective on the care your horse will receive. Because many facilities deal in numbers—that is how they turn a profit—be sure overcrowded conditions do not exist.





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3910 Delaney Ferry Road
Versailles, KY 40383
Phone: 859-873-1988
Fax: 859-873-3781
Order Department: 888-873-1988
www.ker.com
info@ker.com