

Minimum Standards for Equine Care in Kentucky

May 2009

A Publication of the Kentucky Horse Council, Inc.



The Kentucky Horse Council is a nonprofit organization dedicated, through education and leadership, to the protection and development of the Kentucky equine community.



Introduction

Kentucky law (KRS 525.130) requires that all animals have adequate food, drink, space, and health care. This publication describes the minimum food, drink, space, and health care requirements for horses.



Food



A horse's nutritional needs can best be determined by classifying the individual horse into the following categories: maintenance, gestation, lactation, growth, or work; and feeding accordingly.

A horse in maintenance should be fed to maintain current body condition, neither gaining nor losing weight. Ideal body condition score for maintenance is 5-6.

During the later stages of gestation, pregnant mares require additional nutrients above the maintenance level to maintain body condition and support the growing fetus.

Additional feed (above maintenance requirements) may also be required for horses that are lactating, growing or working. Examples of working horses that may require additional feed include horses in training, performance horses, trail riding, driving, and many other physical activities.

Forage

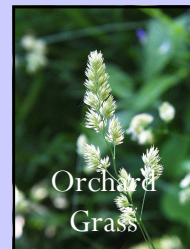
Guideline

Horses should eat at least 1 to 1-1/2 percent of their body weight in forage (grass or hay) per day.

Horses are grazers and the basis for all horse diets should be hay or pasture (forage). Most horses can maintain weight by eating good-quality forage along with free choice access to a mineral salt block and water.

Pasture and hay are appropriate forages for horses and can contain grasses or legumes, or a combination of both. Legumes include alfalfa, clover and lespedeza. Grasses and grass hays commonly found in Kentucky include orchard, fescue, bluegrass, and timothy.

Free-choice hay or pasture is optimal for most horses. Horses should consume at least 1 to 1½ percent of their body weight in forage each day. A 1,000-pound horse should eat 10 to 15 pounds or more of hay or pasture per day. Horse hay should be dry, palatable, and free of dust and mold.



Concentrates

Guideline

Horses that are unable to meet their nutritional requirements by eating forage alone should be supplemented with concentrates.

Often horses that are growing, working, lactating, or in late stages of pregnancy require more nutrients than they are able to obtain by eating forage alone. Horses whose nutritional requirements exceed the available forage need to be supplemented with concentrates.

Concentrates are available in a variety of forms including sweet feed and pellets. Both are made with grains (oats, corn, barley, etc), minerals, and other feedstuff needed to increase weight gain, increase milk production and supply energy needed for performance.



Formulated concentrates are available at feed and farm supply stores and generally should be fed according to the instructions on the label or under the supervision of an equine nutritionist. Horses that require more than 5 pounds per day of concentrates should be fed over multiple feedings.



When feeding a group of horses, receptacles should be adequate for the number of horses so that each horse can eat. Based on herd behavior individual horses may need to be separated for feeding. Older and younger horses both may require specialized concentrate rations to maintain body condition.

Complete feeds are available and can be used to replace some or all of a horse's forage requirements. When feeding a complete feed to replace forage it is important to follow label instructions accordingly and break feedings up into multiple small feedings per day.



Body Condition Scoring

Guideline

Ideally horses should maintain a body condition score of three or greater. Horses with certain chronic health conditions may maintain low body condition scores despite acceptable nourishment. Some older horses may not maintain body condition well. Law Enforcement typically investigates horses with body condition scores less than three.

Just like humans, horses come in all shapes and sizes and have different metabolisms. Often people struggle with a subjective system of labeling horses as thin, fat, or just right. An easy way to determine the condition of a horse is to gauge their body condition score (BCS) using the Henneke Body Condition Scoring Chart.

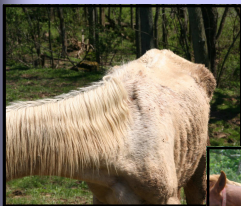
The Henneke method of determining body condition was developed by Dr. Don Henneke in the 1980's. It is an objective way to gauge the amount of body fat on any horse by examining 6 key points (neck, withers, shoulder, ribs, loin and, tailhead) for bone, prominence, muscle development, and fat deposits.

Each of the six areas on the horse should be examined visually and by touch.

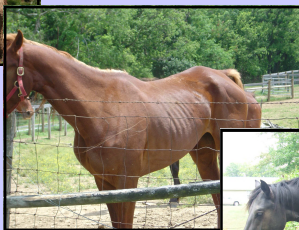
The scores for each area should be recorded. The body condition score of the horse is the average of the six scores. Scores range from 1-9, with an acceptable BCS from 4-7. The ideal BCS is 5.

Horses with less than ideal BCS (3 or lower) may need a change in diet to increase their nutrient intake to accommodate their needs. Horses with a BCS greater than 7 also need a change in diet to decrease their caloric intake to help them lose excess weight.

The physical appearance of a horse can appear far different than the actual score especially if the horse has a thick hair coat, is pregnant, or has prominent bone structure (high withers, angular hips, etc). It is extremely important to touch each of the six areas to accurately determine body condition score.



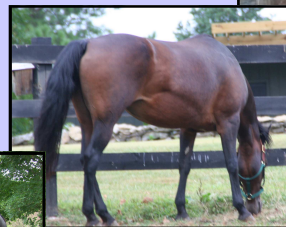
BCS 1



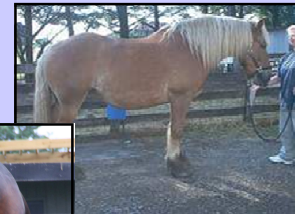
BCS 3



BCS 5



BCS 7



BCS 9

Henneke BCS Chart

Condition	Neck	Withers	Shoulder	Ribs	Loin	Tailhead
1 Poor	Bone structure easily noticeable	Bone structure easily noticeable	Bone structure easily noticeable	Ribs protruding prominently	Spinous processes projecting prominently	Tailhead, pinbones, and hook bones projecting prominently
2 Very Thin	Bone structure faintly discernible	Bone structure faintly discernible	Bone structure faintly discernible	Ribs prominent	Slight fat covering over base of spinous processes. Transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded. Spinous processes are prominent	Tailhead prominent
3 Thin	Neck accentuated	Withers accentuated	Shoulder accentuated	Slight fat over ribs. Ribs easily discernible	Fat buildup halfway on spinous processes, but easily discernible. Transverse processes cannot be felt	Tailhead prominent but individual vertebrae cannot be visually identified. Hook bones appear rounded, but are still easily discernible. Pin bones not distinguishable
4 Moderately Thin	Neck not obviously thin	Withers not obviously thin	Shoulder not obviously thin	Faint outline of ribs discernible	Negative crease (peaked appearance) along back	Prominence depends on conformation. Fat can be felt. Hook bones not discernible
5 Moderate (Ideal Weight)	Neck blends smoothly into body	Withers rounded over spinous processes	Shoulder blends smoothly into body	Ribs cannot be visually distinguished, but can be easily felt	Back is level	Fat around tailhead beginning to feel soft
6 Moderately Fleishy	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat over ribs feels spongy	May have a slight positive crease (a groove) down back	Fat around tailhead feels soft
7 Fleishy	Fat deposited along neck	Fat deposited along withers	Fat deposited behind shoulder	Individual ribs can be felt with pressure, but noticeable fat filling between ribs	May have a positive crease down the back	Fat around tailhead is soft
8 Fat	Noticeable thickening of neck	Area along withers filled with fat	Area behind shoulder filled in flush with body	Difficult to feel ribs	Positive crease down the back	Fat around tailhead very soft
9 Extremely Fat	Bulging fat	Bulging fat	Bulging fat	Patchy fat appearing over ribs	Obvious crease down the back	Bulging fat around tailhead

Drink



Guideline

Horses should be offered clean water and allowed to drink until full at least twice daily.

Water is the most essential nutrient for horses. Horses must consume water daily to maintain normal body functions. The amount of water a horse requires will vary by individual based on level of work, stage of growth, reproductive status, and lactation. In addition, the environment and weather will impact the horses need for water consumption.



The average horse consumes 5-12 gallons of water daily. During lactation the amount of water required may increase by as much as 70%. Horses experiencing regular and rigorous work may require up to three times more water than an average horse.

It is best to provide free-choice access to water. Allowing a horse to drink clean water as it wants and when it wants encourages optimum health and well-being. There are circumstances which prevent free-choice access to water and in those cases horses should be offered their fill of contaminant-free water at least twice daily.



Space

Guideline

Horses should have adequate space including daily exercise without danger of injury. Space should afford protection from the elements and allow room for horses to maneuver without fighting.

Horses can be housed pastured or in stables, or a combination of both. Housing horses in pasture is the most cost- and labor-efficient way to house horses. Horses should have ample room so that the meekest can access food and drink.

Exercise is important to maintain both the mental and physical health of horses. Horses are very social creatures and daily turnout with other horses is optimal.



Pastures should be free of hazards likely to cause injury and fencing should be in good condition.

Stall containments should be large enough so that horses can turn completely around and lie down comfortably. Most horses can live in an average 12-foot by 12-foot stall if they have daily exercise. Horses should have at least 6 inches of clearance above their ears when standing in a normal position. It is important that stabling areas are well ventilated to avoid respiratory disease and infections.

Shelter, either natural or constructed, provides relief from the elements. Natural windbreak can be found from tree lines or low areas; natural shade is primarily available under trees. Constructed shelters may include barns, 3-sided shelters, windscreens, etc. Constructed shelters should be free of hazards likely to cause injury.



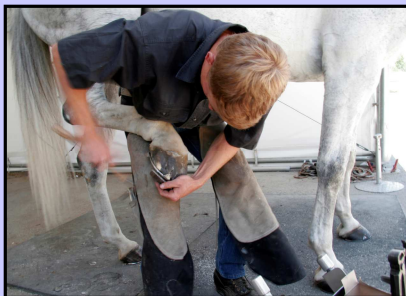
Health Care



Guideline

Horses should appear alert and without obvious signs of unattended injury or illness. A horse suffering with an acute or chronic injury or illness should be under veterinary supervision. Horse's hooves should be maintained so that the horse can stand and move at all gaits comfortably and with a full range of motion.

Horses require regular preventative care for optimum health. Horses should be checked thoroughly every day for injuries or ailments that may require additional health care or veterinary attention.



Preventative care for the average horse typically includes an annual dental examination, annual vaccinations, de-worming every 2-6 months or as directed by a veterinarian, and hoof care every 6-10 weeks.

The American Association of Equine Practitioners recommends basic annual vaccines for horses including Eastern and Western Encephalomyelitis, West Nile Virus, Tetanus, and Rabies. Other vaccines may be appropriate depending on the use and location of the individual horse.

Kentucky law requires that horses have a negative Coggins test (a simple blood test for Equine Infectious Anemia) within twelve months of a change in ownership or before transport (to shows, trail rides, etc).



Summary

Horses can survive in a variety of conditions if they are provided adequate feed and water. Harsh environments may warrant feed and shelter adaptations, and certainly horses benefit from regular preventative care.



Photos courtesy of:

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