

# Horse Care and Feeding Guide

## \*\*\* Winter Season \*\*\*



## What You Need To Know...

### Horse Ownership

Horse ownership is a wonderful and rewarding experience. It is a privilege however that comes with many responsibilities. The owner of a horse is responsible for its care and feeding. Horses' needs are simple: food, water, shelter, and attention.

Many expenses will be incurred for hay, grain, possibly boarding costs, and veterinary and farrier services when owning a horse. These financial concerns should be considered before purchasing a horse.

Presently we are in tough financial times: rising fuel costs, increases in electricity, natural gas, and heating fuel, groceries going up and incomes going down, all accompanied with cut-backs, lay-offs, and small business closures. Wall Street insecurities and the prediction of a possible harsh winter all add up to "the Perfect Storm."

The closure of horse slaughter facilities have not helped. There is now an over abundance of horses with no practical way to dispose of them. Although an ugly perception, slaughter houses serve an important purpose in the horse industry. As an attempted solution there have been an increase of adoption centers, rescue and retirement homes for horses. Unfortunately, they are quickly becoming overwhelmed with unwanted and abandoned horses.

Hay prices are the highest they've ever been. Cost of production, difficult weather across the country, decreased production, and supply and demand have all added to the problem. The financial crunch is felt by all of us, and for some it becomes an issue of social survival. Yet for many horses, it becomes an issue of possible long term suffering and pain before death by starvation.



### Feed

Depending on the ambient temperature, the average horse will eat 2-4% of its body weight in good quality hay each day. With most bales averaging 75-80 pounds, the usual bale will feed one horse for three days. However when it gets *cold*, feed requirements go up. It is not unusual for a horse to eat twice as much hay when it is cold than when temperatures are mild. One bale might last only 1 ½ days rather than 3 days.



## Drinking Water

Winter is also the time when horses' water needs becomes very important. When it is cold many people think horses drink less. After all, the horses can eat snow. Snow is cold and wet.

However snow does not contain very much water. One foot of snow equals about an inch of water. The melting of snow into water takes energy.

The average horse needs 8 gallons of water, about 1 cubic foot of water, or roughly 13 cubic feet of snow per day. The energy needed to melt snow comes from the food the horses eat, usually requiring up to an additional 3 pounds of high quality alfalfa hay or equivalent. These calories would be required each and every day.

Increased hay consumption will require even more water than when temperatures are mild. This depletes the calories which could be otherwise used to keep the horse warm or for growth.

With cold temperatures make sure that clean, tepid, ice-free water is always available. Chopping through ice in the frozen water trough does not provide sufficient water because the ice can quickly reform.

Remember snow is made of water but it is not a substitute for water. Animals require good, clean, and liquid water for proper digestion, good health, and colic prevention.

## General Winter Horse Care Tips

Bring horses into winter in good condition carrying sufficient weight and fat insulation.

Horses should be monitored twice daily.

- Check for cuts, punctures, lameness.
- Feed hay to horses at least twice daily.
- High quality hay is most cost effective.
- Avoid low quality, moldy, or weedy hay.
- Supplement "hard-keepers" with grain.
- Provide clean, ice-free water at all times.
- Check water trough heaters daily.
- Provide access to a salt block at all times.
- Provide shelter from wind and rain.
- A water-proof horse blanket may be needed for thin or older horses.
- Establish veterinarian-client-patient relationship.
- Veterinary Recommendations:
  - Vaccinations every 6 months.
  - De-worming every 3 months.
  - Hoof care every 6-10 weeks.
  - Yearly dental exam.
  - Annual EIA blood test.

Farrier Services

- Trim hoofs every 6-10 weeks.



**If a horse is neglected or abandoned and is not provided food, water and shelter, he will suffer. This constitutes animal cruelty and abandonment and can be criminally prosecuted under the Idaho Code Title 25, Chapter 35.**

**It is the responsibility of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to monitor and investigate any complaints of abandonment, cruelty or neglect of any production animal (including horses) and make a written determination if there is a violation.**

**The department does not have statutory or other authority to seize, take custody, possess or own any livestock, therefore is dependent upon cooperation with the local law enforcement agencies, and other supporting animal care and control agencies, to develop cases for prosecution.**

**If it is determined the animals are at risk they can be seized and placed in the care of the law enforcement agency or animal care and control agency. Final disposition of the animals can then be decided by the court.**