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Animal Industry News Update

from the LCES Animal Science Specialists

Horses (Dr. Clint Depew)

Purchasing Hay for Your Horses

Limited supplies, rising cost of fertilizer and diesel, and the cost of grain make it essential that quality horse hay be purchased for the winter months. Horsemen are encouraged to buy early and to buy adequate supplies of quality hay to avoid potential shortages and high winter cost. Drought in much of the country is reducing the amount of hay available, and costs of production are driving up the cost of hay.

Horses need approximately 1% of their body weight in fiber to maintain a healthy gut and digestive system. Therefore, 10 to 15 pounds of hay per day is desirable. There are complete feeds that have 15 to 25% fiber in them. Although they have the fiber portion of a horse's requirement in the feed, most horses have a strong desire to chew and need something to occupy their time. Boredom often results in vices such as wood chewing and cribbing. Therefore, it is recommended that horsemen provide hay to horses at all times to meet their fiber requirements as well as to provide something for the horse to chew.

Quality hay should be clean, free of all foreign materials, have a fresh green color, and smell fresh. Generally, in Louisiana we can produce grass hay that contains 10 to 14% protein, has fiber levels below 30%, and has adequate calcium and phosphorus to meet the mineral demands of the horse. Quality hay can meet 80-90% of the average horse's energy and nutrient requirements, and 60 - 70% of a performance horse's needs. Therefore, quality hay can reduce feed grain cost.

The stage of maturity is one of the most critical factors in determining the quality of hay. Also, it is important that hay be fertilized adequately.

Table 1: Stage of Maturity, Quality, and Consumption of Bermuda Grass Hay

Cutting Time	Total Protein (%)	TDN (energy) (%)	Fiber (%)	Consumption (pounds)
4-weeks	16.9	55	29.5	17.8
8-weeks	10.4	51	34.8	15.0
12-weeks	7.7	44	38.0	12.3
16-weeks	3.4	36	42.5	7.4

As the hay matures (Table 1) the total protein goes down, the energy or TDN level goes down, fiber increases dramatically, and the consumption by the horse decreases. Therefore, horsemen need to know the stage of maturity of the hay they purchase. Horsemen should ask their supplier when the grass was cut last and how long had it grown prior to being cut for hay. It is possible to purchase hay that looks good, smells good and is not stemy, and yet is not adequate to meet the horse's needs and reduce the amount of grain needed.

Additionally, it is always good to know what cutting you are purchasing. The first cutting in the spring or early summer tends to have more weeds. Therefore it is normally desirable to purchase from the second or third cutting. In Louisiana, cuttings may go all the way into September and October so a fourth or fifth cutting may be desirable also.

The moisture level in hay should be below 15% to avoid mold and dustiness. Unusually heavy bales tend to be higher in moisture and more susceptible to mold growth. If bales seem heavy, put your hand down into the bale to detect heat and/or moisture.

In selecting hay for horses, the ultimate determination is the analysis of the hay. The LSU AgCenter and other laboratories will analyze hay for a minimal fee. Protein, energy, fiber, and mineral content can be determined. These values will help balance the ration and allow you to feed minimal levels of grain and achieve maximum performance from your horse.

Animal Health (Dr. Christine Navarre)

Time to Look at Last Year's Calving Season

With calves now well on their way to weaning, it is time to take a look back at calving season and the following months to evaluate calf morbidity and mortality, and plan for any changes that need to be made for next year.

First, all calf deaths should be listed. Next, record when the calf died, and if known, the cause of death. Group deaths into time categories: 1) stillbirths (those born dead or within few hours of birth); 2) those that died within the first few days of life; 3) those that died in the first 1-3 weeks of life; 4) those that died at one month or later. It also is important to record deaths of calves born to heifers vs. older cattle.

Calf illnesses also should be recorded. Numbers of cases of calf diarrhea, pneumonia and joint ill are important to note.

Once these figures are recorded, they can be compared to expected figures. Calf death losses at birth or within the first few days should be less that 5%. All other death losses should be less than 2%. Recorded figures also can be compared from year to year within the same herd. This will provide the information needed to make any necessary management changes.

Dairy (Dr. Charlie Hutchison)

Milk Prices, Production and Cow Numbers

The prices for the different classes of milk produced in July are: Class I $24.58/cwt, Class II $16.81/cwt, Class III $18.24/cwt and Class IV $16.60/cwt. Based on these prices and an estimation of the utilization in each class, the uniform blend price should be $22.60/cwt ± $0.30/cwt. This should result in a net pay price for producers in South Louisiana, for milk produced in July, of $21.10/cwt to $22.15/cwt depending on deductions, butterfat level and incentives. Some experts predict the July Class I price may be the highest for 2008, while others believe the milk price could potentially go higher later this fall.

The Class I price for August milk was announced at $22.27 for Federal Order # 7 at the Atlanta zone; which is $2.31 lower than the July Class I price and $2.59 lower than a year ago in August. However, the August Class I price is higher than the March – June Class I prices this year.

The USDA stated that U.S. milk production in the April-June quarter totaled 48.7 billion pounds, which is up 2.7% compared to the same quarter last year. The average number of milk cows in the U.S. during the quarter was 9.27 million head, which is an increase of 136,000 head compared to the same quarter last year. Also, during the first six months of the year USDA reported that 33,274 dairy replacement heifers were imported from Canada.

The higher milk price for June milk ($19.40/cwt which is a dollar higher than the May milk price) was not enough to increase the milk-feed ratio due to higher feed prices. Prices increased for both corn (+$0.84/bushel) and soybeans (+$1.40/bushel) compared to May prices. The only bright spot was a reduction in the price of alfalfa hay (--$5.00 per ton). This resulted in a 1.78 milk-feed ratio for June compared to 1.83 for May 2008 and 2.88 for June 2007. The milk-feed ratio for June is the lowest ever since milk-feed ratios have been recorded.

Dairy-cow slaughter is down on a month-to-month basis, but still above year-ago levels. The USDA "Livestock Slaughter" report estimated in June, 180,900 head of dairy cows went to slaughter; which is down about 13,800 head from the May 2008 slaughter report, but up 7,100 head versus a year ago. However, year-to-date slaughter through June is 1,260,000 head, which is up 1.7% or 21,000 head versus the same time period a year ago. The numbers for July should not be impacted, but August slaughter totals will include herds retired under the Cooperatives Working Together (CWT) program.

Utilization of Milk in Federal Order #7

The utilization of milk in Federal Milk Order # 7 (Southeast Order) has shifted significantly on a monthly basis compared to the previous five year average for each respective month since the beginning of 2008. The primary shift has been an increase in Class I utilization by an average of 6.80% per month from January-June 2008 compared to the five year average utilization for each respective month. The utilization of Class III milk has dropped an average of 4.86% per month during the same time frame with Class IV dropping 2.73%. The Class II utilization showed a slight average monthly gain of 0.77% for the first six months of 2008. This is extremely interesting since the sale of fluid milk for the first six months of the year is down compared to the same time frame last year.

The Class I utilization for June was 70.25%. This marks the first time since federal order reform in 2000 that Class I utilization in June has been 70% or higher. In fact in the preceding 101 months since January 2000 the Class I utilization in the Southeast Order has been 70% or over only 10 months. During this time frame the only months 70% or higher were during the late summer and fall of the year (from August to December) with three years having no months that were 70% or higher.

Milk Labeling

According to a recent study by Vicini et al. published in the July issue of the prestigious Journal of American Dietetic Association (JADA), milk is the same nutritious, wholesome food as always no matter what label you put on it. The study is the first in-depth survey comparing retail milk for quality, nutritional value and levels of different milk hormones, including bovine somatotropin (bST). The researchers found “no meaningful differences” in the composition of milk with the three different label claims.

Prompted by the recent trend in misleading food labeling based on dairy cow management, the researchers looked specifically at three label claims: conventional milk, recombinant bovine somatotropin (rbST)-free milk and organic milk. Milk samples for the study were obtained from all 48 contiguous states, though some states did not have rbST-free milk, and some did not have organic milk samples pasteurized by the more conventional, lower-temperature methods. Samples were obtained during a three-week period, and states with larger populations and greater milk production were over sampled.

While minor differences were observed in milk composition for the three labels, the differences were not “biologically meaningful.” The authors concluded that label claims “were not related to any meaningful differences in the milk compositional variables measured.” The only difference among conventional, rbST-free and organic milk is price. According to the study, milk labeled rbST-free or organic sells at $1 to $4 more per gallon than conventional milk.

Because absence-claim labels can imply milk labeled rbST-free or organic is safer or better than conventional milk, the published report emphasizes the importance of consumers being mindful about how product labels impact the food they purchase. Purchasing decisions should be based on science and not on perceptions created by retail marketing, which can be misleading. This peer-reviewed paper is important because it will help health care professionals respond effectively to consumer questions and perceptions about different milk-label claims.

Reference for the study: Vicini J, T Etherton, P Kris-Etherton, J Ballam, S Denham, R Staub, D Goldstein, R Cady, M McGrath, & M Lucy. Survey of retail milk composition as affected by label claims regarding farm-management practices. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2008;108:1198-1203.

Poultry (Dr. Theresia Lavergne)

Poultry Production, Food Safety, Public Health, and California's Proposition 2?

In November, voters in California will vote on Prop 2 "Standards for Confining Farm Animals." This proposition deals with confinement of animals in veal crates, battery cages, and gestation crates. Prop 2 "prohibits the confinement of certain farm animals in a manner that does not allow them to turn around freely, lie down, stand up, and fully extend their limbs." The main target group is the table egg industry (there is no veal and little pig production in California), and there are 19 million laying hens in California.

Proponents of Prop 2 say the proposed measures are for the welfare benefits of the animals in confinement. However, opponents of Prop 2 believe this is not about animal welfare but a social agenda. As characteristic of animal rights groups, science based information on production is not being considered. Also, these groups are not considering the food safety and human health risks that can be associated with egg production in the housing systems being proposed.

Modern egg layer housing systems were designed to make egg production more sanitary and to prevent disease. These systems have been used since the 1930's. A ban of these modern housing systems would increase the risk of Salmonella contamination in table eggs (eggs would be in direct contact with hen wastes). Also, housing hens outside exposes them to migratory birds that can spread diseases, such as avian influenza.

In addition to food safety and public health risks associated with Prop 2, there would be an economic effect on the producers and consumers of eggs in California. Analysts have concluded that all of the cage and cage-free (even these systems do not have the space required in Prop 2) producers in California would go out of business. This would mean a loss of 4,750 jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars to the state's economy. Furthermore, consumers would have to pay more for eggs in the retail stores because they would lose their source of local eggs. They would have to import eggs from other states, and there is speculation that California would need to import eggs from Mexico to meet the demands of the consumers.

This proposition is another example of how animal rights groups push their agenda without considering the effects on the producers and consumers.

(Sources: Feedstuffs, July 28, 2008; Poultry Times, September 8, 2008)