GOLDEN RULES OF FEEDING

In order to keep you horse in peak condition, both mentally and physically, it is important to know and understand these 10 golden rules of feeding.

01. Feed little and often

Horses are naturally evolved to eat little and often, with a relatively small stomach in relation to their size. By dividing the daily concentrate ration into as many small feeds as possible this will encourage more efficient digestion and will be linked closely to the horse’s natural lifestyle. Ideally feed between two to four feeds a day, with no more than 2kg of concentrates at any one time.

02. Feed plenty of fibre

In the wild horses will graze up to 18 hours a day. High fibre diets and good fibre levels are essential to stimulate healthy gut function and reduce the risk of digestive upsets. A horses diet needs to contain a minimum of 50% roughage, ideally eating at least 1.5% of its bodyweight as fibre per day.

03. Feed each horse as an individual

Every horse is an individual and must be fed as such, taking into consideration temperament, workload and how efficiently they utilise their feed. Although the basis of every horses diet should be fibre, adjustments need to be made according to how the individual horse responds to feed and through changing workloads to keep a balanced diet that will meet the horse’s requirements.

04. Always use high quality feeds

Never be tempted to use dusty, mouldy or old feed as these may lack nutritional value and always check the best before date on the bag. Store feed in accordance with the manufacture guidelines, normally somewhere clean, dry and out of direct sunlight and free from rodent infestation.

05. Make all changes to the diet gradually

All changes to the horses diet, including both concentrates and roughage, must be made slowly to reduce the risk of digestive upsets.

06. Allow time after feeding before working

Allow one to two hours after feeding before working your horse, and if your horse has worked hard it is important not to feed him until an hour after exercising. This will then allow the digestive system to process the feed efficiently.

07. Keep to a routine

Horses are creatures of habit and need to be fed as near possible to the same time each day. If a horse is unable to have access to ad-lib forage then it is important to feed at regular intervals for a healthy digestive system.

08. Cleanliness

All utensils must be kept clean as not only will a smelly bucket put a horse off eating but there is also a risk of cross contamination if a number of horses are involved, and one is receiving medication. If your horse is fed from a manger, this must also be regularly cleaned.

09. Provide access to clean, fresh water at all times

Water is the most important nutrient and in a cool climate the horse will drink around 18 litres of water a day, even more if the horse is working hard in a hot environment. It is therefore vital to supply fresh, clean water at all times.

10. Feed by weight not volume

To ensure you are feeding the correct quantities it is important to weigh one scoop of each different type of feed you use as scoop sizes and shapes all vary, with variations in peoples scoop sizes being as much as 50%.