



Equi-Analytical Laboratories

Spring 2015 Newsletter

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Be Sure to Join us
at

[**The Saratoga
Horse
Symposium**](#)

on Saturday May
16th from 9 AM to
5 PM at the
Saratoga County
4-H Training and
Education
Center.

Hay Analysis and Feeding Recommendations

Special guest article by Erik Haydt of Triple Crown Nutrition

Feeding recommendations cannot be made properly without first asking about fiber, which should be the majority of a horse's diet. The primary sources of fiber are pasture and hay. The quality of these forages is determined by soil fertility, species (orchard grass, clover, etc.) and plant stage of maturity at harvest or turn out. Routine soil analyses will help determine if the soil is meeting the needs of the plants and if fertilization is required to insure a healthy stand. Forage quality is more variable, and in addition to the factors mentioned above, will be influenced by temperature, rainfall, and available sunlight during the growing season. You probably know the type of hay you are feeding and maybe which cutting, but do you know the actual nutrient content?



Hay analysis, whether the grower does it or you gather a sample and send it off on your own*, will determine the nutrient composition of your hay and help you make better feeding decisions. Depending on your situation, there are different options regarding hay analysis. First, many horse owners only own three horses or less and often have limited space for hay storage. For these owners, sending samples out to be analyzed isn't practical because by the time the results are received, the hay has been fed. I often recommend that these owners look for hay growers that keep a reserve supply of hay and provide a hay analysis so customers know the quality they can expect. I think this is a valuable quality-added service to the horse customer at a minimal cost.

The second group of horse owners are those with a larger number of horses and space to store a larger amount of hay or various types of hay, such as a boarding barn. These barn situations always have horses with different needs-both easy and hard keepers. A hay analysis of each type of hay you buy, or potentially will buy, will allow you to better make feed decisions to help reduce feed costs and provide better nutrition for all of the horses in the barn.

The final group are farms with sufficient land and resources to grow their own hay or have a neighbor or family member grow it for them. But don't let familiarity confuse your hay for what it is. Maybe it is better than you expect or maybe it's not. Like the second group, a good hay analysis will allow you to make better feed choices and make your hay more marketable if you also sell to other horse owners. Hay analysis is invaluable in the feed decision-making process. It will help determine if you need help with protein supplementation or whether it is a non-issue. It will also help to balance caloric intake for horses who need more calories or for those that need less. As for important vitamins and minerals, feeds are designed to meet these requirements, but must be fed as directed in order to meet vitamin and mineral requirements.

Always remember that in most cases, fiber (pasture and hay) should make up the bulk of your horse's diet. While feed companies are required by law to provide nutrient information on the tag, hay suppliers are not. So to really know what your horse is eating daily, a hay analysis would be a key source of information to make the best feeding decisions.

*Note: A representative core sample must be taken from multiple bales or the information provided will not be accurate.

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