

Humane Society of Elmore County News – 16 Jan '12
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Director

Let's talk horses. Calls about horses always increase in the winter when pastures are brown and neglected horses become more noticeable to passersby. While many horses can do fine during the summer on good pasture alone, their food must be supplemented in the winter when there is no more grass. If you are unsure please consult your large animal veterinarian but most horses need a grain or pellet feed and hay diet when they don't have grass to graze on. Not only will supplemental feeds keep your horse(s) healthy and at their appropriate weight, it will also help your horse keep warmer in the cold weather.

Now is feeding your horse grain and hay going to cost you more money? Yes indeed, and that is just part of being a horse owner. It is important that your horse be fed the appropriate feed for its needs and while some may do fine on a simple sweet feed others may need a Senior or special formulation to meet their needs. If you are unsure what is best for your horse consult your veterinarian, talk to the folks at your local feed mill, call your area extension office, call a local stable, ask fellow horse owners, get on the internet, check out some books or give us a call at 334-567-3377 as we do have staff that are knowledgeable about horses.

One excuse that does not fly about a horse that is horribly thin is that it is 'old!' Old horses may look 'old' but they do not look starved! If they are fed adequately for their nutritional needs then they will maintain a generally healthy weight and condition. There is, however, a lot more to maintaining an old horse, or any horse for that matter, than just grain and hay. The first and simplest thing every horse owner must do is to routinely de-worm your horse(s). De-worming may be the single most important reason why today's horses live so much longer and it is easy and relatively cheap – just talk to your vet or any of those sources noted above. One thing that many owners do not know is that as horses age they develop very sharp points on the outside edges of their teeth that can cause them pain and problems properly chewing their food. This is easily remedied by having your veterinarian 'float' your horse's teeth. Floating, or filing, can be done on the farm and for many aging horses should be done at least once per year and can make an amazing improvement in their physical condition.

Horses also consume a LOT of water and may actually need more in the winter so should have clean and unfrozen water available at all times. There are inexpensive floats and 'in-tank' water heaters to keep water tanks full and unfrozen at all times – just ask your local feed store.

If you suspect a horse is being neglected or treated cruelly please contact the Elmore County Sheriff Department at 334-567-1426 so they can investigate. They will contact us for assistance if necessary and we are glad to help them. Many horse owners are woefully ignorant as to what owning a horse entails and may need guidance to help them do right by their horse(s) so please direct them to the sources above for information. But if they don't seem receptive or are blatantly ignoring their horse's needs, their horse(s) can potentially be seized under court order and they may be charged with animal cruelty by a law enforcement officer.

If for any reason you do not want to call the Sheriff to report cruelty you can call us or email us at hselco@bellsouth.net and we will get the information to them for investigation.

"The essential joy of being with horses is that it brings us in contact with the rare elements of grace, beauty, spirit, and fire." ~Sharon Ralls Lemon