

Humane Society of Elmore County News – 19 Jan '15  
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Even with the recent rains we are in that 'brown' time of year here in Alabama and with that comes more calls on horses in dire condition. While many horses do fine during the summer on good pasture alone, their food must be supplemented in the winter when there is no grass.

For new horse owners the selection of feeds at your local farm store can be a bit overwhelming, but if you talk to the folks there about your horse(s), its age, pasture type, workload, etc they can give you good advice. Some horses may do fine on a simple sweet feed while others may need a more specialized formulation to maintain their weight and health. During the winter, clean horse quality hay is a must as the digestion of hay keeps horses warm in winter, from the inside out, and provides the roughage to keep the digestive process moving along. If you have an older or special needs horse, your first conversation should be with your large animal veterinarian, but you can also get a lot of good advice from the folks at your local feed mill, area extension office, local stable, fellow horse owners, reputable internet sources, horse books or even some of us at the shelter (334-567-3377) who are horse knowledgeable or can point you in the right direction.

Horses must have clean and unfrozen water available at ALL times as they consume a LOT of water and may actually need more in the winter due to dry air, hay & feed consumption. Adding a small amount of salt to their feed might encourage them to drink more. Horses that don't drink enough water can be more prone to a very deadly condition called colic which is an emergency requiring veterinary intervention so please take readily available water seriously. To help keep water available 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 or go on-line and they are quite simple to put in place.

An older horse may move slower, be swaybacked and have 'issues' but it should not look starved. Older horses that are cared for appropriately can and will maintain a generally healthy weight. Age is simply no excuse for a horse to be rail thin. There is, however, 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) which is easy and relatively cheap – just talk to your vet or any of those sources noted above. Another thing that many owners do not know is that horses develop very sharp points on their back teeth as they age which can cause them pain and prevent proper chewing/digesting of their food. This is easily dealt with by your veterinarian who can file or 'float' your horse's teeth right on your farm. Deworming, teeth floating and proper food can literally transform many a horse's physical condition and is just part of being a horse owner. Before obtaining a horse, please take into account that there is a lot to owning a 800-1800 lb animal that can live well over 20 years so please make sure you have appropriate space/housing for a 'range' animal, have the time to care for, train and interact with your horse, and are up to the financial challenge owning a horse can entail.

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.