

Humane Society of Elmore County News – 20 Jan '14
Rea Cord
Director

With another winter blast heading our way, let's talk horses. Calls about horses always increase in the winter when pastures are brown and neglected horses become more noticeable. 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. Most horses need supplemental feed and hay in the winter not only to keep them healthy but also to help them stay warm during cold weather.

Now is feeding your horse more going to cost you more money? Yes, and that is just part of being a horse owner. It is also important that your horse be fed the appropriate feed for its needs. Some horses may do fine on a simple sweet feed while others may need a Senior or special formulation to maintain their weight and health. If you are unsure 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 or can put you in touch with any number of horse smart folks.

Horses should also 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 is often recommended to 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 generally have more 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). De-worming 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 teeth as they age which can cause them pain and problems properly chewing/digesting 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 horses over a certain age should be done at least once per year. 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 purchasing a horse please take into account that there is a lot to owning a 1000-1500 lb animal that can live well over 20 years and just like the surplus of dogs and cats in our country there is also a surplus of horses. Unwanted horses are a big issue even in our area and finding a new home one can take longer than you might think and be quite risky where the horse is concerned.

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.