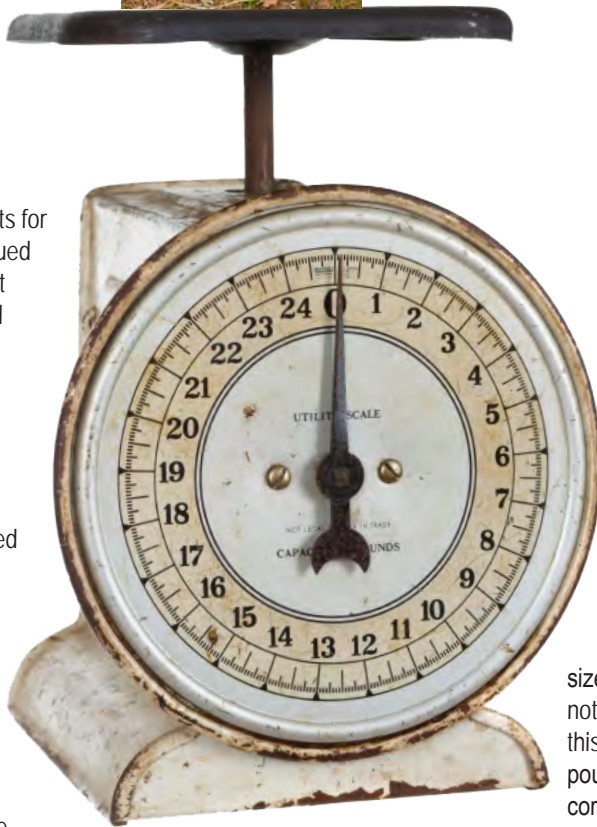


Weights, Measures and More When Feeding Horses

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Horse Specialists for years have continued to recommend that horse owners feed their horses by weight and not by volume. This is because feeds have different densities and one can easily over feed digestible energy by using volume measures alone. Feedstuffs also have differences in digestibility so if we use the example of corn vs. oats at the same volume, corn will provide nearly twice the digestible energy and significantly less fiber than oats. So if you are a horse owner who uses the “universal measuring” device known as the coffee can to measure out your feed, please weigh the can. The use of coffee cans and scoops to measure the volume fed at a feeding is very commonplace because it is extremely convenient for the horse owner when they feed the same products all the time. The danger may arise when one changes feeds or when an estimate of nutrient intake is needed.

I get calls all the time from horse owners wanting to know if they are feeding their horses right. They usually give me some background about their horse(s) and then provide me with coffee can and flake measures of the feedstuffs they are using. When I ask for the kinds of feeds being fed, the actual weight amounts delivered daily to their horse is when I get definite arched eyebrows. A nutritionist must have specific information in order to use their knowledge in calculating daily nutrient intakes and adequacy.

So what should our horse owners do? Horse owners should invest in some type of scale to allow weighing of feed. One should check the coffee can device and determine that this 1 pound can really contains 1 pound. One of my colleagues wrote an article and showed that depending on the type of Maxwell House Coffee (all in the same

size can) had ranges of weights from 11-16 ounces. So therefore, not all 1 pound, 2 pound or 3 pound coffee cans are equal. Further in this article by Dr. Hintz; results demonstrated the following using a 1 pound can: whole barley - 1.4 lb/can; beet pulp - 0.5 lb/can; cracked corn - 1.45 lb/can; whole corn - 1.5 lb/can; ground corn - 1.35 lb/can; whole oats - 1.0-1.2 lb/can; pelleted grain mixture - 1.4-1.6 lb/can; sweet feed - 1.0-1.3 lb/can and so forth. So as you can see there is tremendous variability. I have found that when using the “3 pound” can that the variability many times is even more dramatic. So this is the real rationale for feeding by weight and not by volume.

Furthermore, understanding the differences in flake size as a function of weight is also very important. Is the flake a 2" flake; 4" flake; or more? What does each flake really weigh? Are we dealing with Bermuda grass hay, mixed hay or alfalfa hay? These are all important and vital questions to ask when determining levels to feed. Horse owners would be surprised to see how much savings in both amounts and costs of hay that can be garnered if they really feed their horses by weight to provide the appropriate amounts of nutrients daily. Remember the average horse needs to consume about 1.5-2.0% of its body weight each day of total dietary ingredients to meet maintenance needs. For many maintenance horses hay alone diets may be sufficient provided free-choice water and salt is available.

So the bottom line is whenever possible horse owners should feed their horses by weight and not by volume. Take time to investigate the different weights that are available in all the feeds you use and in the long run it will allow you to feed your horses more economically and maintain a more healthy individual.