

Nutrition for Sale Yearlings

Keeping horses on right growth curve a major goal



PHOTOS BY ZAK NEELAND

Preparing yearlings for sales is a challenge—to have them arrive at peak readiness at the right time—and proper nutrition is a big part of this picture. Dr. Stephen Duren of Performance Horse Nutrition, consults with many Thoroughbred breeding farms around the world and formulates feeds for all conditions.

“When we look at a young horse—from weanling age to yearling age—we want to see a normal growth curve throughout the winter,” he said. “We don’t want that curve to flatten out, or these young horses will have to catch up faster in the spring. They need to continue growing through the winter after weaning.

“This is very important later, as we start the sales prep. It’s pretty easy to slow a yearling down in growth but hard to catch up if you get behind and then have to feed them a large amount to try to catch up at the end. To maintain a steady growth curve over the winter months is therefore very important.

“The next thing, from a farm management standpoint, is to find out as quickly as possible which sale you’ll be putting

these yearlings in, so you know your end target,” Duren continued. “If we are going to feed these young horses to peak at a certain time, it is important to know what that time is going to be.

“Typically we want these horses in a full sales prep program for at least 90 days before that sale. The sales prep will entail a change in turnout, some forced exercise, and some training so they will stand up and show themselves well. We want

enough time to adjust these yearlings and have them just right.”

Nutritional needs change as they go through the sales prep process. Those young horses must go from a horse that’s merely growing to a horse that is working and growing.

“We have to account for this in what we feed,” he said. “If these yearlings are put on walking machines or are being exercised by hand walking, treadmill, ponying, swimming, or whatever the exercise might be, this increases their energy and protein requirements. As the horse is given forced exercise, there will be muscle development/turnover, bone turnover, etc. You don’t just have a growing horse; you have now added exercise and must consider the nutritional needs for that as well.”

Most farms have a favorite type of program for these feed changes.

“Most of them will go from a normal weanling/yearling diet to a sales-prep diet that is mainly an increase in fat content to provide more calories,” Duren said. “And because we add more fat, we have to formulate the ration with additional protein as well as minerals and vitamins. If you are feeding the same volume but it has additional fat and the horse is exercising, the horse will be shortchanged on protein, etc., and the ration won’t be balanced. You have to make the necessary additions, so the prep diet is formulated differently than the growth diet.”

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Semican International for the Permanently Disabled Jockey's Fund



Ron Turcotte, seated front, receives a \$10,000.00 check from Roger Crary (behind Turcotte) of Semican International for the Permanently Disabled Jockey's Fund. Bill Pitney, standing to right of Crary, from Thoroughbred Feeds in Saratoga, NY sold the first bag of Turcotte Hullfree Oats, which generated the funds. The Saratoga jockey's colony joined in support of the presentation. Bottom row l to r: D. Davis, J. Ortiz, R. Turcotte, J. Castellano, J. Bravo. Top row, l to r: J. Lezcano, E. Prado, J. Rocco, N. LaSala, J. Velazques, J. Rosario, R. Crary, B. Pitney, T. Rice, R. Napravnik, J. Leparoux, R. Maragh.

Ron Turcotte received a \$10,000.00 check from Semican International for the Permanently Disabled Jockey's Fund (PDJF). Roger Crary, Semican marketing executive, hand delivered the check to Turcotte and the Saratoga jockeys colony on August 9, 2014. Bill Pitney, of Thoroughbred Feeds in Saratoga, NY sold the first bag of Turcotte Hull-free oats and was on hand for the presentation.

Semican, a Quebec oat research and distribution firm, recently named a new variety of high fat, hullfree oats in honor of the legendary jockey. Turcotte, an advisor to Semican International, for more than a decade, stated his first priority is to the PDJF. At his direction, a portion of the proceeds from each bag of the Premium Turcotte Hull-free oat is set-aside for the PDJF.

Ron Turcotte, seriously disabled by a riding accident in 1978, still looks out for his fellow jockeys by keeping the PDJF in the public eye with personal appearances, talks and photo signings. Turcotte, best known as the jockey of 1973 Triple Crown winner Secretariat, serves as the honorary chairman of 2015 "Jockey and Jeans" PDJF fundraiser set for May 30 at Indiana Grand Racing and Casino.

Jacques Beauchesne, president of Semican notes,

"We are pleased to support Ron in this endeavor. It makes us proud to give back to the horse industry in this way."



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OATS WITH A KICK

If you recognize the name “Turcotte,” you will understand why Semican chose it to honor the company’s premier hull-free line of oats. The fall of 2015 will mark the fifth year of production of Turcotte Hullfree oats, grown in Canada. Semican president, Jacques Beauchesne explained the name for the new oat variety, noting, “This is the finest oat I have produced in 30 years of breeding oats. It is legendary.”

Semican is a world leader in breeding, producing, and processing cereal grains, including hullfree oats, covered oats, barley, wheat, and soybeans. Developing the hullfree oat line has been a special project for Beauchesne and his team. His research farm and headquarters are located near Plessisville, Quebec, where he continues to improve the hull-free oat lines in consultation with researchers, nutritionists, and horse industry leaders.

Hullfree oats are genetically bred to shed the hull, which has low nutritional value. The remaining oat kernel delivers maximum calories, protein, and health benefits for performance horses. Old-fashioned, natural breeding through successive generations—never genetically modified (GMO free) makes Semican’s program unique in today’s high-tech environment.

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For centuries horses and oats have been a winning team. Horses love the flavor of oats, cleaning up the tasty, easily chewed kernels. Oats are not consumed as rapidly as sweet feeds or pelleted grains by horses. Slower consumption and more chewing time lead to increased saliva production, which buffers stomach acidity and may reduce gastric ulcers.

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Many farm managers keep these young horses on the same diet as they move into sales prep, but they trust their staffs to add supplements like a coat conditioner, which is oil (and thus more calories) on a horse-by-horse basis.

“Most farms, however, will simply switch to a higher-fat feed,” he said. “They may add additional fat to the formulated ration, for any horses that are behind and need more calories to catch up—to gain more weight and bloom a bit more.

“This is why it takes a full 90 days because when you start a forced exercise program with these young horses, it will typically stimulate a spurt in growth hormone,” he continued. “The horses will take off growing faster, so you definitely have to feed more. You have to try to maintain their body condition while they are growing.

“This will require some additional feed. Typically a yearling in a non-sales prep program will be fed the grain concentrate portion of their diet twice a day. The sales prep horses are usually fed smaller amounts more frequently so they are often fed three times per day,” Duren said.

Also, they are no longer fed in groups. Sometimes weanling/yearlings are fed in groups over the winter, in ground feeders or in feeders on the fence.

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“Once they enter sales prep they will have individual diets,” he said. “That way you know exactly what each horse is being fed (and how much it is actually eating), targeting what that particular horse needs. Some farms, even during the growth phase, bring these horses in and feed them individually.

“During sales prep, yearlings are always fed individually and feed will be tailored to the individual, according to what you want to accomplish. They won’t be growing at the same rate. There will be different sire and broodmare lines, and with some you know this will be a very large yearling while others you know will be more compact. Body type must be considered. Some horses won’t need as much feed, and others will need more than average.”

During sales prep the feed changes from using straight carbohydrates (cereal sources) to a combination of energy sources.

“We use things like beet pulp and oil,” Duren said. “This makes these feeds safer as we increase the quantity. Relying mainly on grains can lead to problems. We can avoid those risks if we utilize some other highly digestible energy sources.

“Another thing that I typically recommend at this time is introduction of some alfalfa into these diets. This helps for two reasons. When we add forced exercise to the program, there is a tremendous amount of bone turnover, and we need the extra calcium that alfalfa provides. We also need the extra protein for muscle development and repair. I typically want to supply about 25% of

their forage as some form of alfalfa,” said Duren.

Another advantage to alfalfa is the buffering effect from calcium, to help avoid ulcers—which are always a risk for yearlings with a high carb diet and the stress of sales prep.



Dr. Stephen Duren

“My own personal preference is to put everything into the formulated feed that I can, so I don’t have to rely on my staff to add individual supplements to the feed,” he said. “Occasionally a certain horse will need something more, but I try to have all the necessary ingredients formulated into the feed. This makes it consistent; none of it tastes different. If it tastes the same every time, we are more apt to get a consistent intake.”

Many horses become a little fussy if there’s any kind of feed change and won’t eat it.

The sales prep yearlings that are being fed a high volume are always more fussy than youngsters that are simply on a growing diet. Duren uses what he calls the pizza analogy. “When you were in college and you ordered pizza, you were starving and you ate all the toppings and the

crust. By the time you were into your third piece, maybe you didn’t eat the crust. Pretty soon you were just picking off your favorite toppings to eat, and leaving the rest,” he said.

Horses are similar.

“If we’re adding things that they can take off, or have a reason not to eat, they’ll sort it and not clean up the feed,” he said. “These sales prep horses are not college-hungry and tend to be a little fussy just because they have lots of feed in front of them and we’re pampering them. If we do too much adding/supplementing, we’re almost asking that horse to back out of his feed tub. We don’t want that to happen.

“Feed manufacturers are experienced enough, and if you are working with a good nutritionist, you should be able to put everything into a feed that you need to have in there,” Duren said. “There will be the occasional horse that will still need something else added, but I try to put as much as I can into the feed, so I don’t have to worry about changing the feed. I don’t want the horse that I’m trying to get to gain weight to all of a sudden back out of the feed tub and not eat very well for three days.

“This is another reason for having at least a 90-day prep,” he continued. “This gives time for changes. Horses change as they grow. They won’t look perfect on day one when we start the program. If we feed them properly, however, and they had a normal, good growth curve during the winter, we won’t end up with a yearling that’s much too light on day one and we have to start pushing him hard, right from the beginning. If these weanlings/yearlings are preconditioned before they ever get to the prep program, they do better. This is why you need to feed them well all winter; then they are easier to prep.”

Many large farms that receive horses to prep for sales won’t leave this to chance.

“They will visit the farms quite early that they plan to get yearlings from, so they can intervene on the feeding program,” Duren said. “They might tell the farm manager to up the feed on this one or that one so that their own job in that last 90 days will be easier, with less pressure on that horse to catch up. Then they won’t run the risk for colic or laminitis from having to push too much feed to that individual.

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“For instance, with the Kentucky sales, for the horses that come from other states that will be joining a consignment, the farms will send yearling managers to look

at those horses ahead of time so they won't be surprised when they receive those yearlings,” Duren explained.

The farms that have to ship yearlings also need to realize that putting them on a van and shipping them to a sale is a stressful event.

“Those yearlings can lose some body condition just from shipping,” he said. “You want to make sure that you have the yearlings either just right or slightly heavy just prior to shipping. They are going to a strange place, a new stall, etc. The horse next to them may not be one they've seen before. You have changed their routine and these horses are likely to drop a little weight and tuck up a little. With the change and the stress they may go off feed a bit. So I want to make

sure they are slightly over, to allow room for error.”

It can be an interesting challenge to get them all at peak readiness at the same time.

“Most farms are really good at this,” he said. “When you walk through a barn of yearlings, there will be differences in the amount of feed they get. Some will have a large volume of feed while others may be quite low. A group of fillies that don't seem to get very stressed may have never gotten a feed volume increase from their regular yearling diet and are doing just fine. You added a feed with a little more fat when they started exercise, but they are getting the same volume that they were receiving all winter.

“On the other hand, you might have a colt that is more nervous when you separate him from the others and he runs a bit more and is very active,” Duren said. “That horse would get a feed increase.”

The main thing is to feed each individual according to its needs, to meet the target goal by sale time. **BH**



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Proper nutrition is key before shipping to a sale as the stress can cause yearlings to lose body conditioning

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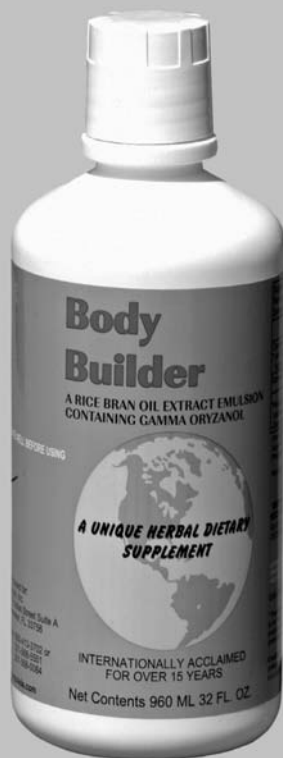
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