

## Feeding wheat to horses in a drought

### Bill McKiernan

Research Leader Animal Production, Production Research, Orange

### Introduction

When feed is in short supply, horses should be assessed to determine if supplementary feeding or full hand feeding is needed. Unfortunately, in times of short supply, a number of factors can combine which can lead to abnormal feeding practices. This is especially so if the feeds generally used for horses, such as most grains, lucerne hay and good quality roughage, are not available. The roughage is essential for digestion.

**Note:** Horses should **not** be fed in conjunction with other stock, as some feed additives, such as urea, are not suitable for horses.

Regular drenching, preferably every 6 weeks, is essential when hand feeding. In older horses, teeth should also be checked regularly.

### Roughage

During drought, one of the most common problems is obtaining good quality roughage. Although horses need roughage for digestion, they do not always require high quality roughage such as lucerne.

As long as horses receive 0.5–0.7% of their liveweight as roughage, the rest of the ration can be made up of concentrate. This proportion of roughage can be made up of virtually any available hay, as long as it is well cured. Pasture hay is acceptable for horses and it is often preferred because it is less likely to go mouldy than some types of legume hay.

Top quality legume hay (lucerne) is very good, particularly for growing horses, pregnant mares and horses in hard work. However, it can be replaced by other types of hay fed in similar proportions. As a general rule, feed three bales of poor hay for two bales of good.

Sorghum hay or corn stubble can be substituted as roughage as long as it is well cured and free from mould. Straw can also be used as a portion of the roughage ration. For horses in work or for pregnant or lactating mares, the straw should be chopped and mixed with some good quality hay.

Good quality silage can replace one-third to one-half of the hay ration for horses. **Poor quality silage should never be fed to horses – they are much more susceptible to digestive problems from spoiled silage than are other classes of stock.**

### Feeding a wheat/roughage ration

During drought, horses can be fed on lower quality roughage and grain, and the grain available in a drought will probably be wheat. Wheat can be fed to horses provided it is introduced gradually and balanced correctly with roughage. This applies to all grains.

Heat-treated (cracked or soaked) wheat is preferable because it is more easily digested. If wheat is heat-treated, up to 4 kg per day per horse can be fed in the ration. The ration must contain roughage. Whole wheat can also be fed to horses. A limiting factor is the ability of the caecum to break down the wheat.

### Examples of daily rations containing wheat when full hand feeding

The rations listed below are all for horses with mature weights of approximately 500 kg. For horses of greater or less mature weight, corrections will have to be made. **These rations should be spread over at least two feeds daily.** To all rations add 1% limestone and 1% salt

### Multivitamin/mineral premix

Some form of vitamin and mineral supplement will be necessary, probably given in the form of a prepared feed additive. Commercial premixes are available and generally fulfil most of the requirements of horses under full hand-feeding situations.



Type of stock	Ration
<b>Maintenance of adult horses (500 kg liveweight)</b>	8–10 kg roughage only 60 g multivitamin/mineral premix OR use some wheat: 2 kg wheat 4–6 kg roughage 60 g multivitamin/mineral premix
<b>Horses (500 kg liveweight) doing medium work for 5 hours a day</b>	2 kg wheat 1 kg bran 3 kg lucerne hay OR 1.5 kg crushed maize OR 2 kg soaked or boiled wheat 1.5 kg linseed meal 5 kg roughage 60 g multivitamin/mineral premix
<b>Mare in last 4 months of pregnancy</b>	2 kg wheat 500 g linseed meal 500 g bran 500 g milk powder 4.5 kg roughage 120 g multivitamin/mineral premix
<b>Mare lactating</b>	2 kg wheat 2 kg lucerne hay OR 1 kg cracked maize OR 1 kg extra of boiled wheat 1 kg milk powder 1 kg linseed meal 1 kg bran 5.5 kg roughage 120 g multivitamin/mineral premix
<b>Young growing yearling</b>	2 kg wheat 500 g bran 500 g linseed meal 250 g milk powder OR lucerne meal 3–4 kg roughage 60 g multivitamin/mineral premix

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