

Hey Neighbor

For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Hot weather increases risks for horses

Water is the single most important thing horses need in hot weather.

While that statement may seem obvious, the near-record temperatures, high heat indexes and accompanying humidity levels have increased health risks for horses.

"We've sure been having weather that old-timers would refer to 'as the kind of day that would kill a horse,' but horses aren't depended on for farm work like they used to be," said Dr. Don Musil, Blue Rapids veterinarian.

However, horses do perspire and won't overheat as quickly as some other species, noted Musil, who hasn't treated any severe case of horse heat stress this season.

"Horsemen today usually have the common sense not to overwork their horses during hot weather. But horses still require special consideration starting with an ample clean water supply at all times," said Musil, who has been in practice since 1978.

Shaded areas are important to help keep horses cool. "If the horse is in a barn, it's essential to make sure there's adequate ventilation and air circulation," he added. A fan may be necessary, but be sure the cords are out of the reach of horses.

Accompanying a "well-balanced nutrition program," horses should have access to salt at all times, Musil said.

Relative humidity is significant because it impairs evaporation of a horse's sweat, warned Dr. Judy Marteniuk, Michigan State Extension equine veterinarian.

Water in buckets and tanks spoils more rapidly with increased temperatures, noted Dr. Dean Scoggins, University of Illinois Extension equine veterinarian. Bacterial growth is rapid and horses often find such water unacceptable.

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water consumption with increased risk of dehydration," Scoggins stressed. "Dip your hand in the water and smell it. If you wouldn't drink it, don't expect your horse to."

Some horses are picky

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Tucker Litke, 7, already understands the importance of water for his horse on hot days. The cowboy watered his horse between classes at the Morris County Fair, Council Grove.

"Any increase in the heat stress index — the sum of the temperature and the humidity — above 140 should be an indication for caution in working horses," said Marteniuk.

A 1,000-pound idle horse needs a minimum of 10-12 gallons of water daily. "If they are working, and the temperature is above 70 degrees, adult horses could easily consume 20 to 25 gallons of water a day," Marteniuk explained.

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and won't readily drink "strange" water when away from home. Specialists recommend taking adequate horse water supply to events, if physically possible. Others suggest adding sweeteners, even "Kool-Aid," to water for horses when on the road to change the flavor and enhance consumption.

Electrolytes are salts, primarily sodium and potassium, used by the horse's body to setup electrical gradients that allow for muscle contraction, nervous system activity and other body functions, related Bob Coleman, University of Kentucky Extension horse specialist. Horses lose considerable sodium, potassium, calcium and chloride in their sweat.

"In addition to free choice salt at all times, it's also a good idea to provide trace minerals," Coleman said. "Electrolyte supplements specifically are seldom needed with adequate salt, but if they are deemed necessary, they should be placed in the feed, not the water."

Crude protein should not exceed 12 to 14 percent of the total ration in the adult athletic horse and about 10 percent for the idle horse, Marteniuk related.

"Excessive protein can generate extra body heat in the digestive process, so 'hot feeds' are discouraged in hot weather," Marteniuk verified.

Horses with heat exhaustion will show signs of weakness, stumbling, increased respiration and higher temperature to 102 to 106 degrees, compared to 99 degrees normally. Symptoms are more severe and dangerous with heat stroke, Marteniuk explained.

A veterinarian must be called, and the horse placed in a shady area with adequate circulation. It should be cooled with water over the entire body and provided free access to water.

Opinions vary about the hazards of hot horses consuming large volumes of cold water in a short period of time. Some say it can cause founder, while others contend it only cools the horse down faster. The consensus might be to limit water consumption to a couple of gallons at first, and then offer the water again in a few minutes after the horse has cooled some and the water warmed.

Horses can be used in hot weather and get along fine with plenty of water and common sense management.

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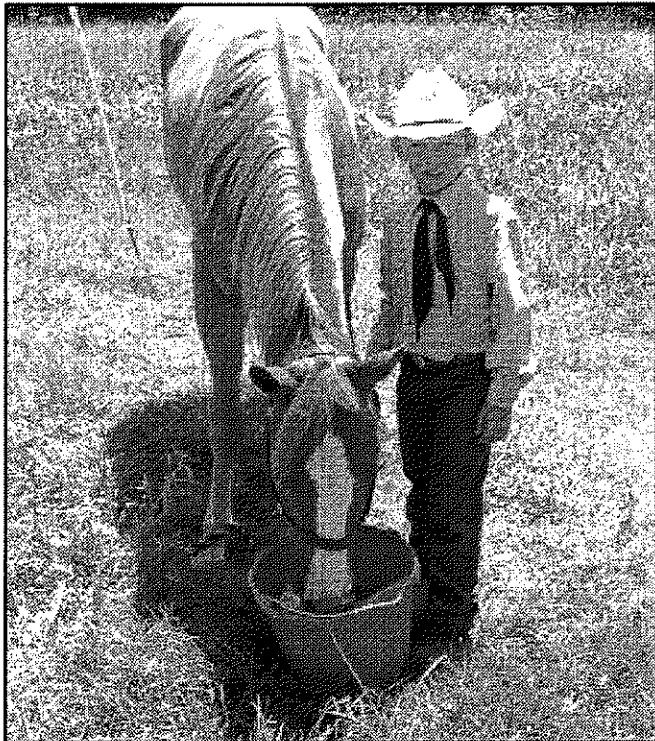
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