



## Turner's Tip

*Jason Turner, Extension Horse Specialist*

February is normally a time when horse owners are checking to see if there is enough hay left in the barn to “make it” until the first spring crop is cut. We realize that purchasing hay this time of year is more expensive than if we buy during the harvest season. If you need a benchmark to see where hay prices are, you can check a few websites. First, the USDA Ag Marketing Service provides market news on hay and other commodities at [www.ams.usda.gov](http://www.ams.usda.gov) (browse for hay under market news). Second, the NM Hay Association has a website ([www.nmhay.com](http://www.nmhay.com)) listing those vendors with hay for sale. Taking a few minutes to check hay prices on the web can give an idea of what you might pay in your community.

Typically, quality hay provides the best nutrient and roughage source for horses at the most economical price. However, in some rare instances where quality hay does not “price in”, you can replace a portion of the horse’s diet with other roughage sources such as beet pulp, alfalfa pellets/cubes, etc. Generally, we would only want to replace 25% (or less) of the horse’s hay ration with these alternate sources, and we would want to make a gradual change in the horse’s diet over a 10-14 day period to adapt them to the new feedstuff. If you have questions on alternative roughage sources for horses, please contact your county agent or me for advice.

### Tips to Stretch Your Hay Supply

If you have bought hay recently or are preparing to do so, be ready for “sticker shock.” With drought conditions in several areas of the US and numerous fires taking out grazing lands, the price of hay is near record highs. I had hoped to share with you some alternatives to feeding horses hay. However, a recent price check on these alternatives (by-product feeds) has shown that the prices of by-products that are suitable to feed to horses have recently reached prices that are nearly that of alfalfa. Therefore, the best approach for horse owners to deal with these high prices is to make sure you are using your forage supply as efficiently as possible. The following tips are geared toward the mature horse under maintenance or light riding conditions.

**Tip #1: Weigh feed** and feed to maintain the horse in a moderate (5 or 6) body condition score (BCS).

Typically, a mature horse (1100 lb.) will eat about 2% (22 lb.) of their body weight per day. If we are feeding alfalfa hay, this will more than meet their energy and protein requirements. In fact, we could feed that horse 18 lb. of alfalfa per day and still meet their energy and protein requirements. Assuming that alfalfa hay costs \$275/ton, feeding 4 lb. less per day would save about \$200/horse/year. You can use a hanging scale to weigh the hay, and use a weigh tape to estimate your horse’s weight. If your horse is a little over the moderate BCS, a

little weight loss might be beneficial to its health. If it is under the moderate BCS (ribs visible), then you should feed at a level that will help it maintain the 5 to 6 BCS. If you have horses on pasture, consider limiting their time on pasture each day to stretch your grazing. You could dry lot them ½ the day and graze them ½ the day.

**Tip #2: Feed quality hay.** Although it is expensive, it is the foundation of a good and safe feeding program. Don't try to save money by buying poor quality hay. Generally, it costs you more in the long run as you have to feed more of it, or have to feed grain, in order to maintain body condition. Furthermore, poor quality hay may contain toxic plants, mold, etc. that lead to greater expense on vet bills. Consider partnering with neighbors to make bulk purchases that may help get a lower price on hay.

**Tip #3:** If by-product feeds such as beet pulp or pelleted soybean hulls are available at a reasonable cost, you might consider replacing a portion (no more than 50%) of the horses daily hay ration with these feeds. Remember that any change in diet should be made slowly over a 10-14 day period.

As forage becomes scarce, make sure to check pastures and turn out areas for poisonous plants. Horses generally avoid these plants, but if no alternative is available they may begin to consume them which can have fatal consequences. If you have questions on evaluating your feeding program, please contact your county agent or myself for further advice.

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## UPCOMING EVENTS 2018

**Southwest Beef Symposium**  
Odessa, TX  
January 17 - 19, 2018

**Tucumcari Bull Test - Sale**  
Tucumcari, NM  
March 10, 2018

**Horse Expo & Sale**  
Horse Center - Las Cruces, NM  
April 28, 2018 - Joby Priest, Horse Manager

# **UPCOMING EVENTS**

## **2018 (*continued*)**

**NMSU Bull Sale**  
**Ag Auditorium - Las Cruces, NM**  
**Eric Scholljegerdes - April 28, 2018**

**Indian Livestock Days**  
**May 16 - 18, 2018**

**US Dairy Extension & Training Consortium**  
**May 14 - June 22, 2018**  
**Clovis, NM**

**NM Youth Ranch Management Camp**  
**(TBA) June 2018**

**US Beef Academy**  
**May 14 - 18, 2018**  
**Corona, NM**

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