

Ask the Experts

Q. My horse choked on his feed. My veterinarian says I should not feed pellets because they cause the horse to choke. What should I feed?

A. Horses can choke on almost any type of feed. Horses choke because they do not mix the feed with enough saliva. Thus, inadequate chewing is the primary problem. Encouraging the horse to eat slower will usually help. This can be accomplished by putting a stone or a salt brick in the feed tub. Sorting around the obstacle will slow down the rate of intake. If you do not have a water source in the stall where the horse is eating, a bucket of water may help the horse moisturize his feed. Another technique used by some horsemen is to mix the concentrate with a chopped forage product such as Showing Chaff. A double handful of chaff (try Spillers/Seminole Showing Chaff) in the bucket followed by the concentrate will provide a mechanism to slow down intake.

Q. I don't feed sweet feed because I understand that molasses causes colic in some horses. I also understand that it causes excitability and causes others to sweat profusely. Should I avoid feeding molasses to my horses?

A. Probably half of the horses in the country are fed molasses every day. There is no evidence that molasses caused colic in horses. Colic is caused by pain in the abdomen. The pain might be due to impaction, stomach ulcers, parasites, gas and probably many other reasons. Molasses is not likely to be a contributor. Some people attribute excitability in horses to the feeds molasses content. Some horse might get high on sugar or even starch, but molasses is seldom a major contributor. If the concentrate has 10 percent molasses, the most sugarDr. Ed Ott the horse would get from the molasses is 4 percent. The remainder of the feed will provide much more sugar than this. To reduce sugar intake for sensitive horses feed a high-fiber, high-fat diet. Sweating is a function of body heat production. If the horse is producing more heat than it can dissipate, it will increase the sweat production to increase the evaporation. Sugar will have a lower heat increment than forages, so molasses should not in itself increase sweating. For working horses in high temperature, high humidity conditions, a low to moderate forage intake and an increased fat intake will be beneficial.