

Humane Society of Elmore County News – 7 Jan ‘19
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Director

Let's talk horses. Calls about horses always increase in the winter when pastures are brown and neglected horses become more noticeable to passersby. While many horses can do fine during the summer on good pasture alone, their food must be supplemented in the winter when there is no more grass. If you are unsure please consult your large animal veterinarian but most horses need a grain or pellet feed and hay diet when there is no grass. Supplemental feeds not only keep your horse(s) healthy but will also keep them warmer in the cold weather.

It is important that your horse be fed the appropriate feed for its needs. Some horses may do fine on a simple sweet feed while others may need a Senior or special formulation to give them what they need. If you are unsure what your horse needs, consult your veterinarian, talk to the folks at your local feed mill, call your area extension office, call a local stable, ask fellow horse owners, get on the internet, check out some books or give us a call at 334-567-3377 as we do have staff that are knowledgeable about horses.

One excuse that does not fly about a horse that is horribly thin is that it is 'old!' Old horses that are fed correctly for their nutritional needs will maintain a generally healthy weight and condition. There is, however, a lot more to maintaining an old horse, or any horse for that matter, than just grain and hay. The first and simplest thing every horse owner must do is to routinely de-worm your horse(s). De-worming may be the single most important reason why today's horses live so much longer and it is easy and relatively cheap – just talk to your vet or any of those sources noted above. One thing that many owners do not know is that as horses age they develop very sharp points on their teeth that can cause them pain and problems properly chewing their food. This is easily remedied by having your veterinarian 'float' your horse's teeth. Floating or filing can be done on the farm and for many horses should be done at least once per year and can make an amazing improvement in their physical condition.

Horses also consume a LOT of water and may actually need more in the winter so should have clean and unfrozen water available at all times. There are inexpensive floats and 'in-tank' water heaters to keep water tanks full and unfrozen at all times – just ask your local feed store.

Should horses have shelter to get out of the elements if they want – well, yes, we think so, but it is sadly not required by law here in Alabama. You don't have to go broke building a fancy barn, however, to help your horse – a three-sided run-in shed where a horse can be shielded from the wind and/or rain can go a long way to helping a horse stay healthy and relatively comfortable in bad weather. Fancy is a term for us humans; functional is all a horse (or any other livestock) cares about.

Blanketing horses in inclement weather is sometimes a good thing but not always necessary. Older or infirmed horses may need blanketing in bad weather to help them maintain their body temperature but healthy horses with good winter coats are likely to be just fine in Alabama winters without blanketing. For owners who do blanket, however, it is essential that those blankets be removed and dried out routinely and the horse brushed out to make sure they aren't wearing a wet blanket or to check that the blanket is not rubbing/chafing the horse anywhere.

If you suspect a horse is being neglected or treated cruelly please contact the Elmore County Sheriff Department at 334-567-5227 so they can investigate. They will contact us for assistance if necessary and we are glad to help them. Many horse owners are sadly ignorant as to what owning a horse entails and may need guidance to help them do right by their horse(s) so please direct them to the sources above for information. But if they don't seem receptive or are blatantly ignoring their horse's needs, then please report the situation to law enforcement so that they can either be 'educated' or dealt with under our state cruelty/neglect laws.