



Equine News



Department of Animal Science
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Spring Pastures Approaching
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Hard to imagine that spring is just a few months away. The relatively mild winter and the recent moisture in many areas of Oklahoma have been the saving grace of many who are trying to afford feeding of our horses. Even so, those of us feeding hay can't have spring arrive quickly enough. Even if you were one of the lucky or smarter ones to have purchased hay last summer, chances are that your supply is dwindling fast. T

The long-term effect of forage production on our pastures still can't be predicted. If another summer of drought and record breaking temperature occurs in 2012, we can expect even less supply of affordable forage than 2011. If moisture continues and temperatures are more toward the norm, we can expect a rebound of pasture forage. However, even if we do receive a reprieve from the drought, we still have lingering issues that need addressed.

- As overgrazing of pastures is likely more prevalent than normal, expect weeds to be a big problem. While weed control may be handled partially with grazing, it will likely be a year that herbicide will be necessary. There are a lot of particulars about how best to apply herbicides in terms of timing, amounts and chemicals, so it is best to get advice from those familiar with conditions in your locale. Cooperative Extension Educators spend a lot of their spring answering questions about weed control, fertilization and pasture management. As a general rule of thumb, herbicide treatment needs applied prior to fertilization of desirable grass species so you aren't wasting fertilizer for growth of weeds. Most commonly used types of herbicides in pastures are spray on 'post emergence' of weedy plants.
- Fertilization should be directed by a soil test. Even if you haven't yet, most will advise that is never too late for a soil test. If you follow advice for sampling, soil tests accurately report the best ratio of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium and the best application rates for the type of forage. Timing and rate of fertilizer are critical, and you will find differing opinions based on what your production goals for forage. A simple answer as to when is it best to fertilize is just prior to a good rain, and at the time of year that the desired plant can use fertilizer for growth. Too early in the year, the intended grass may not be actively growing. Too little a rate and production goals won't be received. Too much may result in too much forage too soon, or simply a waste of money.
- Grazing management will be more important than ever. Overgrazed pastures need relief from grazing. Plants should be allowed to recover from dormancy and overgrazing for several weeks during the early part of the growing season. Relief will allow for plants to grow beyond the initial stages of growth which is when the plant is most susceptible to harm from grazing and when needs are heightened for establishing root growth. Although many of the pastures for horses are small and stocked heavily, which makes relief from grazing of pastures difficult, those that can manage grazing will receive much more return on input costs and much more total forage production for the growing season. Even with a great turnaround of moisture and growing conditions, the effects of last year will have an affect on grass production. So, if you have small acreage and you haven't yet considered rotational grazing during the growing season, this year may be the spring and summer to implement such practices.

So, even though the above may not be novel to most, it is time to consider what you are able to do for pasture recovery, and develop a plan that fits your condition. You can also expect hay to be in short supply this summer, and for prices to remain more characteristic of this past year as compared to years previous.

Valuing out price of hay

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Availability of hay has been so low that many are picking up what ever is available at any cost. The only management of cost is not buying too much at one time because of the expense. Obviously, given a choice , a routine not to repeat. A few reminders offered if and when hay becomes more plentiful:

- Contract with hay growers early, and make sure its contracted to you. Contracting for future purchase price may be impossible for small lot buyers, and it is always a gamble for large lot buyers. Nonetheless, it will likely be a summer when hay growers overestimate their expected production, and underestimate the demand this summer.
- If you don't have storage space on-site, consider doing so now. Larger lots of purchase usually give you an advantage of pricing. Storage doesn't have to be fancy, but does need to emphasize a dry environment.
- Be willing feed hay in ways that reduce wastage. Losing 30% or more of what is offered to wastage is easy to figure, you just paid 30% more for your hay.
- Compare on a per ton basis rather than per bale. Bale weights for grass hay can easily vary 10 to 20%. It's fair to the purchaser to know the real bale weight, which you can check simply by throwing in a bathroom scale in the pickup.
- Use hay tests to your advantage, especially if tests give you an indication of energy value of the hay. While protein is also important, and usually relates well with energy value, using estimates for TDN, RFV, DE or other energy value indices will help you compare nutritive value more accurately. For example, suppose one hay is estimated to provide 65% TDN verses another estimated 45%. More total digestible nutrients should equate to more nutritive value per pound of hay, i.e. .65 lb TDN verses .45 lb TDN for each pound of hay (40% increase in TDN value). If the first hay is sold for \$15/100, your cost would be 0.15 per pound of hay, or 0.23 per unit of TDN. If the second hay cost \$12/100, cost would be 0.12 per pound of hay, or 0.26 per unit of TDN. The cheaper hay per weight of hay is actually a little more costly per pound of TDN. What you thought was \$3.00/100 cheaper actually costs \$3.00/100 more on a TDN basis.

2012 Youth activities have began with record setting attendance

2012 has already shown that the market for youth education is alive and well! OSU Cooperative Extension in Animal Science and 4-H and Youth Development cooperatively hosted the first ever State 4-H Animal Project Leaders Conference. While a horse project leader's conference has historically been offered early at each year, we joined together livestock, dog and horse projects in a single conference. With that, enrollment was up and activities were very diverse.

The State 4-H Horse Topic Oral Communication Contests quickly followed in early February. Youth competed in speech, illustrated presentations, team solving problem and quiz bowl competitions. Numbers in each were larger than last year; Some categories of the contests were up over 100% in participation.

Most recently, a Horse Judging Practice Day was offered at OSU. While an annual OSU Horse Judging School is an annual event, we changed the format this year to focus on youth with an interest in judging horses. While we hoped the change of format would target a perceived need more effectively, we didn't have any expectations by how much. Attendance was approximately 350, which is about 200 more than last year. The day's activity combined sample classes, placing and a chance for youth to present oral reasons in a mock contest. Well attended and very well received. We hope that the response will carry over to many attending the State 4-H and FFA Horse Judging Contest, which is scheduled for April 21 at OSU.

District 4-H Horse Shows are scheduled from mid-May through the first part of June. The State 4-H Horse Show will be help June 14-16 at Shawnee. No doubt there will be many activities to fill the calendar between now and then!

(The following is a reprint of materials presented at recent Oklahoma 4-H Horse Leader Conferences)

Building Horsemanship Skills through a Step-Wise Curriculum Offering

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Hundreds of Oklahoma youth participate in 4-H and open horse shows with little experience or knowledge of class objectives. While horse shows definitely are not the only or arguably the best format to develop horsemanship skills, the shows are nonetheless the most popular, recurring group activities for many of our horse project youth. The show structure requires sole responsibility of preparation on the exhibitor and the exhibitor's family. Because 4-H is an entryway for competition, many if not most of the exhibitors don't know how to prepare. As a result, horse shows become a skill building activity rather than a place to exhibit skills already learned. Without preparation, show experience is unrewarding, and more seriously, unsafe for the exhibitors, show management and spectators.

In order to participate at shows, youth should have sufficient horsemanship skills to safely manage their horse in group situations. In order to compete, youth also should have a working knowledge of the class objectives and the ability to perform basic skills needed to meet minimal requirements of the class. Instruction from leaders and others with experience and skill is an essential element of improving the youth's knowledge level, as are instructional practice sessions that emphasize skill and knowledge development. Instruction and practice sessions need a format to organize and promote skill development. Curriculum must emphasize youth demonstration of skills and by feedback and discussion, demonstration of the youth's knowledge of the various horse show classes. Instruction and curriculum should focus on development of youth skills and knowledge through the experiential learning model. Two sets of curriculum are currently being promoted for use through the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension system: The Oklahoma 4-H Horsemanship Levels Manual and Oklahoma Horse Project Member Self-evaluation sheets.

Oklahoma 4-H Horsemanship Levels Manual.

The manual's objective is to provide 4-H leaders a system to evaluate a member's ability to complete horsemanship tasks which are considered more or less universally essential for improving horse riding and handling skills. The hope is to provide a mechanism for developing safer and effective riding skills while equipping the 4-H'er to assess his/her and horse's readiness to compete. Self responsibility and confidence of the youth should increase. The horsemanship results will allow for a broader activity base and more successful riding experiences. The materials are largely a series of 'tests' that require demonstration of horsemanship. The tests are grouped into four different levels; each level is intended to have tests of advancing difficulty.

Each of the skill tests are evaluated and scored into general categories of 1 through 5. Main points for evaluators to consider are safety, rider knowledge, rider position, horse ability and state of development of the team. Each level has an evaluator's summary sheet that sums the overall scoring and provides a format for discussion feedback. It is hoped that youth will want to work at the skills and be tested enough times to achieve a score of 4 or 5 before being satisfied with their accomplishment; after all our 4-H motto is 'To make the best better'. Some suggestions of use follow.

- An accomplished member may find it beneficial to work with horses of different training levels.
- Combine the material with other sources of information to broaden the youth's ability to accomplish the tasks and to provide variations on activities to accomplish the objective of the specific tasks.
- Provide Incentives and acknowledgement of participation and accomplishment.
- Hold special classes or events for youth working with the manual.
- Assist those active in the program with expenses or products related to showing
- Provide member recognition at local project activities.
- Evaluation provides constructive feedback and encouragement to members.

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Oklahoma 4-H Horse Project Member Self-Evaluation Sheets.

This curriculum is a series of one to two page member sheets that focus on needs and requirements for participation in specific classes at horse shows. The objectives are to:

- Provide a format for students to think about how and why they do certain actions and tasks (increase ability to self-analyze). These abilities increase self-confidence.
- Increase the student's knowledge about procedures and rules for horse show classes by independent and group research (increase ability to use resource material). These skills enhance the ability to think rationally and decision making.
- Encourage face to face interaction with peers on subject of mutual enjoyment and interest (increase ability to verbally communicate and relate to and have respect for others). Communication skills affect management and relationship skills.

The sheets are largely a series of multiple choice questions intended to stimulate reflection of knowledge and actions when read in individual settings, and discussion among peers when used in small groups. Questions may be designed to stimulate discussion and increase awareness of ways to accomplish tasks more so than having a single, correct response. Questions may be designed to stimulate research of rules, i.e. equipment requirements or objectives of the class.

Members should be encouraged to self-evaluate their ability to accomplish the objects of various classes. Members should be encouraged to discuss answers to questions in a self-led, non-confrontational small group setting.

A facilitator information sheet provides ideas for successful use in groups. Facilitators should encourage participants to participate in a positive, nonjudgmental environment. They should facilitate the discussion rather than giving too many personal opinions or providing the majority of the conversation. The value of the sheets is for members to self-evaluate, not to be solely instructed on correct or incorrect statements. Facilitators should guide discussions away from becoming confrontational, negative or judgmental. Expect limited experience among members with self-directed discussion within a group.

Suggestions for small groups

- Group size of 5 to 10 will likely provide a workable environment
- Allow about 20 to 30 minutes for small group interaction, although group discussion and specific topic may vary the time needed greatly. A single sheet can be discussed more than once.
- Goals of the discussion should be clearly and positively stated, i.e. staying positive, acceptance of those with less experience, open to ideas.
- Resources, i.e. excerpts from rule books, should be made available for independent research.
- Older youth may be given additional responsibilities of facilitating discussion of less experienced or younger youth as much as the objective of their personal comments on the subject.

Those with an interest in the curriculum offerings can access the literature on line offerings by navigating to horse project materials under the Animal Science Offerings on the website: <http://oklahoma4h.okstate.edu/litol/>

There is a link to the State 4-H literature on-line site @ www.ansi.okstate.edu/e-equine

The manual and self-evaluation sheets are also available through Oklahoma Cooperative Extension offices via the State 4-H 'Literature on Line' offerings. A hard copy of the Horsemanship manual can be ordered from the Ok State 4-H office through Oklahoma county extension offices. There is a small fee for purchase of the manual to partially offset the cost of production.
