Local horse enthusiasts are invited to participate in a series of monthly educational programs on horse management. The sessions are sponsored by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service. Each individual program will last approximately 1.5 hours including time for question and answer sessions with presenters.

Program dates and topics are listed below:

- **February 17th—7 to 8:30 p.m.— Is Your Truck & Trailer Roadworthy?** State Motor Vehicle Regulations with Sergeant Conrad of the NC State Highway Patrol. This workshop will be held at the Gaston Citizens Resource Center in Dallas, NC. This session is free but pre-registration is required.
- **March 17th— 7 to 8:30 p.m.— “Myth”ology in Horse Nutrition** with Lara Worden of NC Cooperative Extension. This workshop will be held at the Gaston Citizens Resource Center in Dallas, NC. This session is free but pre-registration is required.
- **April 14th— 6 to 8 p.m.— Equine Chiropractic** with Dr. Darcey Walraven of Omni Animal Chiropractic. This workshop will be held at Shining Hope Farms, 328 Whippoorwill Lane, Mount Holly, NC. Pre-registration is required for this session and there is a fee of $5 per person collected at the event. Dinner and refreshments will be provided at this event. Bring your own chairs!
- **May 19th—6 to 8 p.m.—Equine Form & Function** with Dr. Mike Yoder, REINS Coordinator, NC State University. This workshop will be held at Bit of Hope Ranch, 5001 CR Wood Rd., Gastonia, NC. Pre-registration is required for this session and there is a fee of $5 per person collected at the event. Dinner and refreshments will be provided at this event. Bring your own chairs!

Pre-registration is required for all sessions. To register, contact Gaston County Cooperative Extension at 704-922-2112. If no one has registered by the Tuesday before the event, the session will be canceled.
Debunking Equine Feed Myths


The misconception about feeding horses is a topic that is written about frequently but is worth repeating from time to time, because it appears to be a difficult one for some to grasp. Many of the traditional methods have been passed from generation to generation of horsemen, and while some are still useful, many are outdated and even detrimental to the daily management of the modern horse.

Fortunately, modern science and research over the past 20 or so years have helped debunk many of the myths associated with feeding horses. Here is a sampling of some misconceptions:

Bran mashes have a laxative effect on the digestive tract

Despite being fed with good intentions, a weekly bran mash is a dramatic alteration to the daily ration and causes a disturbance in the normal population of microorganisms that reside in the hindgut. Dumping wheat or rice bran into the system causes a sudden kill-off of some bacteria and forces overgrowth of others. This shifting bacterial population in the gut usually results in a good case of diarrhea, leading one to believe wheat and rice bran acts as a laxative. Remember, routine feeding of the same feeds every day is the best way to avoid digestive upset in horses.

Pellets cause choke

Pellets do not cause choke; horses that eat too fast cause choke. When horses become overly hungry due to long periods with nothing to eat, are fed in close proximity to their herd mates, or feel threatened eating in a field, they tend to become very aggressive when eating.

Choke is a behavioral problem, not a “form of feed” problem. A horse that eats too aggressively and bolts its feed is most likely to choke on any food source. The key to preventing aggressive eating is to change the management of the horse. This can be done by increasing turnout or grazing time, increasing feeding frequency and giving smaller portions of feed, separating an aggressive horse from the herd when being fed, and making sure horses do not become overly hungry from spending long periods of time with nothing to eat. Feeding in a shallow trough or pan with large, smooth stones that prevent the horse from getting a large mouth of feed also can be helpful.

First-cutting hay is not as good as second or third cutting hay

This may or may not be true because the cutting has nothing to do with the factors that are important to making good hay:

- Level of fertilization of the field
- Amount of water available during growing season
- Type of plant being grown
- Region of the country
- Level of maturity when harvested
- Insect infestation
- Weed control
- Sunlight

Obviously, all these variables can change dramatically throughout the growing season. Many can be controlled, and the best hay growers do just that. For example, in this country, much of the best hay comes from the dry Western regions, where the sun is almost always shining and Mother Nature does not interfere with long rainy periods. Irrigation is used to control water application, fields are properly fertilized, and the right species of plants are grown for the region.

If you would like to learn more about Equine Feeding Myths, please consider attending the REINS 2011 Horse Owner Education Session on March 17th from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Gaston Citizens Resource Center in Dallas, NC.

Prepurchase Exams: How to Buy Smart

The search is over: You have finally found the horse of your dreams. But before you sign the sales contract and load him/her onto the trailer, protect yourself with a prepurchase exam. Granted, there’s no magic crystal ball to guarantee a horse that looks great on exam day will carry you to your equestrian goals. But a prepurchase exam can give you insights to help you make a smart & informed decision.

In general, the exam will include three phases:

- Basic health evaluation, including health history, temperature, pulse, respiration, general condition, and conformation
- Lameness assessment, including flexion tests, soft tissue palpation, and movement evaluation
- Ancillary diagnostics that might not come into play, including radiographs (X rays), ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and bloodwork

Each phase in the process can include multiple steps. Exactly what’s included in your prospect’s exam depends entirely on you. Do you want to know a horse’s tiniest flaws? Or are you only concerned with major issues? Also, the veterinarian doing the exam should have a familiarity with the breed and/or discipline.

Disclosure of relevant information is the key part of the exam and should be made to both buyer and seller when possible, especially, when there is negative findings relative to the horse’s serviceability. That said, the medical records are the exclusive property of the buyer who is paying for the exam. It is helpful if both buyer and seller are both present and, at the very least, the buyer should be immediately accessible by phone at the time of the exam.

By the time the prepurchase exam is done, the veterinarian should have “had their hands on every square inch of that horse.” And as the buyer, it’s then your job to listen and make a smart & informed decision on whether to buy or not!)