



Field Notes for The Week Of

3-13-2023

Learning About Horses

One has to love the month of March right? I am being sarcastic by stating that because the month of March can be a very frustrating month at times, with its ups and downs in temperatures and traditional windy conditions. So far March is right on par for being average in temperature and precipitation. This past week was a cool week but on average dry allowing farmers to get out in the field and start their spring chores. I talked to a few producers this week who were plowing, spreading lime/fertilizer, frost-seeding clover, planting oats, and delivering newborn calves. With all the early spring activities going on the farm, a few local horse owners allotted some time to learn about key topics in the equine world. W-C Milling Company and Kent Nutrition Group sponsored an Adams County Horse clinic covering an array of different topics such as vaccination, worming, nutritional maintenance, pasture management, toxic weed control, and insurance needs. With all these topics you can imagine the amount of conversation and questions that came about. From insurance stories and medical conditions, the room was full of Q and A, that is truly what these local learning meetings are all about!

Horses are very unique creatures and one person once told me that trying to manage a horse is like trying to manage a cow and hog wrapped up in one creature. I believe this is due to the digestive system of a horse which is not a true ruminant and not a true monogastric system. Horses are referred to as hindgut fermenters. Horses have very small stomachs meaning horses usually consume small amounts more often throughout the day, the large intestine is very large allowing for the slow breakdown of fibrous crops. The foregut allows for grains and small carbohydrates and the hindgut breaks down the hay. This diverse digestive system also means that many health issues can arise when rations are not balanced. It is recommended that horses receive 1.5-2% of their body weight in forages and water intake can be between 20 and 60 liters of water a day depending on the environment. Energy for maintenance and growth usually derive from grains like oats, .03 Mcal/kg of body weight is usually recommended as horse increase activity this can increase but caution should be taken to not overdue the energy to prevent too much weight gain. A body condition score of 5 is ideal for horses and learning how to score should be a horse owner's goal.

