



## Feeding in hot weather

The overweight debate is still strong in the press, but if there is one benefit to obesity, it is that it offers insulation during the cold winter months, however, the reverse is true during hot weather.

Overweight horses have a reduced ability to cool the body due to surplus adipose tissue. This, together with the fact that energy intake is also increased due to an overweight horse requiring more feed than a horse carrying less condition, therefore increasing body heat production, makes the horse more uncomfortable, particularly those with little or no shade. Heart and respiratory rates are increased, resulting in decreased performance levels.

On the other hand, some horses, particularly fine skinned pure bred horses suffer with heat stress which lowers energy intake, therefore producing weight loss. A great deal has been written over the last few months regarding reducing weight in obese horses, however, little has been written about weight gain in horses who do not cope well in hot weather.

Obviously, the management system should be taken into consideration to minimise heat stress to the individual horse. Shade and ventilation is vital, as is a comprehensive feeding regime.

Feed should be highly palatable. Take time to determine the likes and dislikes of the horse – cubes or mix, dry or damp and so on. Competition horses should be fed to minimise heat production. Avoid feeding a high fibre, high protein concentrate during hot and humid weather, as more heat is produced during the utilisation of fibre and protein than with other dietary constituents.

**Hickstead Horse Feeds** have two cereal based mixes. **Herbal Meadow Mix** is a low energy cereal mix suitable for horses in light to medium work, prone to heat stress. The addition of mint and rosemary encourage palatability during hot, humid temperature and the added cooked flaked soya will promote weight gain and muscle tone. Protein and fibre levels are ideal and will not exacerbate heat trauma.

**Eventa Sports Mix** is a competition mix, ideal for horses that are competing regularly. Again, protein and fibre levels are sufficient for working horses but are not in excess. The addition of oats will promote energy levels, and added cooked flaked soya will produce excellent muscle condition for top-line.



Both the above mixes contain maize, a good cereal grain to feed as it is lower in fibre and protein and higher in oil than other cereal grains, making it more energy dense.

High oil feeds are more suitable than high fibre feeds for feeding during hot weather as oil will allow energy to be available for competing, yet has the effect of decreasing heat production in the horse. **Hickstead Horse Feeds** produce a whole range of feeds, from low to high energy, all with excellent levels of oil, making them appropriate to feed throughout the summer months.

Other tips for feeding during hot, humid conditions are to maintain a good forage supply as well as provide salt daily in the diet; between a teaspoon and a level tablespoon depending on type of horse and workload should be sufficient. For hard working horses, an electrolyte should be given to replace salts lost in sweat, but make sure a clean water supply is always available.