

Is The Credit Crunch Having A Detrimental Effect On Your Horses Health

Fact Sheet

If any of you are feeling a little like me then you will be getting rather tired of hearing those awful words 'credit crunch'! However, whether you call it those words or a recession or some other description, the fact remains that most of us are making changes to our spending habits and looking at ways to tighten our belts. While we may be saving those extra pennies can we be sure that we are also doing the best for our horse's health in the process?

Providing a complete and balanced diet does not need to be a drain on finances and if we just stop and think for a moment then it is possible to save money with the peace of mind that our horses will not be missing out on anything.

Horses require six nutrients in their diet: water, carbohydrates, fats, protein, vitamins and minerals. With the exception of most of the horse's water requirements, almost all of a horse's remaining dietary requirements can be obtained from a single source and that is **FORAGE!**

Forage

Generally, through the winter many horses will be on reduced workloads due to short daylight hours. Adult horses that are not involved in moderate or heavy work do not generally require any hard feed and will maintain the appropriate body weight and obtain all necessary nutrients on pasture and free choice to good quality forage alone. The only exception to this rule is the requirement for salt. Salt is the only mineral for which horses have an undisputable appetite and it should be supplemented regardless of their feeding regime. Normal table salt can be offered in a handful of chaff if the horse is reluctant to use a salt lick (Some horses find licks tough on the tongue!).

You may be able to save cost further by actually weighing out your hay rather than allowing your horse to have free choice access, which may result in some wastage. To help maintain a healthy digestive system and to prevent bad habits such as stereotypes and wood chewing, horses require approximately 1.5-2.0% of their body weight as forage on a daily basis e.g. 500 Kg horse requires 7.5-10 Kg of forage. For horses that are out grazing on good quality pasture then this quantity can be reduced. Usually, field kept horses are quite good at telling you if they are getting enough or not!!

Evaluate Body Condition

Take time out on a fortnightly basis to evaluate your horse's body condition. This will indicate if your horse is being fed enough (or too much) forage or concentrate feed. I have seen many situations where owners end up overfeeding their horses because they prefer to see their horses 'well covered' or are simply not familiar with what a healthy weight looks like (see our body condition scoring chart at http://www.saracen-horse-feeds.co.uk/feedcheck/condition_scoring/). Ideally, horses at an appropriate body weight have ribs and hip bones that are not visible but are easily felt.



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Exceptions to the 'Forage Only' Rule

Horses that usually require additional sources of calories to maintain body condition include competitive horses, broodmares and the 'poor doers', but this still does not mean that feeding them a well balanced diet to support their performance need be very expensive. BEWARE of rushing out for the cheapest or budget brands as you will find that in the long term the cost saving you made initially will not be what it first seemed.

The basis of the diet i.e. forage can be topped up with other fibre substitutes to increase the calorie intake but also be kind on the pocket. Feeds such as **Saracen Super Fibre Pencils**, soaked sugar beet pulp, and quality chaffs should never be underestimated for their nutritional properties and huge benefits.

If your horse is still not maintaining condition on their current diet then you may then need to consider looking at a complete feed that provides a combination of energy sources other than fibre substitutes. Generally, for average adult horses, a good quality and well formulated concentrate feed will be suitable to help those that struggle a bit more with holding body condition. Look at ingredient inclusions and raw materials such as alfalfa, soya hulls and soya etc topped with soya oil really will help to ensure that you get more for your scoop. As a guideline: 10-12% protein and 3-10% oil is sufficient to help improve body condition e.g. **Saracen Cooling Mix and Herbs, Cooling Pencils and Show Improver Pencils**.

Other Money Saving Tips To Help Maintain Health

If you are not fortunate enough to have good quality forage, simple and inexpensive Feed balancers are great! Remember to work out your costs per dose to appreciate just how cost effective Feed balancers are! E.g. Bio-Life 2000

If you feed lots of supplements, ask yourself honestly, which ones are essential, beneficial or a luxury

If your not doing so already, take a trip to the £1 shop and invest in some basic kitchen scales for weighing your horses concentrate feed

If you do not have a spring balance to weigh your forage, use your bathroom scales!

Generally pencils or cubes are cheaper than coarse mixes.

FOR FURTHER TECHNICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRODUCTS MENTIONED PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE www.saracenhorsefeeds.co.uk OR FOR A PERSONAL FEEDING PLAN PLEASE CALL OUR FEED HELPLINE 01622 718487



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