A Newsletter for a New Year

Eileen Coite

Happy New Year! On behalf of Cooperative Extension and Regional Equine Information Network System (REINS) region 13, I’m excited to share with you a new quarterly newsletter developed for equine owners in the region, which covers Johnston, Greene, Wayne, and Wilson Counties. The newsletter will provide a means for REINS volunteers to communicate and assist you as horse owners with timely educational information and events, and will in turn give you the opportunity to reply back to us with questions and needs as they arise. The letter will arrive quarterly as the seasons change, and we plan to give you timely, needed information and reminders to benefit your horses and farms.

I’d like to take a moment to introduce you to the REINS program and volunteers in your county. The purpose of REINS is to have certified paraprofessionals available to answer questions regarding horse management and science. REINS volunteers assist county extension agents in the delivery of educational programs on a local, county, and regional basis. A list of volunteers and their county, along with agent contact information, is located on the last page of the newsletter.

Please feel free to contact us with any article suggestions and needs that you may have throughout the year, or if you have questions about the REINS program. We hope you enjoy the newsletter and find it useful.
As the colder months set in we should be prepared for winter care of our horses. Nature provided horses with a warm winter coat to protect them from the cold, but there are a few things we, as horse owners can do to help. Protection from the elements, adequate nutrition and exercise are just three considerations.

Protection from cold soaking rains and drafts benefit both horse and owner by decreasing illness and thus decreasing vet bills. A simple three sided shelter built with consideration to prevailing wind direction and some form of natural windbreak, like horse friendly trees or shrubs, will be of great benefit to your horse. Remember if your horse wears a blanket outside and it gets soaked, it is not providing any warmth to him and may actually increase body heat loss through evaporation. If horses are stabled inside, the shelter should be free of heavy drafts, but should also provide natural ventilation. Bedding of straw, sawdust or shavings also protects the horse from body heat loss on the cold ground.

Body condition should be regularly evaluated during the winter. It is very easy to miss significant weight loss when a horse has a heavy winter coat. It is important to feel under the horse’s hair coat in the winter to evaluate body condition. A body condition score (BCS) chart is available at the Cooperative Extension office, and individual training in BCS can be scheduled with your county REINS volunteer or extension agent. Proper nutrition in the winter is essential, and the most important nutrient is water. On the average a horse consumes ten gallons of water a day. Horses will consume enough water if the water temperature is kept above 45 degrees F. Make sure the ice in the water tank is broken and removed every day to allow horses to have access to water or better yet add a water tank heater (de-icer) to the water tank. Other ways of getting extra water into those horses that don’t seem to drink as much is by adding salt to their feed. Beet pulp can be also be soaked and fed to the horse. Beet pulp will expand and absorb a great deal of water and most horses love it. Adequate water intake greatly reduces the risk of colic due to impaction. In addition to water, horses need calories to maintain body weight. Thin horses lose body heat more rapidly than a heavy horse. Hay helps horses generate more body heat from the digestive process. Feeding more hay helps the horse stay warm as well as providing energy, protein and fiber. Beet pulp is also a good source of digestible fiber, and like hay it to can help horses stay warm by generating body heat through digestion. It may be necessary to provide additional nutrition in the form of concentrates (grain). Good dental health enables the horse to chew any feed source and should be a consideration.

Exercise is another important consideration in winter. Equine circulation and digestion benefits from regular turn out and free exercise. Horses should be turned out at least once a day and left out the entire day as weather permits. Decreased exercise results in decreased circulation to all muscles and organs, including the intestines, which can result in slower digestion and potentially lead to impaction colic.

Regular exercise also reduces boredom, which can result in undesirable behaviors such as stall walking, cribbing or weaving.

Protecting your horse from the elements with natural cover or man-made shelter, adequate nutrition and exercise are only three ways to help keep your horse healthy and happy through the winter months. For more information on winter horse care, contact the extension office at 731-1527.
As you look out your window from your warm house, you may be thinking of the trail rides you participated in over the past year. Whether you ride in the cold or not, there are things you can do to prepare for your next ride, in the spring or maybe next week. Winter is a good time to check your tack. My saddle sure could use a good cleaning and inspection of stress points for wear or damage. I know I can’t be the only one who has ever had a saddle on a rack in the middle of the living room floor.

Any saddle manufacturer can show you how to clean and check for wear, that’s another article. Bridles can unbuckled and cleaned at the same time. Clean your horses’ bit, for his comfort as well as appearance. Replace anything that is worn enough for you to question its safety, or the comfort of your horse. Nylon tack can be washed with a little bleach; not too much or you’ll lose some color and eat the stitches away. Be sure to check buckles and buckle holes. Rusty hardware is like sandpaper; it slowly cuts through nylon and leather. All rows of thread need to be checked and stitched as necessary. Thinner saddle pads can be washed in the washer, while thicker ones may need to go to the car wash for a soap free pressure wash. Saw horses or a saddle rack work great for that. Just be sure it has time to dry before you need it, in winter bring it in after it stops dripping, unless you want a pony Popsicle. If you need to replace something, now is the time, before you really need it. There are some great stores online that can offer quite a discount over some mail order catalogs. If you’re one of those that need to see what you’re buying, there’s always your local tack shop.

Let’s look at your horse. How’s old paint doing this winter? Note when his Coggin’s test is due, you don’t want that to keep you from any trail rides or shows. Vaccinations up to date? Has the farrier been lately? All that kind of stuff can be written on your calendar, allow enough time to have it taken care of before it becomes a problem. Looking out the window and seeing a fluffy horse is not the best way to monitor his physical condition. You can check how warm he is by taking your fingers and feeling his skin under the hair between the front legs. If it’s warm there, he’s usually warm all over. You need to put your hands on him and feel how much fat he has on his neck, at his withers, around his tail head, over his ribs, and behind his shoulders. Does he have a crease down his back, if so, how deep? Body condition scores are a good way to make sure old paint is getting the right amount of groceries. Body condition is scored from 1 to 9 with 1 representing an animal that is very emaciated and 9 representing an animal that is obese.

Most people want their horses somewhere between a high 4 and a low 6, depending on the type of work your horse does. You can get a complete description of body condition scores from your NC Cooperative Extension Service. An overabundance of feed can sure make riding on cold mornings interesting, some horses get “high” on too much feed and forget their manners. If you’re not sure how he’s going to act, it wouldn’t hurt to lunge old paint for a few minutes first to gauge how he’s feeling. Once in the saddle, warm up slowly before asking for anything strenuous, bending exercises at the horse trailer help loosen muscles and instill obedience. On the way back, walk in to cool down, a sweaty horse will get chilled quickly. I’ve always heard “walk the first mile out and the last mile in” but you’ll have to be the judge of how long that mile is depending on your horse. If you’re a fair-weather rider, it’s only a matter of time before the seasons change again. Look after your horse and yourself and we’ll see you on the trail!
2005 flew by way too fast and 2006 will likely do the same. Fortunately the North Carolina horse industry is alive and well, not however, without some forthcoming issues that will require our attention. As you know, in 2005, round two of the Horse Slaughter Prevention Act was introduced to the United States House of Representatives. However, before the bill could be acted on, Rep. John Sweeney pushed an amendment to the Department of Agriculture spending bill, that effectively removed funding for the inspection of all horse slaughter plants. This amendment has the power to essentially close the plants unless it is determined that the plant owners may themselves pay for the services of the inspectors. Whether they will or will not be allowed to do so, may not be important, since another attempt to pass the Horse Slaughter Protection Act will be made in 2006. At this time, it appears there is more than enough support to pass the legislation.

However, there are several large issues here that need to be carefully considered. By the way, there are approximately 85,000 horses slaughtered in the United States or exported for slaughter annually. That number was derived by taking the 66,183 horses reported slaughtered in the United States in 2004 and adding the 18,877 that were exported to Canada during the same period. Not known at this time is the number of horses that were sent to Mexico for that same purpose.

Issue one, the National Cattlemen’s Association was just one of many national organizations who signed on against the Act, fearing that it was simply step one in a long-term effort to end the slaughter of all animals in the United States, a fear not without merit. Issue two, are horses livestock or are they companion animals? Livestock are treated differently in the calculation of taxes for “business interests.” Those involved in a horse “business” may find fewer tax breaks available in the future. If in-fact, horses are companion animals, rather than livestock, a whole new set of regulations may soon be implemented in the way in which we care for our horses.

Some who are opposed to the Act argue that the bill, which not only would prohibit the slaughter of horses but the transport of horses within the Country and out of the Country for that purpose, is an invasion of our rights as owners to determine how we end the lives of horses that are ill, suffering the effects of old age or that have been injured beyond rehabilitation.

One of the largest issues we will have to face if the Horse Slaughter Prevention Act passes is what to do with the extra horses. Even if 50 percent of the 85,000 horses being processed annually, are euthanized by veterinarians, that leaves 42,500 additional horses to be cared for. That is 850 horses per state, 850 horses that would need to be fed and cared for on an annual basis, and another 850 next year, and the year after.

Representatives of some of the largest horse rescue organizations have already stated they cannot handle that many more horses annually, and that they fear the number of abuse and neglect cases would increase as a result of passage of this Act.

In 2006, horse owners and those involved in the horse industry, will need to answer some difficult questions regarding the horse, the industry, and the direction Congress should take on the Horse Slaughter Protection Act. While none of us want horses to be slaughtered needlessly, an even greater crime would be that they suffer neglect and abuse as a result of our own well-intentioned, yet potentially misguided policies.
Hi,
My name is Clover. My friends here at REINS need help finding a name for our kids' page. If you would like to submit a name, please send your entries to: Sharon.Sutton@wayne.gov or call 731-1527, by March 1, 2006. We will announce our choice and the person who submitted the winning name in our next issue.

Answers:

Across
1 Health test for Equine Infectious Anemia
4 Usually caused by deep puncture wounds
6 The body part that points towards sound first is ______
8 Absorbs concussion
9 Directly behind the horse is its blind ______
11 Encompasses the nostrils and mouth
12 A blood-sucking insect

Down
2 One of a horse’s natural gaits
3 The most important consideration when trailering your horse
5 Highly contagious disease, especially in young horses
7 A small bone in the hoof
10 The ability of a horse to see to each side of his body independently is called ________ vision
13 If a horse colics he/she may lie down and ______
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<td>January 28</td>
<td><strong>Carolina Horse Management Conference</strong></td>
<td>Ernst &amp; Ruby McSwain Extension Educational and Agricultural Center, Lee County Extension Office, Sanford, NC</td>
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<td>February 4</td>
<td><strong>NC Youth Horse Judging Team Training Clinic</strong></td>
<td>Jim Graham Building, NC State Fairgrounds, Raleigh, NC</td>
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<td>February 4-5</td>
<td><strong>NCSU Horse Show Judges’ Certification Clinic</strong></td>
<td>Gov. James B. Hunt Complex, NC State Fairgrounds, Raleigh, NC</td>
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<td>February 23-26</td>
<td><strong>American Paint Horse Association Horse Judging Seminar</strong></td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
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<td>February 25</td>
<td><strong>NCSU-CVM Horse Owners Symposium “Sports Medicine”</strong></td>
<td>NCSU College of Veterinary Medicine, Raleigh, NC</td>
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<td>March 10-11</td>
<td><strong>NCSU Equine Hoof Care and Shoeing Short Course</strong></td>
<td>Extension Horse Husbandry Officer, NCSU Equine Educational Unit, Raleigh, NC</td>
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<td>April 1-2 (TBD)</td>
<td><strong>Carolina and Virginia 4-H Horse Leaders Conference</strong></td>
<td>Roanoke, VA</td>
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<td>May 1-3</td>
<td><strong>Horse Protection Officers Short Course</strong></td>
<td>NCSU Equine Educational Unit, Raleigh, NC</td>
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To receive a short course and clinic brochure and pre-registration forms contact:

Extension Horse Husbandry  
NCSU  
Box 7523  
Raleigh, NC  27695-7523

Phone: 919-515-5784  
Fax: 919-515-8518  
Or on the web at:

http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/an_sci/extension/horse/hhmain.html
Calendar of Events:

February 4-5  4-H Horse Judging Clinic in Raleigh.
February 11  SE District  4-H Horse Bowl Contest in Kenansville.
February 18  Wayne County Horse Health Clinic to be held at the Wayne County Fairgrounds.
March 4  State 4-H Horse Bowl and Hippology Contest in Raleigh.
March 18  Eastern Carolina Regional Horse Festival to be held at the Wayne County Fairgrounds.
March 19  Bill Scott Horsemanship Clinic to be held at the Wayne County Fairgrounds.

For more information on any of the above activities and events, contact the Extension office at 731-1527.

REINS Volunteers by County
Volunteers may be contacted via Extension Agents

Greene County: Currently there are no REINS volunteers in Greene County

Johnston County: Kelly Boutwell, Michele McLaughlin, & Will Walls

Wayne County: Jerry Boone, Vivian Rowe, Cindy Wheaton, & Vickie Yelverton

Wilson County: Carol Kyles & Kathy Moore

Extension Agent Contact Information
Greene County: Eve Honeycutt, (252) 527-5191, eve_honeycutt@ncsu.edu  
Agricultural Agent
Johnston County: Ron Hughes, (919) 989-5380, ronald_hughes@ncsu.edu  
Agricultural Agent
Wayne County: Eileen Coite, (919) 731-1527, eileen_coite@ncsu.edu  
REINS Regional Coordinating Agent, Agricultural Agent
Wilson County: Walter Earle, (252) 237-0114, walter_earle@ncsu.edu  
County Extension Director

Wayne County Cooperative Extension’s Equine News is a bimonthly newsletter written by a team of experienced equine owners for other persons interested in equine information in Southeastern North Carolina. For more information on material and events presented in this newsletter, contact your local agent and Cooperative Extension office at:

Eileen A. Coite  
Extension Agent  
Agriculture—Livestock