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## WHAT IS IN A FEED LABEL?

I am a sucker for nice packaging and so I know how easy it is to be attracted to the images we see in magazine ads and on the side of feed bags and supplement containers. Beautiful horses with flowing manes running and jumping high fences, looking vibrant and healthy, everything we wish for our horses we see depicted in these images. And then when we read the text there are the apparent promises of perfect black coats, great hooves, safe energy, it doesn't get any better. But what are the ingredients in this product? How much fiber is in it? Who makes it? Who do you call if you have questions or concerns?

The uniform state feed bill developed by Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) and American Feed Industry Association requires that all commercial feedstuffs have a label. In bagged feeds this is a label that is sewn into one the bags seams and in supplements it tends to be stuck on the side of the container. The label contains everything that you need to know about that feed. The label is required to contain the following information; product name, manufacturer, purpose statement and feeding directions, guaranteed analysis, feed ingredients, net weight, precautionary statements, active drug ingredients, company's name and mailing address.

There is a lot in a name, Strategy, Ultium, Envision they are all catchy and play a part in our decision to buy the product. Sometimes there is a number associated with the feeds name for example "Winners 12". The number 12 in this name relates to the amount of crude protein that is in the feed. I have seen feeds with two numbers in the name the first of which was protein and the second fat, however I am not aware of any regulations regarding a 2<sup>nd</sup> number only that numbers must relate to protein content.

The label must state the net quantity of product. This is perhaps particularly important when buying supplements which may appear to have similar sized containers but contain different quantities of supplement. If you are trying to shop economically and select products based on cost this is worth looking at along with the amount of supplement/feed required to be fed every day to meet the manufactures suggested daily intake. The feeding guidelines must also be on the label and on feed sacks are normally stated as the number of pounds of feed required per 100 lbs of body weight. What the feed label does not tell you is that if you feed less than this recommended amount your horse is not guaranteed the nutrients as stated on the label. By which I mean if the feed states that feeding this product will provide all the nutrients your horse needs if fed in combination with a certain amount of a certain type of hay, this is only true if you feed it at the levels specified. So if it says to feed 1 lb per 100 lb body weight then you would need to feed your 1000 lb horse 10lbs of this feed per day to fulfill the nutrient gap. Very few people actually feed the manufactures recommended amounts because they feel that feeding that amount would make their horse fat or too excitable. This is fine but be aware that your horse may not be getting their entire nutrient requirements met if you feed this way.

The manufacturers name and address are required to be on the label. The statement starting "manufactured by..." identified the party responsible for the quality and safety of the product and its location. If the label says "manufactured for..." or "distributed by..." Then the food was manufactured

by an outside source but the name on the label still designates the responsible party. There may also be a contact phone number. If you have questions or concerns about any product so not hesitate to contact the party given on the feed label. This is how we dealt with the feed contamination issue I discussed earlier and the feed company was very pleased to know they had a quality control problem and provided the client with a free bag of feed.

At the very least, the label must give the minimum percentages of crude protein and fat and maximum percentages of crude fiber. These are part of the guaranteed analysis. The term "crude" refers to the methods used to test the product are rough estimates of nutrient content. Amounts of other nutrients may also be given for example ash (total mineral content) calcium, phosphorous and some vitamins. Traditionally the percentages given on the label does approximate the actual amount of that nutrient in that bag/container. If the percent is a minimum for example 14% crude protein you can be fairly sure that there will be slightly more than that in the feed for example 14.3%. There will be enough to insure the manufacturer's claims are met but not so much that unnecessary extra amounts of a nutrient are being added. Generally speaking the percentage crude fiber in a feed gives a rough idea of the feeds energy content. Concentrate mixes with less than 6% crude fiber are dense in energy and require careful management, with 8-12% crude fiber being a moderate energy feed and 18% or over being relatively low. Note that most senior complete feeds have high (approx. 18%) crude fiber. This is because they aim to provide the horse his fiber requirements for horses unable to eat hay these feeds have energy contents not dissimilar to hay. If the calcium, phosphorous and salt in a feed total 5.5% or higher of the total mix manufacturers are required to give the minimum and maximum percent calcium, minimum percent phosphorous and the minimum and maximum percent salt.

Under the guaranteed analysis is the ingredient list. Ingredients in the product are required to be given in descending order of predominance by weight. This means that there is more of the first given ingredient than the second on a weight basis and so on down the list. However there is a catch here in that the ingredients are weighed in their "as fed" wet state. This means that they have not been dried to remove the water content, and some feeds like molasses are high in water content so the actual nutrients coming from that feed will be less than other feeds further down the list. Generally though it is safe to assume that the higher up the list the more of that ingredient there is in the feed. This is very helpful if you are trying to avoid certain ingredients. Some horses have food allergies and so reading the fed label can be critical. However there is catch. In order to keep costs down manufacturers sometimes use collective feed names/terms. For example the ingredient list might say grain product, which could be oats, corn, barley or rice, or perhaps it says processed grain by-product which could be wheat bran, rice bran, wheat mill run, brewers dried grains. The collective terms are laid out by AAFCO and this allows feed companies to use whichever grain product is available at a good price when that batch of feed is made up and means they don't have to print new labels. They are able to move with fluctuations in the market and as long as the guaranteed analysis is met the ingredients can be manipulated. Whereas if the ingredients state "oats" specifically they cannot use barley instead. However, another caveat is that while an ingredient is listed it does not have to be in the feed. So if it says oats and there are no oats for a certain period of time the oats can be left out the label left unchanged and as long as the guaranteed analysis can be met everything is fine. This is great for the feed manufacturers but not

so helpful for horse owners who are trying to find out what exactly is in a feed. My experience has been that the higher quality feeds use fewer collective feed terms and while you will likely pay more for this feed you will be more likely to know what is in it.

In the next newsletter I'll touch on some more labeling requirements that are perhaps more pertinent to supplement labeling. ☺

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