

Q & A—Feeding Your First Horse

CI am 13 years old, and my parents have finally agreed to buy me my very own horse. It's a dream come true. Before we can begin looking for a horse, my parents gave me a list of questions I must answer. Here's one of them: "Who will you go to if you have a question about feeding your horse?" I couldn't think of anything, so I thought I'd ask you! They're satisfied with my other answers, so I am only one question away from fulfilling a dream. Help me, please.


ACongratulations! Owning a horse may be one of the greatest joys in your life. I think what your parents are trying to convey is that responsible horse ownership does not require that you know how to resolve every challenge of horse management. What is critical, however, is that you know where to go to find competent answers. That quality is called resourcefulness, and it is a gift that should be nurtured and used throughout life.

Are you involved in 4-H, FFA, or Pony Club? Adult leaders of these groups are often knowledgeable horsemen and horsewomen with horses of their own, and they will be glad to help you should you have a question about feeding your horse. The advantages of becoming a member of one these groups are incredible. Fellowship and educational opportunities abound for children and young adults. I encourage you to find out if one or more is available in your area. If possible, join and learn!

Where will you purchase your horse's feed? If you're like most horse owners, you will become loyal to a local feed company. Sometimes these stores will employ an individual that has many years of practical experience in handling and feeding horses. This person should be able to recommend a feed that is appropriate for your horse based on the forage (hay or pasture) that it is consuming, but he or she may not be able to answer more convoluted nutrition questions.

Often, locally owned feed companies work with large consulting firms that employ scientists devoted entirely to horse nutrition. So, if the employee at the feed company cannot provide an answer to a given question, he may be willing to pass along your query to a more knowledgeable individual.

Don't forget your veterinarian, the very person that has made a lifelong commitment of caring for animals. As you know, veterinarians do more than stitch wounds and administer vaccinations. They often possess a wealth of information about feeds and feeding management, and how mismanagement might adversely affect a horse's health. Occasionally, a veterinarian will not feel comfortable dispensing in-depth nutrition advice but will gladly give you the name of a nutrition expert to contact.

With a little resourcefulness on your part, you will find that many people are willing to help you make the right nutrition choices for your horse. All you have to do is ask! 



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