



KENTUCKY
HORSE COUNCIL

MINIMUM STANDARDS OF CARE IN KENTUCKY

A publication of the Kentucky Horse Council
Updated 2023

kentuckyhorse.org

Table of Contents

FOOD.....	1
Forage.....	1
Concentrates.....	2
HENNEKE BODY CONDITION CHART.....	3
DRINK.....	4
SPACE.....	5
HEALTH CARE.....	5

Horses can survive in a variety of conditions if they are provided adequate feed and water. Harsh environments may warrant feed and shelter adaptations, and horses benefit greatly from regular preventative care.

Any citizen of the Commonwealth who is concerned about the welfare of a horse may contact the Office of the Kentucky State Veterinarian to report suspected equine neglect or abuse via a form on their website, which can be found at <https://www.kyagr.com/statevet/kentucky-livestock-welfare.html>

Photos provided by Sarah Coleman and Jennifer Roytz



The Kentucky Horse Council is a nonprofit organization dedicated, through education and leadership, to the protection and development of the Kentucky equine community.

Introduction

Kentucky law (KRS 525.130) requires that all animals have adequate food, drink, space and health care. This publication describes the minimum food, drink, space and health care requirements for horses.

FOOD

A horse's nutritional needs can best be determined by classifying the individual horse into one of the following categories and feeding accordingly:

- Maintenance
- Gestation (pregnant)
- Lactation (nursing)
- Growth
- Work

A horse in **maintenance** should be fed to maintain current body condition, neither gaining nor losing weight. Ideal body condition score for maintenance is 5 to 6 on the Henneke Body Condition Scoring System (for more information on this scoring system, see sidebar).

During the later stages of **gestation**, pregnant mares require additional nutrients above the maintenance level to maintain body condition and support the growing fetus.

Additional feed (above maintenance requirements) may also be required for horses that are in **lactation (nursing)**, **growth** or **work** phases of their lives. Examples of working horses that may require additional feed include horses in training, performance horses, racehorses, trail horses, show horses and those involved in other physical activities.

Forage

Horses are grazers, meaning they are physiologically designed to eat grass. The basis for all horse diets should be hay or pasture (forage). Many horses can maintain weight by eating good-quality forage if they also have access to a mineral salt and water.

Pasture and hay are appropriate forages for horses and can contain grasses or legumes, or a combination of both. Legumes include alfalfa, clover and lespedeza. Grasses and grass hays commonly found in Kentucky include orchard, fescue, bluegrass and timothy.

Free-choice hay or pasture is optimal for most horses. Horses should consume at least 1½ percent of their body weight in forage each day. A 1,000-pound horse should eat 15 pounds or more of hay or pasture per day. Horse hay should be dry, palatable, and free of dust and mold.

HAY GUIDELINE

Horses should eat at least 1½ percent of their body weight in forage (grass or hay) per day.

THE HENNEKE BODY CONDITION SCORING (BCS) SYSTEM

The Henneke system is a scientific method of evaluating a horse's body condition regardless of breed, body type, age or sex. The numeric system requires both a visual and hands-on inspection to determine the amount of fat deposits, muscle development, bone and prominence in the horse's body in six key places. These locations are used as they are the most responsive to changes in body fat.

They include:

- Neck
- Withers
- Shoulder
- Ribs
- Loin
- Tailhead

The system uses a scale of 1 to 9 to describe the body condition of a horse, with 1 being extremely thin and 9 being extremely fat. The ideal score for most horses is between 4 and 6.



Concentrates

Often horses that are growing, working, lactating or in late stages of pregnancy require more nutrients than they can obtain eating forage alone. Horses with nutritional requirements that exceed the available forage need to be supplemented with concentrates.

Concentrates are available in a variety of forms, including sweet feed and pellets. Both are made with grains (oats, corn, barley, etc.), minerals and other feedstuffs that encourage weight gain, increase milk production and supply energy needed for performance.

Formulated concentrates are available at feed and farm-supply stores, and should be fed according to the instructions on the label or under the supervision of an equine nutritionist. Horses that require more than 5 pounds per day of concentrates should have their concentrates broken into multiple feedings so as not to overload the digestive system.

When feeding a group of horses, concentrate receptacles should be adequate for the number of horses so that each horse can eat out of a container. Based on herd behavior, individual horses may need to be separated for feeding to ensure they are able to ingest their full ration without being run off. Older and younger horses both may require specialized concentrate rations to maintain body condition.

Complete feeds are available and can be used to replace some or the entirety of a horse's forage requirements. When feeding a complete feed intended to replace forage, it is important to follow label instructions accordingly and divide feedings into multiple small meals per day.

BODY CONDITION SCORING

Just like humans, horses come in all shapes and sizes, and each has a different metabolism. Often people struggle with a subjective system of labeling horses as thin, fat or just right. An easy way to determine the condition of a horse is to gauge their body condition score (BCS) using the Henneke Body Condition Scoring Chart (see table on page 3).

The neck, withers, shoulder, ribs, loin and tailhead should be examined both visually and by touch; the scores for each area should be recorded. The body condition score of the horse is the average of the six scores. Scores range from 1 to 9, with an acceptable BCS from 4 to 7. The ideal BCS is 5.

Horses with less-than-ideal BCS (3 or lower) may need a change in diet to increase their nutrient intake to accommodate their needs. Horses with a BCS greater than 7 also need a change in diet to decrease their caloric intake to help them lose excess weight.

The physical appearance of a horse can appear far different from the actual score it receives, especially if the horse has a thick hair coat, is pregnant or has prominent bone structure (high withers, angular hips, etc). It is imperative that you touch each of the six areas to accurately determine body condition score.

CONCENTRATES GUIDELINE

Horses that are unable to meet their nutritional requirements by eating forage alone should be supplemented with concentrates.



BCS GUIDELINE

The ideal body condition score for a horse is 5. Horses with certain chronic health conditions (like an endocrine disorder) may maintain low body condition scores despite being offered acceptable nourishment and having the ability to ingest it. Some older horses may not maintain body condition well. Law enforcement officials (often animal control officers and sheriffs) are often called to investigate the care of a horse with a body condition score of less than 3 to ensure that the horse is not being neglected and that it is being offered the minimum food, drink, space and health care requirements.

HENNEKE BODY CONDITION SCORING CHART



CONDITION	NECK	WITHERS	SHOULDER	RIBS	LOIN	TAILHEAD
1 Poor	Bone structure easily noticeable	Bone structure easily noticeable	Bone structure easily noticeable	Ribs protruding prominently	Spinous processes projecting prominently	Tailhead, pin bones and hook bones projecting prominently
2 Very Thin	Bone structure faintly discernible	Bone structure faintly discernible	Bone structure faintly discernible	Ribs prominent	Slight fat covering over base of spinous processes. Transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded. Spinous processes are prominent	Tailhead prominent
3 Thin	Neck accentuated	Withers accentuated	Shoulder accentuated	Slight fat over ribs; ribs easily discernible	Fat buildup halfway on spinous processes, but easily discernible. Traverse processes cannot be felt	Tailhead prominent, but individual vertebrae cannot be visibly identified. Hook bones appear rounded, but are still easily identifiable. Pin bones not distinguishable
4 Moderately Thin	Neck not obviously thin	Withers not obviously thin	Shoulder not obviously thin	Faint outline of ribs discernible	Negative crease (peaked appearance) along back	Prominence depends on conformation. Fat can be felt. Hook bones not discernable
5 Moderate (Ideal Weight)	Neck blends smoothly into body	Withers rounded over spinous processes	Shoulder blends smoothly into body	Ribs cannot be visually distinguished, but can easily be felt	Back is level	Fat around tailhead beginning to feel soft
6 Moderately Fleshy	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat over ribs feels spongy	May have a slight positive crease (a groove) down back	Fat around tailhead feels soft
7 Fleshy	Fat deposited along neck	Fat deposited along withers	Fat deposited behind shoulder	Individual ribs can be felt with pressure, but noticeable fat filling between ribs	May have a positive crease down the back	Fat around tailhead is soft

HENNEKE BODY CONDITION SCORING CHART



CONDITION	NECK	WITHERS	SHOULDER	RIBS	LOIN	TAILHEAD
8 Fat	Noticeable thickening of the neck	Area along withers filled with fat	Area behind shoulder flush with body	Difficult to feel ribs	Positive crease down the back	Fat around tailhead very soft
9 Extremely Fat	Bulging fat	Bulging fat	Bulging fat	Patchy fat appearing over ribs	Obvious crease down the back	Bulging fat around tailhead

DRINK

Water is the most essential nutrient for horses. Horses must consume water daily to maintain normal body functions. The amount of water a horse requires will vary by individual based on level of work, stage of growth, reproductive status and lactation. In addition, the environment and weather can impact the horse’s need for water consumption.

The average horse consumes 5 to 12 gallons of water daily. During lactation, the amount of water required may increase by as much as 70 percent. Horses experiencing regular and rigorous work may require up to three times more water than the average horse.

Ideally, a horse would always have free-choice access to unfrozen water. Allowing a horse to drink clean water as it wants and when it wants encourages optimum health and well-being. There are circumstances that prevent free-choice access to water; in those cases, horses should be offered their fill of contaminant-free water at least twice daily.

DRINK GUIDELINE
 Horses should have free-choice access to unfrozen water at all times. If this is not possible, the horse should be offered his fill of contaminant-free water at least twice daily.



SPACE

Horses can be housed pastured or in stables, or in a combination of both. Keeping horses on pasture is the most cost- and labor-efficient manner to house them. Horses should have ample room so that the meekest among them can access food and drink.

Exercise is important to maintain a horse's mental and physical health. Horses are very social creatures and daily turnout with other horses is optimal.

Pastures should be free of hazards likely to cause injury and fencing should be in good condition.

Stall containments should be large enough so that horses can turn completely around and lie down comfortably. Most horses can live in an average 12-foot-by-12-foot stall if they have daily exercise. Horses should have at least 6 inches of clearance above their ears when standing in a normal position. It is important that stabling areas are well ventilated to avoid respiratory diseases and infections.

Shelter, either natural or constructed, provides relief from the elements. Natural windbreak can be found from tree lines or low areas; natural shade is primarily available under trees. Constructed shelters may include barns, three-sided shelters, windscreen, building or other. Constructed shelters should be free of hazards likely to cause injury.

HEALTH CARE

Horses require regular preventative care for optimum health. Horses should be checked thoroughly every day for injuries or ailments that may require additional health care or veterinary attention.

Preventative care for the average horse typically includes an annual dental examination, annual vaccinations, deworming as directed by a veterinarian and hoof care every 6 to 10 weeks (on average).

The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) recommends basic annual vaccines (called "core vaccines") for Kentucky horses that including Eastern and Western Equine Encephalomyelitis, West Nile Virus, tetanus, and rabies. Other vaccines may be recommended by the horse's veterinarian based on its use and location.

Kentucky law requires horses that travel (to horse shows, trail ride, etc.) to have a negative Coggins test (a simple blood test for Equine Infectious Anemia, a mosquito-borne, potentially fatal illness that is transmissible from horse to horse via biting insects) within the last 12 months. Certain facilities and trails may require the horse also have a certificate of veterinary inspection (CVI) to indicate health before the horse is allowed to unload.



SPACE GUIDELINE

Horses should have adequate space and the ability to exercise daily without danger of injury. Space should afford protection from the elements and allow room for horses to maneuver without fighting.



HEALTH CARE GUIDELINE

Horses should appear alert and without obvious signs of unattended injury or illness. A horse suffering with an acute or chronic injury or illness should be under veterinary supervision. Horse's hooves should be maintained so that the horse can stand and move at all gaits comfortably and with full range of motion.

