FEEDING PRACTICES AT STANDARDBRED AND THOROUGHBRED STABLES

L.L. SOUTHWOOD, D.L. EVANS*, W.L. BRYDEN**, AND R.J. ROSE

There are few published surveys of feeding practices at racehorse stables and there is limited information on the nutrient requirements of racehorses. The study reported here describes a survey of feeding practices at 25 Thoroughbred (TB) and 25 Standardbred (SB) stables in the Sydney region. Participating trainers were asked to make up the daily feed of a 4-6 year old gelding of average size, in full training. The main ingredients of this ration were weighted individually.

A computer analysis of the diet, using the Equine Nutritionist software programme (N-Squared Computing, U.S.A) was carried out using the weights of the main dietary ingredients. The programme estimated the concentration of the major dietary nutrients and compared these with recommended values (NRC 1989).

The average weight of the TB horses was 493kg (range 425-555kg) and the SB horses 437kg (range 379-500kg). SB horses were fed on average, 11.8kg/day (as fed) and TB 11.0kg/day. The mean digestible energy (DE) intake of SB was 132MJ/day (range 94-213MJ) and for TB 129MJ (range 75-192MJ). On average, TB trainers fed 95% and SB 108% of the NRC energy requirements for horses performing "intense work". The average amount of concentrates fed by both trainers was 7.7kg/day. The average amount of roughage (hay and chaff) fed by SB trainers was 4.1kg and TB trainers 3.3kg. The average daily intake of hay was 2kg for TB and 1.6kg for SB horses whereas chaff intake was 1.5kg/day for TB and 2.4kg/day for SB horses.

The average intake of crude protein from the SB diet was 1442g/day (range 898-2129g) and 1452g/day (range 723-2104g) from the TB diet. The SB trainers fed 124% and TB 112% of NRC requirements.

The DE and crude protein content of both SB and TB horses' diets was lower than expected, being about 80% of that fed in other surveys in the USA (Glade 1983) and Australia (Henderson 1978). The amount of roughage fed by all trainers in this survey was about 50% of that fed by racehorse trainers in the USA. We were surprised at the similarity between SB and TB diets, given the greater workload of SB. However there were some interesting differences: hay was the main roughage source for TB horses whereas chaff was the main source for SB horses. The mean roughage:concentrate ratio for SB was 2.8:1 whereas for TB was 2.1:1. Despite being unaware of the scientific aspects of horse nutrition, this study has shown that trainers using traditional feeding practices feed their horses close to recommended NRC requirements.

GLADE, M.J. (1983). Equine Vet. J. 15: 31.
HENDERSON, C. (1978). Unpublished data.
National Research Council (1989). "Nutrient Requirements of Horses." 5th rev.ed. (National Academic Press: Washington, D.C.)

Departments of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, Veterinary Physiology* and Animal Science**, University of Sydney, NSW 2006