



Canter For Climate



PROPERTY MANAGEMENT FOR HEALTHY HORSES

FACTSHEET #5

FACTSHEET 5/5

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PROPERTY MANAGEMENT FOR HEALTHY HORSES

We would all love to provide our horses with a happy healthy environment to live in. The way we lay out the paddocks on our property can make a substantial difference to the life of our horses.

For a horse to be healthy and happy they need:

1. Constant access to clean water
2. Constant access to roughage
3. Dietary requirements met - calorie and nutritional
4. Choice in their diet
5. Movement
6. Being able to socialise and not being bored



1. Constant access to clean water

While a horse can survive up to five days without water (sometimes even longer in cold weather); going more than 24 hours without water can lead to colic, well before severe dehydration sets in.

2. Constant access to roughage

A horses' gut needs fibre. See Factsheet 4 for more detail.

The reason horses prefer short grass is because it is "sweeter". Short grass is generally high in Non-Structural Carbohydrates (NSCs) i.e. sugars and simple starches, dramatically increasing a horses risk of Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS).

If the pasture is very lush and lacking fibre, horse may seek out browse like woody shrubs. So, in very wet times when the grass is "all water" horse may eat poisonous plants that they have previously ignored in their paddock.

Horses on pasture should eat tallish grasses not only short grass

3. Dietary needs met

There is a wealth of information on this topic available. As this is not a key topic for discussion by the Canter for Climate organisation it will not be covered here in the Factsheets.

Please see our Resource Library for suggestions on suitable information sources.

4. Choice in their diet

In the wild horses will be selecting their intake to match their needs. By providing diverse species in your pasture you can allow them to mimic natural behaviour. Horses will graze many of the Forbes/broadleaf (non-grass) plants that we call weeds i.e. cobbler's peg (*Bidens pilosa*), sida species, Shade Plantain (*Plantago debilis*).

Some of these can be poisonous, so you need to learn those that occur in your area. However, many are helpful in providing vitamins and minerals not as abundant in grasses. Horses will often seek particular plants at different growth stages looking for specific nutrients

You can provide a wide range of species in the paddock for your horses to select what it wants/needs by changing grazing practices and planting species other than grasses and legumes in the paddock.

For example: sunflowers, plantain, turnip, kale, forage brassica, swede, chicory, buckwheat, linseed, chaff, quinoa, flax, etc



5 Constant ability to move

Exercise is essential to maintaining overall horse health. Muscles, bones, and hooves suffer from insufficient movement. The risks of many metabolic disorders like Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS), an endocrine condition that leads to poor insulin regulation and Cushing's, etc can be reduced by horses having access to regular movement throughout the day.

Horses walk more when grazing taller, more diverse pasture as they seek out different plants.

When horses are being stripped grazed they are confined to relative small areas, especially if you only own a few horses.



Photo: www.horsetalk.co.nz

You can ensure they achieve the necessary exercise, if you can't ride every day or two by:

- Releasing them each day from the strip into the remaining paddock and encourages them to have a run around for a time. Feed bins soon get them back into their current strip.
- Provide a thin strip of fresh pick each move but allow the herd access to previously grazed areas up to a week back (as per the photo).
- Providing laneways to water and shade etc away from the area they are grazing. See Paddock Paradise / Track System below for further information.

6. Being able to socialise and not being bored

Horses are a herd animal and most find emotional stability from being in a group. Horses without social interactions and other activities to keep their brains active often develop bad habits like wind sucking, weaving or just become sour.

Paddock Paradise / Track System

You can provide your horses' needs for constant access to roughage, movement and not being bored by locating the water, resting areas, hay and grazing areas in separate locations on your property. Laneways or tracks joining these locations allows the horse to move between them.



Diagram: Mountain Ash Insights. Horses on Small Acres Webinar

Image: An example of a Track System.

In most climates these tracks will have to be surfaced (i.e. crusher dust, coarse sand or similar applied) so they don't become dusty/muddy messes. A variety of surfaces can provide additional mental enrichment.

For further information on how and why to establish a Track System see links at end.



Photo: Paddock Paradise



Photo: Alena Vostatkova

To allow the strip grazing of your pastures you will need many access points from your lanes into the paddocks.

The track system is particularly useful on very small properties and/or when you pastures need a spell and you are providing hay. By placing the water and hay in different locations around the track it encourages movement of the herd, while also giving the pastures a rest from grazing, which it needs.



If tracks cannot be established on your property, then fencing off corners of paddocks, preferably where the pasture is in the worst condition, to feed hay is also a useful practice. The area where the horses are fed the hay will become enriched with hay, manure and urine and can be seeded with a diverse pasture mix once the horses are back grazing the rest of the paddocks.

Locking your horses up on hay before all pasture is utilised can allow a few hours of pasture to be offered each day.

Further Information

Book: [Paddock Paradise](#) by Jamie Jackson

Blog: [My Paddock Paradise on 5 Acres](#) by Liberty Supplies
[Equicentral / Track System compared for horse & land management](#) by Equiculture

Video: [Welcome to our Horse track system - Paddock paradise](#) by This is Becca Lilly
[Tour of our Wild Meadow's Paddock Paradise 2020](#). by Wild Meadows Equestrian Centre

Summary

By providing all the basic needs of our horses we ensure not only their physical but also mental health. While clean water and good feed including ample amounts of roughage are well known, horses also need access to regular movement and the ability to socialise to be truly healthy and happy.

Changing the way we lay out our paddocks and the way we give them access to pasture can make a huge difference in the well being of the animals in our care.

Pastures with diverse species with taller grasses (30+cm) help provide a balanced healthy diet. Tracks around the property allowing your horses to move about and access water, shelter and pasture as they want and need keeps them mentally alert, emotionally balanced as well as physically fitter.

References

Equiculture

www.equiculture.net

Free mini course: [Horse, Pasture & Grazing course.](#)

Paddock Paradise by Jaime Jackson

<https://www.all-natural-horse-care.com/paddock-paradise.html>

<https://www.aanhcp.net/pages/welcome-to-paddock-paradise>

NQ Dry Tropics NRM - Healthy Soils Project

www.nqdrytropics.com.au

