



# Horse Bits

## Horse Industry Newsletter-July/August, 2009



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### Vesicular Stomatitis Quarantine Lifted in Starr County, Texas

#### From the Texas Animal Health Commission

Texas animal health officials have lifted a quarantine on a ranch in Starr County, where horses have recovered from vesicular stomatitis (VS), a virus that occurs sporadically in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming and other western states. Currently, there are no quarantines or active investigations for vesicular stomatitis in Texas. Livestock susceptible to VS include horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, deer and other cloven-hooved animals. Infected animals can develop blisters, lesions and sloughing of skin on the muzzles, tongue, teats and above the hooves and usually recover in two to three weeks. To prevent the spread of this virus, which is not fully understood, quarantines remain in effect at least 21 days after the animal's lesions have healed.

"Although the quarantine in Texas is released, some states may continue to enforce enhanced entry requirements or restrictions on Texas livestock until the height of the VS 'season' ends in late fall, when temperatures drop. New Mexico also has had VS this year, and it is possible that another VS case could be detected in Texas, since the virus is active this year," said Dr. Bob Hillman, Texas' state veterinarian and head of the Texas Animal Health Commission, the state's livestock and poultry health regulatory agency. He urged private veterinary practitioners and livestock owners to check with the states of destination prior to moving animals to ensure all entry requirements are met.

Dr. Hillman explained that the clinical signs of VS mimic the highly dangerous foot-and-mouth disease, and a veterinary exam and laboratory tests are needed to confirm a diagnosis. "Horses are not susceptible to foot-and-mouth disease, but they are often the first animals to get VS," said Dr. Hillman. "We can assist with private veterinary practitioners with disease investigations at no charge, and we can receive disease reports 24 hours a day at 800-550-8242."

#### More on Equine Gastric Ulcer Syndrome (EGUS)

Research is continuing on EGUS at Texas A&M. Collaborative projects between the Department of Animal Science and the College of Veterinary Medicine have been on-going for the past 3 years. Interesting results have been emerging from the joint efforts of Dr. Dennis Sigler, Dr. Pete Gibbs, Dr. Noah Cohen, Dr. Clay Cavinder and graduate students. Initial studies have indicated that feeding alfalfa hay compared to coastal hay reduces the severity of ulcers in yearlings. Further study confirmed that alfalfa was beneficial in reducing the severity of gastric ulcers and that trace mineral supplements had little effect on ulcer scores. A third study is on-going and addresses the question of whether supplemental calcium might affect gastric ulcers. Research at University of Illinois, which was reported at the recent Equine Science Society meetings, showed that after only 8 weeks on a high concentrate diet, ulcer scores increased by 3-fold.

Ulcers affect many performance horses. It has been reported that up to 93% of all race horses are affected by EGUS. Recent research by April Knudson, Manager of Veterinary Services, Merial, found that 76% of reining horses studied had some ulceration and that 60% of horses of all breeds and ages had stomach ulcers. The most recent study at Texas A&M found that 76% of the yearlings previously kept in pasture, had a grade 2 or 3 ulcer upon initial endoscopic examination.

One of the causative factors in EGUS is stress, which can come in various forms. Unfortunately, many of the things horses go through daily, can be considered stressful. Research will continue to try to find ways to manage horse to reduce stress and to manipulate the diet to reduce the severity of EGUS without sacrificing performance potential.

#### Faculty Member and Graduate Students Honored at Annual Equine Meeting

A faculty member and two graduate students from the department of Animal Science were among the award recipients at the Equine Science Society meeting held in Keystone, CO., May 29-31, 2009.

**Dr. Brett Scott**, Assistant Professor and Extension Horse Specialist, received the society's Outstanding Educator Award, an award presented to a society member who has demonstrated excellence in the area of equine education, either to students or to industry.

Graduate students **Jessica Lucia** and **Shannon Garey** each were recognized in the Graduate Student Paper competition. Lucia received first place in the Exercise Physiology Competition while Shannon Garey earned the third place award in the Production and Management Paper Competition.

The Texas A&M Department of Animal Science was strongly represented at the meeting. Members of the faculty who attended include Clay Cavinder, Josie Coverdale, Brett Scott, Dennis Sigler and Martha Vogelsang. A&M Graduate Students in attendance included Shannon Garey, Sicilia Grady (now at CSU), Lexie Hayes, Cassidy Kurtz, Jessica Lucia and Kelly Winsco.

The bi-annual meeting featured scientific research papers on equine nutrition, exercise physiology, reproduction and genetics plus presentation on equine teaching and extension. There were 305 equine research, teaching and extension people in attendance. A total of 161 scientific papers and posters were presented.

Researchers from Texas A&M presented eight papers with four additional papers presented which were co-authored from TAMU. Texas A&M University presented the second largest number of papers by any university, behind the University of Kentucky.

## **Considerations for Choosing Quality Forages for Horses**

The severe drought conditions in some parts of the state and good growing conditions in other areas, bring to light the need for careful selection of forages for horses. Depending on location, hay may be in short supply, non-existent, or may be of poor quality because of over-maturity. In a few cases, hay may be unfit for horses because it has been rained on during harvest and contains mold. Horse owners may be forced to consider feeding lower quality hay or they may have to choose alternate forages because of shortages.

Research on colic conducted at Texas A&M (Cohen, Gibbs, Woods, 1999) during previous drought periods has shown that change in hay type is one of the single biggest dietary factors associated with digestive disturbance in horses. Horses do not tolerate dietary change well, and the shortage of hay may cause horse owners to feed hay of different types, or from different batches. Even the same type of hay can vary a great deal in quality, depending on how it was managed, when it was cut and where it was grown. The drought conditions have forced some horse owners to switch hays more often, compared to more normal years. Transition to a new batch or type of hay should be made gradually, if possible, to reduce the likelihood of digestive disturbance in horses being switched from one batch of hay to another.

When locally available grass hay, such as coastal Bermudagrass, is in short supply, some owners may consider switching their horses to alfalfa hay being shipped into Texas from neighboring states. Alfalfa is an excellent forage for horses as long as it is harvested at the right stage of maturity, is clean, free of mold, and contains no blister beetles. If horses are not accustomed to eating alfalfa, it is recommended that they be allowed a gradual transition, preferably over 2 to 3 weeks, to avoid digestive upsets. As grass hay gets more expensive, due to shortages, it may be more economical to feed alfalfa. Alfalfa has about twice the value of most grass hays as a protein source for mares and foals and about 110 to 120% the value of grass hay as an energy source. If the hay is being considered as a source of both energy and protein, a good rule of thumb is that alfalfa is worth about 1.5 times what grass hay costs. On an equal weight basis, when good quality grass hay costs more than \$7 for small square bales, alfalfa at \$10 per bale or less, is a better buy. Some processed forms of roughage also can be useful during a hay shortage. Processed roughage can be found in pelleted, cubed and chopped/bagged forms. On a pound for pound comparison, these roughage sources are usually more expensive than traditional square bales. However, the feeding value can be higher because many of these alfalfa-based roughages have a guaranteed nutrient content. One solution to getting through these tough times is to use both grass hay and a processed roughage such as those mentioned above. This can help stretch existing hay supplies. For horses that also get fed some concentrate feed, total roughage at 0.75% to 1 % of body weight will usually meet the roughage need and minimize vices such as wood chewing and chewing of manes and tails.

### **To get the best value in forages for horses:**

1. Buy hay by the ton, if possible, and buy a several month supply at a time.
2. Buy hay that has been tested for basic nutrients, prior to purchase, or at least test it yourself after purchase.
3. Buy hay that has all come from the same field and same cutting.
4. Buy hay that has been fertilized properly and cut at the right stage of maturity.
5. Inspect all shipments of hay for bale weight, dryness, high leaf to stem ratio, cleanliness, smell, free from mold and weeds.
6. Consider other sources of forage, when normal forage is in short supply.

For more information on selection and use of hay and processed roughage in feeding horses, go to <http://animalscience.tamu.edu> and click on equine science or horse program.

(Source of some of the information presented here: Feeding Horses During Drought Conditions, Texas AgriLife Extension Publication. P.G. Gibbs)

**Previous issues of Horse Bits can be found at:**  
<http://animalscience.tamu.edu/academics/equine/horse-bits/archives-horse-bits/index.htm>

## **Texas State 4-H Horse Show is a Big Success**

The 47th Annual Texas State 4-H was held July 25th –August 1. 781 exhibitors and their families converged on Abilene for the week-long horse show. There were a total of 2218 entries which is only slightly down from last year. Some class entries were actually up, including the Working Cowhorse class which had 102 youngsters entered. The largest number of entries was in the speed events with Barrel Racing at 178 entries and Pole Bending with 171. In the qualifying judged events, Showmanship at Halter had 144 entries, followed by Western Pleasure with 130. 4-H'ers from 143 counties attended the annual show which is a culmination of the past year's hard work and dedication to their horse projects. Horse projects can involve older show horses or yearling, 2 year-old or 3 year-old futurity projects. The show is managed and run by Texas AgriLife Extension Specialists, County Extension Agents, District Administrators and adult volunteer leaders from across the state. Major sponsors for the show are Cargill Animal Nutrition, Wrangler, and Tony Llama Boot Company. Numerous Buckle Sponsors and individual business sponsors make this show a huge success and educational, rewarding and fun for all who attend. Those interested in sponsoring the show in 2010 may contact the State Extension Horse Specialist's office.

**This year's show was dedicated to Tony McMillian, former Executive Vice President and General Manager of the West Texas Fair and Rodeo, for his many years of dedication and service to the Texas State 4-H Horse Program.**

## **AQHA Sponsors International Horsemanship Clinics Conducted by Texas A&M Students**

The Texas A&M Equine program recently participated in an international program funded by a grant received from the American Quarter Horse Association. Selected university students had the opportunity to educate European western riding enthusiasts with basic and advanced riding skills. Texas A&M conducted clinics in Sala and Malmö, Sweden and Wenden, Germany from July 12 through August 3, 2009. Approximately 20 riders and horses participated in each clinic and subjects included basic horsemanship, controlling the various parts of the horse, lead changes, and education on proper feeding, conformation, and equipment usage. This was the 3rd trip that Dr. Clay Cavinder has made as the leader of these teams but each year the team has been comprised of different TAMU students; therefore, offering approximately 4 students per year with an opportunity to experience the equine industry outside of the US and to gain experience in teaching. The Animal Science Department had 3 undergraduates and 1 graduate student who were the instructors for the clinics; Cassidy Kurtz, Derrick Caddell, Brittanie Sutton, and Teresa Meier.

## **Just a Reminder- National Reining Horse Association Judging Seminar**

The Texas A&M Equine Science Section, in conjunction with the Heart of Texas Reining Horse Association, will be hosting its first ever National Reining Horse Association judging seminar. The 2-day seminar will be held on the campus of Texas A&M University on August 29th-30th. The seminar will be conducted by an approved NRHA clinician and will cover the basics of judging a reining horse run along with in-depth discussion concerning penalties and maneuvers. In addition to providing information on what the judge is looking for in a reining run, participants will have the opportunity to complete the NRHA judges exam in hopes of passing and attending an NRHA approved school. The cost of attendance is \$65 and those who wish to test must pay an additional \$100 and be a current NRHA member. For more information please contact Dr. Clay Cavinder at (979) 845-7731 or by email at [cac@tamu.edu](mailto:cac@tamu.edu).

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