

Feed Bag Tips

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Understanding a feed tag can be confusing. You don't have to be a nutritionist to get the information you need from a tag. A little knowledge goes a long way, and not all horses need the best feed. There are few things to keep in mind when choosing a feed to suit your horse's needs.

You can tell how much energy a feed has by looking at the fat and fiber—the higher the fat, the higher the energy.

The higher the fiber, the lower the energy. This is a rule of thumb. Some better feeds have digestible fibers like beet pulp.

What is a good source of energy?

Fat and digestible fibers will fuel your horses and give them the energy needed to do long distance rides. It is important to feed a high fat feed. Carbohydrates are the most readily available energy source and all feeds will have some amount of sugar and starch in them. A good thing to look at in your feed is the non-structural carbohydrate (NSC) amount. This number can be obtained by adding the starch and sugar. A low NSC is generally considered to be 20% or less. If you have a metabolic concern with your horse, you may want to stay below the number. Some feeds have a 30% NSC. Horse feed is similar to human food in that the unhealthy feed is cheap and the good feed is expensive. There is no health food on the dollar menu.

The most expensive part of a feed is the fortification. If the feed mills leave out the vitamins and minerals, then they can sell the feed for far less than if they add these nutrients. Look to see what nutrients are guaranteed. You want a nice long list.

Protein quality is very important. You can tell if you are getting quality, digestible proteins by looking to see if amino acids are guaranteed on the feed tag. **Lysine** is the limiting amino acid, meaning that if it runs out, the other amino acids cannot be used. You at least want a guaranteed lysine level. It's better to have **methionine** and **threonine** guaranteed, as well.

Inexpensive feeds are “least costed.” This means that the formula will change based on the commodities market. If the tag says “grain products” the company has the option to use oats sometimes and barley others, depending on what is least expensive at the time. So the feed may change and you wouldn't even know it. Not all feeds that say grain products are least costed. The large companies that do all the research use ambiguous ingredients because the small companies don't have the ability to do research. They copy the big companies formulas and then undersell them. You can always call the company and ask if their formula is least costed.

All feed companies, big and small, have “good, better, and best feeds.” You truly get what you pay for when buying feed. For example, Nutrena's “good” feed is **Triumph**, Their “better” feed is **Safe Choice**. Their “best” feed is **Proforce**. Purina has even more variety. The **Country Acres** line is bare bones, The **Impact** line is “good” The “better” feed is **Strategy** and the “best” is **Ultium**.

I see people buying the “good” feed and then adding all kinds of expensive supplements to it. It's more cost effective and convenient to just buy the “best” feed than to doctor up a “good” feed.

I studied nutrition for four years at Texas A&M and I am still learning. It is a real science to get your feeding program right. It is incredible how much bad information is out there. Do your own research as much as possible. If you do ask for advice, make sure the person has some education on the information they are offering. Nutrition is a vital part of a good endurance program..