



Basics of Feeding Horses: Feeding Management

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Source: NebGuide G1781 "Basics of Feeding Horses: Feeding Management"

This reference was put together to help 4-H'ers complete the feed chart required in Level II. This is a recommended way of determining how much to feed a light working horse, a moderate working horse, and how much is required to maintain an idle horse.

Feed Horses According to Body Weight

Table 1 shows recommended daily feed intakes by horses as a percentage of body weight. To use this table, decide what class best fits your horse and your horse's body weight. While scales are most accurate for weighing horses, they are often impractical and other methods, such as visual estimation, weight tapes or body measurement formulas can be used. One common method, a heart girth tape, is available from feed dealers, veterinarians, and livestock supply companies. Another method is to use a body weight equation such as the following, which only requires a measuring tape. One equation is:

$$W = \frac{HG^2 \times BL}{330}$$

W = Weight in pounds
HG = Heart girth in inches
BL = Body length in inches

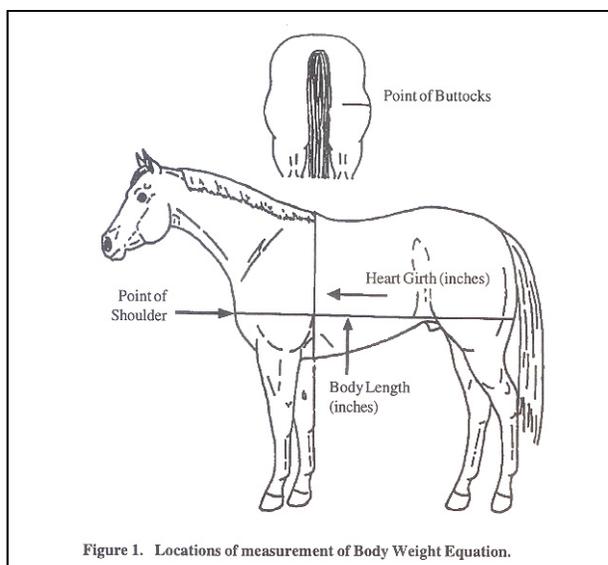
As shown in Figure 1, heart girth is measured at the horse's circumference. Run the tape around the horse, at the highest point of the withers. Body length is measured from the point of the shoulder, along the horse's side and point of the buttocks (half the distance from the corner to the tail).

Table 1.

Table 1. Expected feed consumption by horses (percent body weight) ¹			
	Forage	Concentrate	Total
Mature horses			
Maintenance	1.5-2.0	0-0.5	1.5-2.0
Mares, late gestation	1.0-1.5	0.5-1.0	1.5-2.0
Mares, early lactation	1.0-2.0	1.0-2.0	2.0-3.0
Mares, late lactation	1.0-2.0	0.5-1.5	2.0-2.5
Working horses			
Light work ²	1.0-2.0	0.5-1.0	1.5-2.5
Moderate work ³	1.0-2.0	0.75-1.5	1.75-2.5
Intense work ⁴	0.75-1.5	1.0-2.0	2.0-3.0
Young horses			
Nursing foal, 3 months	0	1.0-2.0	2.5-3.5
Weanling foal, 6 months	0.5-1.0	1.5-3.0	2.0-3.5
Yearling foal, 12 months	1.0-1.5	1.0-2.0	2.0-3.0
Long yearling, 18 months	1.0-1.5	1.0-1.5	2.0-2.5
Two year old, 24 months	1.0-1.5	1.0-1.5	1.75-2.5

¹Air-dry feed (about 90% DM).
²Examples are horses used in pleasure, equitation or working 1-3 hours per day.
³Examples are horses in ranch work, roping, cutting, barrel racing, jumping, etc. or working 3-5 hours per day.
⁴Examples are horses in race training, polo, etc. or working more than 5 hours per day.

Figure 1.



Example: How much to feed your horse?

1. Determine the class of horse you have: Light working horse
2. Estimate the horses weight
 - A. Heart girth = 70"
 - B. Body length = 69"
 - C. $W = \frac{(70)^2(69)}{330} = 1024 \text{ lbs.}$
3. Nutrient requirements (*Table 1*). Intake is based on a percent body weight. From *Table 1*, it is estimated this class of horse will have an intake of 1.5-2.5 percent of body weight. Range in total intake (forage + Concentrate).
 - A. If intake is 1.5% of body weight per day then:
 - i. Total pounds of feed fed = $.015 \times 1024 \text{ lbs.} = 15.36 \text{ lbs. per day}$
 - B. If intake is 2.5% of body weight per day then:
 - i. Total pounds of feed fed = $.025 \times 1024 \text{ lbs.} = 25.6 \text{ lbs. per day}$
4. Forage — Range of forage intake = 1.0-2.0 percent of body weight (*Table 1*)
 - A. If forage intake is 1.0% of body weight then:
 - i. Pounds of forage fed = $.01 \times 1024 \text{ lbs.} = 10.24 \text{ lbs. of forage per day}$
 - B. If forage intake is 2.0% of body weight then:
 - i. Pounds of forage fed = $.02 \times 1024 \text{ lbs.} = 20.48 \text{ lbs. of forage per day}$
5. Concentrate — Range of concentrate intake = .05– 1.0 percent of body weight (*Table 1*)
 - A. If concentrate intake is .5% of body weight then:
 - i. Pounds of concentrate fed = $.005 \times 1024 \text{ lbs.} = 5.12 \text{ lbs. concentrate per day}$
 - B. If concentrate intake is 1.0% of body weight then:
 - i. Pounds of concentrate fed = $.01 \times 1024 \text{ lbs.} = 10.24 \text{ lbs. concentrate per day}$
6. This horse will need to eat between 10 1/4 to 20 1/2 pounds of hay and 5 to 10 1/4 pounds of grain each day, as long as the total daily feed consumption does not exceed 15 1/2 to 25 1/2 pounds of feed.

NebGuide G1781 "Basics of Feeding Horses: Feeding Management" is online at <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g1781.pdf>



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Name _____

FEEDS CHART

Breed of Horse _____

Weight of Horse _____ lbs

		GRAIN 1	GRAIN 2 (optional)	FOREAGE 1	FOREAGE 2 (optional)	OTHER (optional)
<p>Name and Description of Grain or Foreage used (Ex: Sweet Feed: Oats, Corn, Barley, Soybean Meal, Vitamins, Minerals, and Molasses)</p>						
Type of Activity	Idle	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day
	Light Work	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day
	Moderate Work	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day	_____ lbs/day