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THE WINTER FEEDING OF IDLE FARM
HORSES

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Economy in wintering idle farm horses, like many other good practices, may easily be overdone. Many hundreds of horses in the corn belt are fed and cared for each winter so poorly as to leave them entirely unfit for hard work when spring comes. In fact, the poor care given often weakens them so as to lower their resistance and cause unnecessary losses from disease during the winter or when they go into hard work in the spring.

It will be especially important in the spring of 1918 to see that every needed farm horse is in prime condition to do good service in the collar. This is necessary in order to get the largest possible return in work performed out of the man labor available, which will, without doubt, be the most important limiting factor in determining the size of the 1918 crop.

Three Things are Necessary in the wintering of work horses satisfactorily: sufficient exercise, proper shelter, and the right amount of well-selected feed. Naturally, in their efforts to provide these, some horse owners may use more high-priced feed or spend more on care and shelter than is needed for best results. Except in the case of growing animals and breeding stock, which require the food materials needed for growth of bone and muscle, idle horses can be satisfactorily carried thru the winter to a large extent on such coarse roughages as oat straw, corn stover, sorghum hay, and similar feeds. These feeds are commonly spoken of as carbonaceous

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roughages. They furnish mainly heat and relatively little bone and muscle-forming material.

Stalk Fields Not Adequate.—In some years stalk fields furnish a considerable amount of fairly satisfactory feed. It is a mistake, however, to assume that they will furnish adequate feed and shelter for an idle horse. The exercise and fresh air may be beneficial to the horses, but often the value of the feed obtained, especially late in the season, when the ground is likely to be soft, is more than offset by the damage done to the field by the tramping of the animals.

Feed Legume Hay.—To keep the work horse in good, healthy condition it is advisable when possible to give one feed a day of legume hay, such as clover, coarse alfalfa, sweet clover, or soybean or cowpea hay where these are grown. It is good practice to give this feed in the evening, allowing free access to the straw or other roughage during the day. If no such legume hay is supplied, at least a small amount of grain must be fed if the carbonaceous roughages mentioned are to be used to good advantage and the animals kept in good, healthy condition. Ear corn and oats are the standard grains for mature horses, oats being preferable especially for horses being carried largely on the rough carbonaceous feeds mentioned.

Avoid Damaged Corn.—The large crop of oats produced in 1917 makes it possible to use this grain rather largely in our horse-feeding operations. The large amount of soft corn makes it safe to assume that much of it will be moldy or otherwise damaged. Special attention should be given to avoiding such corn in feeding horses, since horses are especially susceptible to sickness and poisoning from these sources, many dying each year from this source of poisoning. If damaged corn must be fed, the danger is lessened if it can be fed mixed with oats or oats and bran.

Little Grain Needed with Good Roughage.—In general, the amount of grain required to keep an idle horse in good condition during the winter will depend to a great extent upon the kind and quality of roughage fed. If some good legume hay is used, little, if any, grain is needed, since such hay helps to supply all of the food materials needed and also to keep the bowels in good condition. The general condition of the horse as to flesh and general thrift must be the best guide to the feeder in selecting the ration.

Use Bran Mash.—One or two bran mashes a week for the horse that is being wintered largely on coarse carbonaceous feed is good, cheap health insurance. For winter feeding the mash may be made by mixing three to four pounds of dry bran with hot water and allowing it to cool to feeding temperature in a covered pail. Bran

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mashes help to prevent much sickness and death due to impaction of the digestive organs, "straw colic," and similar troubles. A handful or two of oil meal a day may take the place of the bran mashes, and will help to keep the bowels properly regulated. Bran mash or oil meal fed as recommended is one of the best remedies that can be used by those in search of a good conditioner for their horses; and it is much cheaper than the condition powder and medicated stock foods often used to improve the general thrift of the horse being wintered on rough feed.

Succulent Feeds, such as roots and corn silage, have not been used in this country to any great extent for horse feeding. Of the root crops, carrots are considered best for horses. Altho low in food value, when compared with grains, they have a high value as conditioners. The serious objection to their extended use is the large amount of hand labor required in their production. Careful feeders have secured good results in feeding moderate amounts of good corn silage to horses that are being carried thru the winter. Such silage should be made from well-matured corn, put up in a good air-tight silo, with enough moisture to insure its being packed solid and excluding all air. If the corn is fairly dry when put into the silo, enough water should be added to insure its packing solid. Ten to fifteen pounds of good silage fed in connection with legume hay or carbonaceous roughage will usually give fairly satisfactory results. The greatest care must be exercised in feeding silage to horses, however, as any mold either in the silo or in the feed troughs is almost sure to cause trouble, and frequently death. Naturally, more risk may be taken with cheap horses than with high-class, valuable ones.

Exercise is necessary to good health. Probably the best place to provide this is a blue-grass pasture which has been allowed to grow up somewhat during summer and fall, where not only exercise may be had, but considerable good picking as well. Small lots and straw yards, unless used in connection with a larger area, are not satisfactory because horses do not move about enough. In some instances, stacks, yards, and protected wood lots furnish sufficient shelter. Under most conditions, however, it is more satisfactory to get up the horses in the evening and give them some feed and a dry bed in the barn.

Other Items of Good Care.—A few other items of good care should not be neglected. Digestive troubles are sometimes caused by bad teeth. Experience shows the importance of having the horses' teeth gone over once a year by a competent veterinarian. This applies particularly to horses with some age. Feet should be carefully leveled with a hoof rasp once a month. The edge of the wall

should be rounded somewhat to prevent its chipping or breaking off irregularly.

Good, clean drinking water should be supplied liberally. In cold weather a tank heater should be used to keep the water trough free from ice. Salt should also be provided, either thru free access or regular salting once a week or oftener.

Every Gain in Horse Power Will Mean a Saving of Man Labor.—

It is neither economical nor wise to starve the horse thru the winter by giving either too little feed or poorly selected feed. He cannot do full work in this condition even tho he is given enough good feed when he goes to hard work in the spring. Most farmers have sufficient time to give their idle work horses every necessary attention during the winter, and it will be of the greatest importance in the spring of 1918 to have every farm horse in prime condition to do a real horse's work.

