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## Forages for Horses Workshop Meets the Needs of a Growing Clientele

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### Abstract

A growing number of people are purchasing horses for pleasure riding but have very limited knowledge about basic forage production practices. The Ohio State University Extension Forages for Horses workshop was developed by agents and specialists to teach horse owners and stable managers basic forage management concepts. Topics taught in this 2-evening workshop included: anatomy and physiology; plant growth; soil fertility; species selection; pasture renovation; hay storage; and poisonous plant identification. Evaluation of the program was positive, and participants indicated they gained new knowledge as evidenced by pre and post-test scores.

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### Introduction

The number of people owning horses and operating horse-boarding establishments is growing in Tuscarawas County and throughout Ohio. According to statistics from the 1997 Census of Agriculture, the last year for which statistics are available, there are more than 11,000 horse farms with more than 76,000 horses and ponies in Ohio. Among the 50 states, Ohio is ranked seventh in the number of horses and ponies. Many of these horse owners have relatively small acreage and an interest in owning horses for pleasure riding and showing.

Because of the growing number of calls about horses and horse management, a Forages for Horses workshop was held in the winter of 2001 with the help of the Tuscarawas Valley Academy of Veterinary Medicine (TVAVM). The TVAVM is a group of approximately 20 large and small animal veterinarians who practice in and around the county. The TVAVM agreed to provide financial support and a veterinarian to speak at the workshop.

### Background

Because of an increasing number of requests for information, a team of Ohio State University Extension agents and specialists saw horse owners and boarding stable owners as potential clientele for educational programs. This team of Extension agents and specialists developed the

curriculum and format for the Forages for Horses workshops, modeled after the successful Ohio Forage Production Short Course.

The Forages for Horses workshops are typically held over two evenings with a total of 6 hours of instruction. Topics discussed during the first evening include:

- Horse digestion and physiology;
- Plant growth;
- Soil fertility;
- Plant species selection; and
- Pasture renovation.

At the end of the first evening, participants are given a homework exercise. This exercise consists of four scenarios related to pasture management and horses. Participants are asked to answer the questions using their own knowledge and the information they learned in the workshop.

The second evening of the workshop starts with a group discussion of the homework exercise. This is especially useful because it helps to clarify questions and reiterate important points or topics from the previous evening. The majority of the second evening is spent discussing hay quality and storage and poisonous plant identification. Estimating hay quality is done using a hands-on exercise where participants are asked to evaluate four different hay samples and rank them using their senses. The group rankings are compared against laboratory analysis.

In addition to a team of Extension agents and specialists, local veterinarians are involved in teaching the workshop. This has been especially helpful when discussing horse anatomy, digestion, and physiology. Having a veterinarian on hand to answer nutrition and plant poisoning questions is also helpful. In addition, veterinarians often lend credibility to Extension programs.

## Results

In an effort to evaluate the success of this program, a pre-test-post-test of the Tuscarawas County workshop was conducted using a Likert-type scale with 1=poor to 4=excellent. Table 1 shows the results.

Topic	Pre-Test (N=25)	Post-Test (N=25)
Digestive physiology and horse nutrient requirements	2.0	2.9
Plant growth physiology	2.0	2.9
Soil fertility	1.5	2.8
Species selection	1.5	2.8
Pasture renovation	1.7	2.9
Hay quality and storage	2.2	3.6
Poisonous plant identification	2.0	3.2

The topic that showed the greatest knowledge gain was hay quality and storage. The next highest rankings were soil fertility and species selection, followed by poisonous plant identification, pasture renovation, plant growth physiology and digestive physiology. and horse nutrient requirements.

Among those participating, the average number of horses owned was just under seven. Participants also reported the number of acres of hay or pasture they owned or managed was 33 acres. In addition, those responding said the workshop met their expectations and provided them with a great deal of valuable reference material.

## Conclusions

As the number of "mini-farms" continues to grow, it is likely that the number of people owning horses will also increase. This audience may not be familiar with Extension educational programs, but is anxious for education and information to help them better manage and care for their animals. A program similar to this that offers topics on nutrition and hay and pasture management can be a great benefit to a growing Extension audience.

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