

SINCE



1929

PRST STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 80
Staunton, VA

AUGUSTA COOPERATIVE FARM BUREAU, INC.
1205B RICHMOND RD.
STAUNTON, VA 24401



AUGUSTACOOOP.COM / AUGUSTACOOPEFARMBUREAU / AUGUSTACOOPEFB

AGRONOMY & EQUINE EDITOR
September 2026



1929



SINCE

FREE-FEEDING HAY: WHEN WILL MY HORSE SLOW DOWN?

A nutrition expert offers advice for ensuring free-fed horses don't overeat hay.

Q: I started free-feeding grass hay to my horses about three weeks ago, and they haven't slowed down a bit. In addition to their free-feeding, they get a small amount of alfalfa hay (about 5 pounds each day, divided into morning and evening feedings) and a flax-based supplement and multivitamin. When will they stop pigging out on the day on the hay, and are there any signs of concern I should look for?

A: Kudos to you for wanting to feed your horses in a way that aligns more closely with their digestive anatomy and physiology. It can be a little scary to watch your horses gorge day after day. The majority of horses do self-regulate after several weeks. Some do so more quickly and some take longer. Of course, there are always the exceptions to the rule who just do not self-regulate.

It is important to pay attention to your horse's body condition and weight. I would recommend performing a condition score and weight estimate on your horses every two weeks so that you can determine objectively if any are gaining weight. Some horses might be gorging and yet their weight might not change. Excessive weight gain, especially in breeds at risk of metabolic disorders, is always a concern no matter how hay is fed. Pay particular attention to the formation of neck crest fat.

Some things that might help this transition include:

Consider hay quality and getting it tested

Ideally when free feeding hay you want a hay with low in nonstructural carbohydrates (NSC, or starch and water soluble carbohydrates less than 12% on a dry matter basis) and on the lower end for calories (under 1 Mcal per pound better yet closer to 0.8 to 0.9 Mcal/lb). This means that, despite having free access to the hay, the hay being fed has less nutritional value than a forage with higher NSC and calorie content. This will help prevent your horses from gaining weight while eating free choice.

The acid detergent content (ADF) will help indicate the amount of the hay that's indigestible. Generally staying with an ADF between 35-40% tends to be a good option for horses eating free choice. A lower ADF is preferable for competition horses and breeding/young stock. Be careful not to get hay that is so indigestible that there's a risk that it might cause impaction colic due to poor digestibility. If testing hay is not feasible look for bales that have a lower leaf to stem ratio, because hay with more stem is generally lower in NSC and calories.

Typically alfalfa is not recommended as a hay for free feeding due to its higher calorie content. As long as you do not experience weight gain I think it is fine to continue the alfalfa. However, if weight gain starts to creep in consider dropping the alfalfa hay or at least reducing the amount fed. If you'd like to feed some alfalfa for example as a source of higher quality protein or to mitigate ulcer risk, then perhaps switch to pellets that can be more carefully weighed out.

Understanding that horses might appear "fat" when they aren't

Increased forage consumption leads to greater gut fill and more indigestible fiber throughout the digestive tract. This can lead to an increase in the horse's barrel and can be misinterpreted as the horse getting fat when fat levels have not changed. Additionally, fiber encourages water consumption and holds more water in the digestive tract, adding the appearance of bulk. If in doubt use a weight tape and body score condition your horse every other week to keep track of any weight fluctuations. Again I would be particularly concerned a horse experienced an increase of crest fat, which could indicate metabolic function issues.

Slow feeders

If you are currently feeding hay completely loose as well as free choice, using a slow feeder might be a good idea. These come in many forms from rigid plastic feeders to small holed nets. The benefit of these systems is that they help slow consumption and regulate intake. They also save on a great amount of waste. Another benefit of utilizing some kind of slow feeder, especially nets, is that you can place them strategically around the horse's living space encouraging movement. The more the horses move the more calories they burn and movement is good for encouraging the passage of feed through the digestive tract. Nets that you can fit an entire bale in are available but smaller nets make for easier distribution.

Ensure the hay does not run out

Initially the rapid consumption of hay when fed free choice is due to the habit of meal feeding. If feed runs out once switched to free feeding the horse is going to experience the lack of hay as a break down in the feeding system and could become stressed and as a result go back to rapid consumption. Therefore it's vital, especially for the first weeks, to ensure that hay does not run out day or night. When using nets I like to see a soccer ball sized amount of hay left in the net when I next come to feed. This tells me that the horse had access to hay that could have been consumed if desired but that the choice was made not to eat it. You mention that they are pigging out during the day. Does this mean that they do not have free access to hay at night? If so, then the gap in hay availability might be why they have not yet self-regulated their intake.



Pay attention to behavior

Take note of your horse's behavior at feeding time. Are they waiting for you to come and feed and eager to get eating or are they pretty nonchalant about feed arrival? The latter typically suggests that they are moving towards regulation of intake. They are realizing that hay is always available so there is no reason to stand anxiously awaiting the next meal arrival. I have had clients also report horses that used to be banging at the stable door each morning become far more relaxed around feed time, and interestingly they also observed changes in personality under saddle. A greater willingness to work and the sense that the horse was less tense and on edge. While anecdotal it does make sense that being generally more relaxed about life could impact behavior when ridden.

Make sure that you have plenty of fresh clean water available. Increased forage intake increases water consumption, so it's very important to make a constant supply of fresh clean water available at all times.

To ease your mind, weigh what they are eating

If you're using smaller nets this is pretty easy. Weigh the nets when full and then, even if not empty, weigh them again before refilling and calculate the difference to determine how much was consumed. If there are multiple horses eating from the same nets average the consumption across the number of horses to estimate intake per horse. Then compare this to the average weight of the horses. I've had clients do this and what has been interesting is that the horses have all consumed about 2% of their body weight per day. This is right around the amount of voluntary forage consumed by the horses in numerous grazing studies quoted in the National Research Council nutrient requirements of horses.

Be sure to provide necessary micronutrients

As you would when feeding limited forage you need to ensure a quality source of additional trace minerals and vitamins. When feeding the hay with a slightly lower nutritional value as recommended above, ensuring a source of quality protein in the ration is a good idea. This is because the more mature hays that have the lower NSC and calorie levels also tend to have lower crude protein content. For this reason I recommend feeding a high-protein ration balancer as a way of not only meeting the mineral and vitamin requirements but also of providing the necessary quality protein.

In summary, I would focus attention less on the actual act of hay consumption and rather on the body condition and weight of the horses. Some moderate weight gain is to be expected initially; however, if weight gain continues unchecked this would be an indicator that free choice hay is not a viable option for that particular horse.

The Horse

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE WEANING YOUR FOAL

With the right plan, you can make weaning as stress-free as possible for your mare and her foal.

Weaning a foal from his dam can be a stressful time as he learns independence, but there are steps you can take to ease the process for both broodmare and baby.

Understanding the Weaning Process

Weaning often comes with an environment change, such as a new pasture or stall, a change in herd status and hierarchy, and a change in diet, says Carly Turner-Garcia, DVM, Dipl. ACT, of Black Type Equine, in Coyle, Oklahoma. Any of these factors can result in an increase of cortisol, the stress hormone, and can decrease the body's inflammatory and immune response. "Basically, everything that they've known is now different, kind of like dropping your kid off at the first day of kindergarten or preschool," she adds.

Christine Skelly, PhD, equine extension specialist at Michigan State University (MSU), in East Lansing, says mares typically seem to cope with weaning relatively quickly. Foals, however, can experience greater challenges during the transition and might be at increased risk for developing mild upper respiratory infections or nutritional imbalances, weight changes, stress colitis, or even colic in severe cases. Easing the transition helps reduce those risks.

"From just a social aspect, the foal has an extremely strong bond with their dam, so when we break that bond during weaning, especially when we do it very abruptly, without anything to replace the nutrition and the comfort the mare provides, we're putting a lot of stress on the foal," says Skelly. "The mares seem to get over weaning sooner and with a little less trouble. As soon as their bag dries up, they're pretty much on the road (to recovery)."

"From a psychological standpoint, we want to ensure the foal continues to learn how to interact with other horses," she adds. "The dam's job was to teach their baby manners and help them learn how to communicate with other horses and even people, and those lessons need to continue as the weanling adjusts to their new group dynamics."

Preparing Your Foal for Weaning

Horse owners and farm managers commonly wean foals when they're 4 to 6 months old. Garcia recommends starting a vaccination program before separation because vaccinating during weaning could trigger a strong immune response in an already stressed animal. It's also a good idea to deworm your foal before weaning to reduce the chance of gastrointestinal stress.

Introduce concentrate feed (creep feed) while the foal is still nursing so he becomes accustomed to eating a balanced ration before weaning. The energy content of a mare's milk starts to decrease after a few months of lactation, so adding feed to the foal's diet supports immunity as well as healthy muscle and bone development.

“Start creep feeding around 2 to 3 months of age, providing the foal usually a pound of feed per month of age,” says Skelly. “They may not eat all of the feed because they still have access to the mare’s milk. Ensure the creep feed is formulated to match the foal’s stage of growth. Then, when we do separate the foal and dam, the foal is already well adjusted to the concentrate ration.”

Setting Your Mare and Foal Up for Success

Researchers have shown a gradual transition away from the mare eases stress during the weaning process. If the mare and foal are turned out with other mares and foals, and you don’t have a visual barrier at your farm, separating all the foals at once will help them cope better. Skelly has weaned foals several ways and, for larger herds of mares and foals, she prefers to put foals on one side of a fence and mares on the other. She recommends using 2-by-4-inch woven wire or diamond mesh fencing so the weanlings cannot nurse through the fence.

“They still can see each other for several days, and stay in close quarters,” she says. “Then over time, the mares drift off, trying to find better pasture, and at some point, they lose interest in their foals. The foals are grouped with their fellow weanlings that they have grown up with, so they have companionship. They also have access to free exercise, which will help their bones and muscles grow healthy and strong.”

Skelly says at MSU, a few months prior to removing any broodmares from the pasture, she and her colleagues turn an older mare out with the mares and foals. As each foal reaches 6 months of age, they remove his or her dam from the pasture.

“In this situation, the group stays relatively stable since you’re only removing one or two mares at a time,” she explains. “It’s not as abrupt as all the mares leaving at once, and all the babies yelling. You may have one foal running around, but nobody else is running around with them, so the group stays a little calmer. The older mare provides some adult stability to the group while the weanlings adjust to their new situation.”

Garcia says there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to weaning. The best method often depends on your farm and the resources available. Stall weaning involves putting the mare in a stall next to the foal for about a week, then taking the mare away. “There might be a little bit of hollering, but for the most part, it goes pretty smoothly,” she says. “They’re herd animals, so as long as they have a herd for moral support, they do a lot better.”

She also recommends avoiding any drastic changes to the environment, such as moving the foal to a new barn or introducing additional management changes during weaning.

The technique of putting two foals in a stall together can sometimes cause more stress as they try to figure out their hierarchy, she adds. “It might work for some people, but that’s a very small space to have two stressed-out animals crammed in together, so it’s not my preference,” Garcia notes.

Take-Home Message

Weaning is one of the first major transitions in a horse’s life and, while it can be stressful, thoughtful preparation can ease the process. A gradual approach that minimizes disruption can reduce stress and health risks while helping the foal adjust successfully to independence.

The Horse

FEEDING YOUR SENIOR HORSE: WHY AND HOW THEIR DIET SHOULD CHANGE

When do I know my horse is officially a senior horse?

There isn’t a specific age where your horse becomes a senior horse — your horse’s sweet sixteen doesn’t mean they’re automatically old. That’s especially true when some horses can work and compete well into their 20s.

Do pay attention to what changes for them as they get older, like their teeth, digestion and body condition. Their ability to take in feed and absorb nutrients to maintain healthy body condition is a more important indicator of what we consider “senior” horse needs.

When should I switch my horse to a senior feed?

If you start to notice changes in your horse’s body condition, musculature or eating behavior, you may want to consider a switch to senior feed, as these factors can indicate a need to adjust their diet.

Even though horses don’t slow down the minute they reach a certain age, their nutrition needs can change as they get older.

“What generally triggers the need to switch to a senior diet is when a horse’s dental or digestive condition starts to decline,” says Anna Dunaway, Ph.D., equine nutritionist, Equine Technical Solutions at Purina.

If your senior horse is losing weight, struggling to maintain condition or lacking energy, it may be time to consider a senior horse feed designed with higher calorie density, more digestible fiber and added prebiotics to support aging horses.

What eating behaviors should senior horse owners watch for?

Your horse’s ability to chew forage is generally a major indicator as to whether switching to a senior feed is in order. Some common changes in eating behavior include:

- **Quidding:** Often the result of poor teeth, quidding is when a horse stores feed in the side of their mouth and drops it after a few bites or drops feed quickly after taking a bite.
- **Behavioral shifts:** These may include atypical actions when the horse tries to chew, such as lifting, shaking or twisting their head.
- **Slower eating:** Because of chewing difficulties, senior horses often eat more slowly than they used to — for example, going from a five-minute feeding to taking 20 minutes to eat.
- **Increased risk of choke:** Poor teeth, decreased saliva production, poor musculature of the throat area and other factors can lead to a blockage in the esophagus, commonly known as choke. This can make swallowing difficult or even impossible.

Annual or biannual oral exams in older horses can help address dental irregularities early and before they snowball into bigger issues.

What does a change in my senior horse's body condition and musculature mean?

Weight loss and diminished body condition are indicators that your horse is not digesting feed as efficiently as he should, especially if you haven't changed anything in your horse's feeding or exercise programs.

Just because your horse is a senior doesn't mean a significant loss of body weight is normal. Many owners are resigned to having a thin horse just because the horse falls into a senior category, but if fed properly, it is possible for a horse to maintain a body condition score of 5 well into their senior years.

If your horse isn't building muscle, even if you are still riding and working him as you normally would, talk with your veterinarian about placing your horse on a senior feed. A feed with high-quality protein can help your horse maintain muscle mass.

What makes a senior horse feed different?

The primary difference with a senior horse feed is that it's more easily digestible than feeds formulated for younger horses.

That means senior horse feeds may be better able to provide your horse with essential nutrition in a way that is easy to chew, digest and utilize.

How has senior horse feed changed over time?

In the early 1990s, research demonstrated older horses had reduced apparent digestibility of fiber, protein and phosphorus.

This data prompted further research into the nutritional requirements of senior horses, leading to the 1993 creation of Purina® Equine Senior® horse feed — the first nationally available feed specifically formulated for senior horses.

Are all senior feeds the same?

Not all senior feeds are the same. As the senior feed space has gotten more advanced, there are more advanced products — and your options aren't just complete feeds. "It's important to understand what your horse really needs," says Dr. Dunaway.

Some feeds, like Equine Senior®, are complete feeds, which means they contain all the essential roughage so that even a horse unable to chew hay will receive adequate fiber.

At some point, Equine Senior® feed may replace all of the hay in the horse's diet. As the horse ages further, it may be beneficial to add water to Equine Senior® feed to produce a mash or gruel, which will be even more easily edible for the horse with an extremely poor dental condition.

However, if your senior horse is active and still in work, plus their dental and digestive functions are OK, they'll actually do better with a concentrate feed meant to be fed alongside forage — similar to the non-senior feeds you might already use.

"You want to keep them on a performance feed because while they are active, the rest of their body is still aging," says Dr. Dunaway.

What complete feeds should I consider for my older senior horse?

Equine Senior® is a great complete feed for older horses who need an easy-to-chew and -digest feed that replaces their forage with a combination of soluble and insoluble fibers such as beet pulp and top-quality hay. Equine Senior® horse feed has several features specifically geared to older horses:

- **ActivAge®** prebiotic, which has been proven to support the immune function, mobility and an appropriate metabolic response in aging horses.
- **Amplify® Nugget**, our proprietary ingredient, is scientifically formulated with rice bran, flaxseed, and vegetable oils to provide an optimal fatty acid profile and nutritional balance while maintaining strong palatability.

Augusta Co-op Solution Purina Equine Senior, 50 lbs.

For the special needs of older horses with problems chewing and digesting feed. A complete pellet that features Easy Soak pellet technology. If needed, can create a mash with warm water. Features easy to digest fiber sources with quality hay built in for added fiber.

14% crude protein

5.5% crude fat

18% crude fiber



SKU - 32980

- Easy Soak™ pellet technology, which can create a mash in five minutes with warm water, making it easy to chew and swallow for horses with dental problems or missing teeth.

Studies have shown senior horses with low body conditions continue to benefit from changing to a senior feed and feeding ample amounts to promote weight gain. These horses also show improvements in red blood cell count, hematocrit, hemoglobin and vitamin C status when fed Purina® Equine Senior® (HR-47, Purina Animal Nutrition, Equine Senior Field Trials, 2008).

What concentrate feeds should I consider for my active senior horse?

If your senior horse is still chewing and digesting forage relatively easily, they may simply need additional key nutrients as they age.

One of the following feeds might work well for them:

- Purina® Enrich Plus® Senior: A ration balancer for easy keepers that may be fed as a horse's sole ration along with quality hay or pasture to provide the proper balance of protein, vitamins and minerals without additional calories.
- Purina® Equine Senior® Active: A moderate-to-high calorie feed for active seniors.
- Purina® Ultium® Senior: Our highest-calorie and lowest-starch and -sugar senior feed, designed to satisfy the most active seniors or hardest keepers.

All three also have ActivAge® prebiotic to support immune function, mobility and an appropriate metabolic response and Outlast® gastric support technology. Equine Senior® Active and Ultium® Senior also both contain the Amplify® Nugget to support ideal body condition.

How can I help my senior horse enjoy an active, healthy life?

Senior horse nutrition has come a long way in the last few decades. Multiple feed choices and customizable feeding programs are helping senior horses live longer, healthier lives.

Talk with your veterinarian about your senior horse's nutrition to be sure you are feeding properly, knowing a few small adjustments in your feeding regimen can help your horse fully enjoy their senior years.

Purina Mills

COUPON



\$5 Off Any \$50 Purchase

COUPON CODE: 5OFF1

Cashier must collect coupon at time of use.

Augusta Co-op would like to thank you for being loyal patrons. We are proud to be serving the community.

**COUPON VALID AT ALL
AUGUSTA CO-OP STORE LOCATIONS**

Coupon valid September 7, 2026 through September 26, 2026. Coupon must be present at time of checkout to receive discount. Limit one coupon per customer. Coupon valid for one in-store sales transaction only. Cannot be combined with other coupons, sales or discounts. In-stock items only. Not redeemable for cash.



Nutrena
What's inside counts.



SCAN. REVEAL. MAXIMIZE.

Reveal what's inside your hay to maximize your horse's nutrition. Let us test it for you!
Thursday, October 8th, 2026: 4:30PM - 7:00PM

Location: Augusta Cooperative
1205 B Richmond Road
Staunton, VA 24401

Details: Join us with a sample of your hay, enough to fit in a gallon zip-lock bag, to receive a FREE hay analysis from our Equine Field Rep, Doug Leavitt utilizing our cutting-edge technology for real-time data (Protein, ADF, NDF etc.) in under 10 minutes!



**Save \$5 per bag
on all Nutrena
and Elite feeds
1 Night only!**

© 2025 Cargill, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

FALL FARM *Supply* SALE

September 7 - 19, 2026



Save on farm supply essentials including waterers, stock tanks, bale feeders, bunk feeders, gates, fencing, and more!
All locations. In-stock items only.

AugustaCoop.com or (540) 885-1265

WE ARE

Hiring!

Scan Now &
Join Our Team!

<https://www.augustacoop.com/about/careers/>



NUTRENA DAYS ON SALE NOW

\$5 OFF

Nutrena True Dog Food
September 1-30, 2026

 **True**

© 2021 Cargill, Incorporated. All Rights Reserved.

EVENTS / CALENDAR

FALL FARM SUPPLY SALE

September 7-19, 2026

All locations.

Save on farm supply essentials including waterers, stock tanks, bale feeders, bunk feeders, gates, fencing and more!

BACK TO SCHOOL CLOTHING SALE

September 14-19, 2026

Staunton location only.

30% off all clothing, boots, and accessories. In-stock items only. Excludes clearance items.

EQUINE EXTRAVAGANZA

October 8, 2026 • 4:30PM - 7:00PM

Staunton location only.

Join us for a night of feed deals, food, and more!

Vendors will be on site.

AUGUSTA CO-OP POULTRY DAYS

September 28 - October 10, 2026

All locations.

Huge deals on Purina, Nutrena, and Augusta Co-op poultry feed!

SMALL ENGINE OPEN HOUSE

October 16-17, 2026

Small Engine Shop, Staunton.

Save big on Husqvarna & STIHL lawn mowers, equipment, and more!

Scan to view
event details





Experience the advantages of having
local bankers that understand
agriculture and put your farm **first**.

TALK WITH A
LOCAL AG EXPERT
TODAY.

1563 Commerce Rd.
Verona, VA 24482



firstbank.com | Member FDIC | 