

Old Hay: Is it Better for Laminitic Horses?

Article finds no advantages.

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According to Kathryn Watts who heads up Rocky Mountain Research & Consulting Inc., there is no advantage to feeding “old” hay to horses that need lower nutritional requirements as a result of health conditions such as obesity or laminitis.

“No nutrients quantifiable by hay analysis are lost during 9-13 months of storage in hay that is baled between 12-15% moisture and properly stored in a dry climate,” says Watts in an article she wrote titled “Is Old Hay Better for Horses with Laminitis?” Watts’ Rocky Mountain Research & Consulting Inc. works to educate horse owners about the correlation between laminitis and high sugar content in some grass; research for this latest article by Watts was funded by a grant from the Animal Health Foundation, which works to find the cause and prevention of laminitis by funding major researchers in the field.

“As I travel around the world, learning and teaching people about feeding horses with laminitis, I keep hearing a recommendation that has never made sense,” Watts explains in her article. “People say that leaving hay in a shed for a year renders it ‘safe’ for horses with laminitis.”

Not so Watts concludes. But where did this idea of feeding old hay to laminitic or obese horses come from?

“While searching for the source of this myth, it was brought to my attention that in a 1966 edition of the Pony Club manual, a recommendation is given to feed ponies ‘old seed hay, preferably 12 to 18 months in the stack.’ Also: ‘Good old hay provides excellent keep for small stabled ponies,’” Watts explains. “While I value Pony Club advice for many things, it might be best to get advice for feeding laminitic ponies elsewhere. All this conflicting information needs to be put in the proper context of buying hay for horses that must have sugar and calories reduced.”

Watts has helped bring together research for horse owners on her website about the dangers of feeding grass with high sugar content. You can read her findings at www.safergrass.org; to read “Is Old Hay Better for Horses with Laminitis?” in its entirety, visit www.safergrass.org/articles/old_hay.htm.