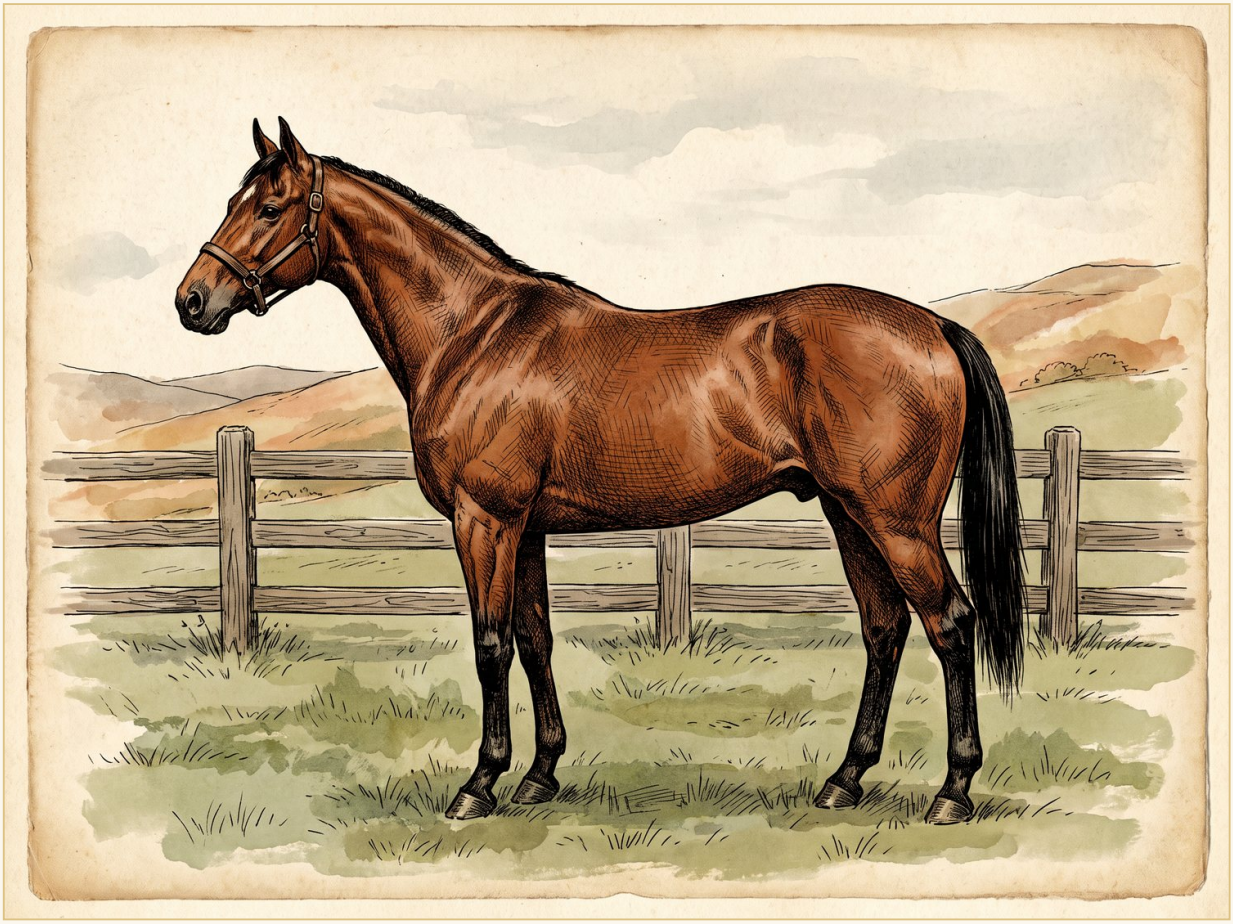
WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Horse

Forage first, a good farrier and tack that lasts



Family-owned in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters nationwide

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> ***New owner?*** *Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.*

*Every horse people fall for has a few things in common: a warm breath on your sleeve, an ear tipped toward your voice, and a way of making a gray Pennsylvania morning feel better. They also share a few things that don't make the postcard. A horse lives **25 to 30 years or more**, eats about 15 to 20 pounds of hay a day, needs a herd (or at least a real friend), and can turn a quiet Tuesday into an emergency in under an hour. None of that is a reason to stay away. It is a reason to go in with open eyes, the way families around our home in Christiana, Lancaster County, have done for generations, in a country of working horses, harness shops, saddlers, and farriers who learned the trade standing next to someone who learned it from someone else. We carry a little of that into every guide: forage first, skip the sweet feed, tack that lasts, and patient relationship-building over quick fixes. Start with the Quick Start, then work through the rest at your own pace. A horse is not a hobby you finish. It is a friend you keep.*

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

Whether the trailer is pulling into your driveway or you are starting at a boarding barn, this is the order that keeps a new horse safe and settled.

1. **Walk every foot of the fence and paddock before the horse arrives.** Look for broken boards, loose wire, protruding nails, holes, low branches, gaps a hoof could catch in, and anything that does not belong. Pick up trash, baling twine, and old buckets, and check every tree and shrub against the toxic plants table later in this guide. If you board, do the same walk with the barn manager.
2. **Make a companionship plan.** Horses are **herd animals**, which means they feel safe in a group and stressed alone. A horse should never be kept by itself without a plan for daily companionship: another horse, a pony, a donkey, or at the very least a neighbor across a safe fence line. If you only have room for one, talk to your vet and a trusted horse person before you commit.
3. **Line up your veterinarian and your farrier now.** A **farrier** is the professional who trims and (when needed) shoes a horse's hooves. Choose an equine vet who makes farm calls, ask about after-hours emergencies, and tape both numbers inside the barn door. Collect the horse's health records, and if it is traveling or boarding, get proof of a negative **Coggins test**, a blood test for equine infectious anemia (EIA), a serious viral disease with no cure.
4. **Fill the water before the horse steps off the trailer.** A clean trough or bucket, full, in a spot the horse can easily find. In cold weather it must be ice-free. A horse that has just traveled is often thirsty and stiff, and water is the first thing it needs.
5. **Stock hay before you need it.** Hay is dried grass or legume (like alfalfa) fed as **forage**, the fibrous plant material horses are built to eat nearly all day. Have at least two weeks on hand, and feed the same hay the horse was eating before if you can. Sudden feed changes are a leading trigger for **colic**, the general term for abdominal pain in horses and a true emergency we cover in detail below.
6. **Keep the new horse apart from resident horses for 14 to 21 days.** This is called quarantine, and it protects your herd from anything the newcomer may be carrying. Let horses see and sniff each other across a safe fence, but not touch noses over it. Use separate buckets, brushes, and tools, and care for the new horse last.
7. **Take baseline numbers on day one.** Learn the horse's **TPR**: temperature, pulse, and respiration (breathing rate). Take all three at rest and write them down (our vet section shows exactly how). Note body condition, weight, hoof shape, and manure. During quarantine, take the temperature twice a day; 102°F or higher is your earliest warning of illness.
8. **Introduce pasture slowly.** Lush spring or fall grass is rich in sugar, and a sudden all-day buffet is a recipe for **laminitis**, a painful inflammation of the tissues that hold the hoof to the bone. Start with 15 to 30 minutes of grazing, add time over one to two weeks, and offer hay before turnout so the horse is not arriving at the grass starving.

9. **Keep the first 48 hours quiet.** Hand-walk the horse around the paddock so it sees the boundaries, then let it settle. No riding, no new-horse parade. Check appetite, manure, water intake, and attitude at least three times a day. Normal manure, falling water levels, and a horse eating hay with its head down are all good signs.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What to have in place on day one, by category.

Essentials

- **A well-fitted leather halter and a sturdy lead rope** — leather will break under extreme pressure, which can save a horse in a snag. Have a spare. Avoid leaving a horse in a nylon halter unattended in turnout.
- **A grooming kit** — a rubber curry comb, a stiff brush, a soft finishing brush, a mane and tail comb, and a **hoof pick**. Grooming doubles as a daily health check.
- **Clean water setup** — a trough or large buckets that hold at least a full day's supply, plus a tank de-icer or heated bucket rated for outdoor use if you live where water freezes.
- **A hay feeding system** — a slow-feed net, box, or feeder that stretches meal time, plus a hay scale or hanging scale so you feed by weight rather than by guess.
- **Plain salt** — loose, plain white salt or a plain salt block, available at all times, separate from any mineral mix.
- **A ration balancer or vitamin-mineral supplement** — a small-serving, low-calorie feed that provides protein, vitamins, and minerals without the sugar and starch of grain. We explain this fully in the diet section.
- **A basic first aid kit** — a digital thermometer, a stethoscope, wound-flush saline, sterile gauze, self-adhesive wrap, padded leg wraps, bandage scissors, a flashlight, and your vet's number on a laminated card.
- **Fly protection** — a breathable fly mask with ear covering and a horse-safe fly spray.

> ***Ready to set up?*** *Browse the essentials in our collections: Horses!.*

Enrichment

- **A companion** — the best enrichment item a horse can have. A herd mate beats any toy.
- **Daily turnout** — time in a safely fenced pasture or paddock to move, graze, roll, and socialize.

> ***Enrichment, one click away.*** *Shop Tack and Riding Gear.*

SECTION 2

Meet Your Horse

The domestic horse (*Equus caballus*) has worked beside people for roughly six thousand years, and what shaped the species is open grassland: a grazing, moving, flight-first animal that survives by staying with the herd and noticing everything. That is the horse in your pasture today. It will spend most of its day eating, walking, and watching, and it will get anxious, bored, or sick if its life does not allow that.

Trait	Detail
Common name	Domestic horse
Scientific name	*Equus caballus*
Average adult weight	**800–1,400 lbs** depending on breed; a 1,000 lb horse is a common reference
Typical lifespan	**25–30+ years** with good care; many reach their mid-30s
Activity pattern	Grazes and moves for **16–18 hours** a day; naps in short bouts
Social structure	**Herd animal** — needs the company of other horses or at least another equine

The honest commitment — what you are actually signing up for

This is the most important section in the guide, so take your time with it.

A horse is a 25-to-30-year relationship. The horse you buy at 8 may well be with you at 33, through kids growing up, jobs changing, drought summers, ice-storm winters, and at least a few vet bills that make you sit down. Many horses outlive the first reason their owners wanted them, which is why so many sound, sweet, healthy horses end up in rescues. The honest questions are "Can I afford this horse for the rest of its life?" and "Who steps in if I cannot?"

Costs. Think in ranges and get local quotes. Keeping a horse typically runs from a few thousand dollars a year (your own pasture, doing the work yourself) to well over ten thousand (full-care boarding, regular lessons, or a horse with special needs). On top of that come:

- Hay, which is the largest single expense for most owners who don't have enough pasture
- Farrier visits every 6 to 8 weeks, year-round
- Vet care: annual exam, vaccines, fecal egg counts, dental work, and the occasional urgent call
- Supplies, bedding, fencing repairs, tack, helmets, and trailer or hauling costs
- An emergency fund, because a single colic or lameness emergency can run into the thousands, and colic surgery can cost far more

Time. A horse needs to be fed, watered, checked, and turned out at least twice a day, in every kind of weather. At home, expect an hour or two of chores before you ever pick up a saddle. If you board, the chores are done for you, but the visits, grooming, groundwork, and riding are still yours.

None of this makes the horse a bad idea. For the right family, a horse is a joy that grows with every year. If you are not ready, there are good ways to start smaller: take lessons, lease a horse, volunteer at a rescue, or help a neighbor on the weekends. Adopting an older, steady horse is often kinder than buying a young one. Whichever path you take, plan for the long run.

Herd life: why a horse should never be alone

In the wild, a lone horse is easy prey, and their instincts have not changed. Horses rest more deeply when others keep watch, and a lone horse can pace, weave, crib (grab a fence with its teeth and gulp air), or simply stop eating. Within a herd, horses have a pecking order and a best friend, and they often choose the same grazing spot and the same friend for years.

Reading horse body language

A horse does not need to speak to tell you how it feels. Learn these and you will head off most trouble before it starts.

Signal	What it usually means
Ears forward, soft eye	Interested, curious, relaxed
One ear turned back toward you	Listening to you while watching what is ahead
Ears pinned flat against the neck	Anger or threat — give space and do not approach from behind
High head, wide eyes, flared nostrils, tense body	Alarmed — a horse about to spook or bolt
Pawing, looking at its flank, repeatedly lying down and getting up	Possible colic — see the emergencies section
Swinging the hindquarters toward you	A warning or kick threat — step back and stay out of range

Horses are also **prey animals with blind spots**: directly behind them, directly in front of the nose, and straight below the head. Always approach from the side at the shoulder, speak as you come, and keep a hand on the animal as you walk around it so it knows where you are. Never stand directly behind a horse.

What surprises new owners

Most new owners are caught off guard by three things. The first is **how much a horse eats and what comes out the other end**: a 1,000 lb horse produces about 50 pounds of manure a day, and you need a plan for it. The second is **how fragile a big animal can be**. A horse cannot vomit and has roughly a hundred feet of intestine that can twist or block, which is why colic is so common and so serious. The third is **how much of horsemanship is quiet, patient work on the ground** before you ever ride. The people with the best-mannered horses at the Lancaster County shows will tell you the same: relationship first, saddle time second.

SECTION 3

Housing, Pasture & Fencing

Horses are happiest outside, moving, with a herd and a view. A stall is a tool, not a home. The best setup gives your horse room to walk, graze, and loaf, with shelter from wind and weather and clean water within easy reach.

How much pasture is enough?

A common rule of thumb is **1.5 to 2 acres of pasture per horse** for pasture that supplies a meaningful share of the diet, and more in dry regions or poor soils. Fewer acres can work with active management, but a small paddock quickly becomes a dirt lot and the horse eats mostly hay. A **dry lot** (a gravel or packed-dirt paddock with no grass) paired with a good hay program is a legitimate setup, and often the safer option for horses prone to laminitis.

Stall time should be balanced with turnout. A horse kept in a stall for most of the day is at higher risk for colic, ulcers, stiffness, and stable vices such as cribbing and weaving. Aim for as many hours of turnout each day as your setup safely allows, with a stall used for bad weather, injury, or short feeding times.

Farm layout — a map you could draw

Picture a simple farm viewed from above, north at the top of the page, with each item lettered the way you might label a sketch.

Label	Where it goes	Size and details	Why it works
A. Entry gate and parking	South edge, near the road or lane	Gate at least 12 feet wide; room for a truck and trailer to turn around	Keeps hauling and visitors away from the horses
B. Hay and feed storage	Southeast corner, apart from the horses and not in the barn loft above them	Dry, ventilated, off the ground on pallets; locked or latched	Protects feed from moisture, mold, and curious horses; reduces fire risk and keeps dust out of the horse area
C. Run-in shelter	North edge of the paddock, with its back to the prevailing winter wind and the open side facing southeast	At least 12 feet by 12 feet per horse; larger for two or more	Gives horses a dry place to stand out of wind, rain, and sun at will
D. Dry lot or sacrifice paddock	Directly in front of the run-in	Gravel or stone dust base; about the size of a small barn lot	A place to keep horses off wet or resting pasture and out of mud
E. Water tank	Along the shared fence line between two paddocks, in sight of the barn or house	Large enough for a full day's supply for every horse; placed on gravel or a concrete pad; heated or de-iced in winter	One tank serves two paddocks and is easy to check each time you pass
F. Pasture A and Pasture B	Side by side, each with its own gate onto the lane	Divided by a cross fence so one rests while the other grazes	Lets grass recover, controls parasites, and keeps footing from turning to mud
G. Shade	Trees or a roofed area along the south or west side of each pasture	Check each tree before you count it (no black walnut, wild cherry, or red maple)	Shade protects pink noses and helps with heat stress
H. Manure pile	Northeast corner, downwind, at least 50 feet from water and fencing	Contained, turned, or hauled regularly	Keeps flies, smell, and runoff away from horses

Label	Where it goes	Size and details	Why it works
J. Perimeter fence	All the way around, with a second line inside the pasture if possible	Top rail 4.5 to 5 feet high	Keeps horses in, dogs and deer from startling them, and neighbors safe

Run-in shelter or barn

A **run-in** is a three-sided shelter a horse can walk into and out of at will. It needs to be dry, well drained, and large enough that every horse can stand inside, including the lowest-ranking one, without being run off. Face the open side away from the prevailing wind. For a barn stall, plan on at least **12 by 12 feet** for an average horse (10 by 10 for a pony), with a ceiling high enough that a rearing horse will not strike it and good ventilation. Airflow matters far more than warmth, so open a window or door even in winter.

Fencing — safe, visible, strong

A good horse fence is one the horse can see, cannot get a foot through, and cannot break itself on. **Avoid barbed wire** entirely. It causes deep, ugly injuries and has no place around horses.

Fence type	Notes
Wood board or post-and-rail (3 to 4 rails)	Classic, visible, and strong; needs painting or staining and repair when horses chew or lean
Electric tape or rope (as an addition)	Excellent as an interior divider or as a "hot" line above wood or woven wire; visible, easy to move; never use thin single-strand electric wire as the only fence
Split-rail	A traditional look, but its wide gaps mean it works best with woven wire attached or an electric line added
Barbed wire, high-tensile single strands, or wide-mesh sheep wire	**Avoid** — horses can tear tissue or catch a hoof and panic

Whichever fence you choose, set posts firmly, keep the top rail at roughly **4.5 to 5 feet**, and keep the lowest rail low enough that a horse cannot get a leg under it. Use latches a horse cannot work with its lips, and make sure no sharp bolts, nails, or hooks stick out. Walk the whole fence line every week.

SECTION 4

Bedding & Footing

Bedding is more than a cushion. It is the air your horse breathes in the stall and the surface under its hooves while it rests. Choose something low in dust, absorbent, and safe if nibbled.

Bedding type	Best for	Performance	Notes
Kiln-dried pine shavings	Most stalls	Absorbent, widely available, easy to clean	Buy from a supplier who certifies no black walnut; look for low-dust bags
Wood pellets (swell with water)	Stalls with heave-prone or dust-sensitive horses	Very absorbent, low dust, compact to haul and store	Needs a little water to fluff; can be heavy to muck when wet
Straw (wheat or oat)	Foaling stalls, horses that do well on it	Warm, inexpensive, cushioned	Some horses eat it, which can cause colic or choke; can be dusty or moldy
Coarse sand or stone dust (paddock footing)	High-traffic outdoor areas	Drains well and resists mud	Do not use sand where horses eat off the ground (sand colic); use stone dust or gravel for run-ins
Black walnut shavings or bedding with any walnut content	**Never**	**Can cause laminitis within hours**	Even small amounts mixed into shavings can be dangerous; ask your supplier
Sawdust or shavings from treated, glued, or painted wood	**Never**	Chemicals and glues are toxic	Do not take free "shop scraps" from a cabinet or furniture shop unless you know exactly what's in them

Avoid outright

- **Black walnut** in any form — shavings, sawdust, mulch, or chips. It is common in Pennsylvania, and a bag of "free shavings" from a local sawmill may contain it. Exposure can cause sudden laminitis. Ask for a written confirmation, or skip the unknown source.
- **Lawn clippings** used as bedding or dumped in the paddock. They ferment quickly and can cause colic and laminitis.

SECTION 5

Hay, Water & Salt — The 3 Numbers

If you only get three things right, get these. Every horse owner should know them by heart, because nearly everything else in horse care rests on them.

Parameter	Target	How to measure it	What goes wrong when it's off
Forage (hay and grass)	**1.5–2% of body weight per day** — about 15–20 lbs of hay for a 1,000 lb horse	Weigh the horse with a weight tape, then weigh flakes on a hay scale and feed by weight	Too little: weight loss, ulcers, bad behavior, chewing wood; too much: obesity and metabolic problems; long gaps between forage: ulcers and colic risk
Water	**5–10+ gallons per day**; more in heat, during hard work, or for lactating mares	Mark the tank, refill it daily, and note how much disappears; check skin elasticity and gum moisture	Too little: dehydration and impaction colic; icy or very cold water: horses drink less in winter
Salt	Loose salt or a plain salt block available at all times; roughly **1–2 ounces a day** for a horse in light work, more when sweating heavily	Weigh a block over a month or measure out loose salt; watch for licking	Too little: reduced thirst, poor hydration, electrolyte imbalance; much more than needed: excess water intake and wet stalls

A "flake" of hay is not a standard unit. A flake can weigh anywhere from 2 to 6 pounds depending on the baler and bale, so weigh a few to find out what yours actually weighs. Easy keepers (horses that gain weight on air) should be near 1.5 percent, hard keepers and working horses near 2 percent, and anything below that should be a vet decision.

How to weigh your horse with a tape

A weight tape around the heart girth gives a rough estimate and, more usefully, shows change over time. Measure the same way each time, on level ground, with the horse standing square, and check monthly.

Body condition: aim for a 5

Vets use the **Henneke body condition scoring system**, a 9-point scale where 1 is emaciated and 9 is extremely obese. For most horses, a **5** is the target: you can feel the ribs easily with light pressure but not see them, the back is level, and the fat over the tailhead feels spongy. A 4 or below is thin; a 6 or above, especially with a cresty neck, is heading toward trouble. Score your horse monthly and take photos from the side.

Hay quality

Good hay smells sweet and fresh, is dry, and is free of dust, mold, weeds, and debris. Walk away from hay that is musty, dusty, or wet; round bales left outside carry extra mold and botulism risk. Where possible, **test your hay**. A lab report shows protein, minerals, and the **non-structural carbohydrate (NSC)** level, the sugar and starch. County extension offices can often arrange testing, and for a horse with metabolic concerns it is not optional.

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



Forage first. Hay is the foundation, salt and water are always available, and grain, treats and sweet feed are the small extras.

Walnut Creek Supply's horse philosophy fits on a single line: **forage first, and skip the sweet feed.** Clean fuel, no junk. A horse is a grazing animal with a small stomach and a long, sensitive gut that evolved to process grass in small amounts, nearly all day. Feed in a way that matches that design and horses are calmer, healthier, and cheaper to keep. Fight it, and you pay in ulcers, colic, laminitis, and vet bills.

The forage-first plan

For most adult horses, the diet starts and nearly ends with **good forage**: pasture grass and hay. The number to know is **1.5 to 2% of body weight per day in forage**, which works out to roughly **15 to 20 pounds of hay for a 1,000 lb horse.** Hay that is good quality, free of dust and mold, and fed in a way that stretches the eating time will meet the energy and fiber needs of most horses in light to moderate work.

Forage keeps the gut moving, buffers stomach acid with saliva (a horse makes saliva only when it chews), and satisfies the horse's urge to eat for hours. Long gaps without forage raise the risk of **gastric ulcers** and colic. Use slow feeders and small-hole hay nets to stretch meals through the night, and aim for no more than four to six hours without forage.

Feeding frequency

Feed hay or turn out to pasture **at least two to three times a day**, and more often if you can arrange it. Concentrates (grains and pelleted feeds), if you feed them, should be split into small meals. A good rule is **no more than about half a pound of concentrate per 100 pounds of body weight per meal** (so no more than five pounds for a 1,000 lb horse). Feed on a regular schedule, because horses thrive on routine.

Grass hay, alfalfa, and pasture

Forage	Category	Best for	Notes
Timothy, orchardgrass, and mixed grass hay	**Staple forage**	Most adult horses	Moderate protein and energy; lowest risk of overfeeding calories; best default
Pasture grass	**Staple forage**	Horses with room to graze	Seasonally high in sugar (spring and fall); limit time for horses prone to laminitis
Alfalfa (and alfalfa mixes)	**Supplemental forage**	Hard keepers, growing horses, lactating mares, horses with ulcer risk	Higher in protein, calcium, and calories; too rich for easy keepers when fed alone

What about grain and concentrates?

Concentrates are the grains, pellets, and sweet mixes added to the forage to supply extra calories and nutrients. Many horses need very little. In fact, a lot of horses do very well on **forage plus a ration balancer** and nothing else.

A **ration balancer** is a small-serving, concentrated feed (typically fed at 1 to 2 pounds a day for a 1,000 lb horse, but follow the label) that supplies protein, vitamins, minerals, and amino acids that hay alone may lack, with very few calories and little sugar. A plain vitamin-mineral supplement can do a similar job for horses on good pasture.

Horses that need more calories (hard workers, hard keepers, lactating mares, seniors) can add soaked beet pulp, alfalfa pellets, or a measured amount of a low-sugar, high-fat feed. Whole oats are a classic energy feed, but they are still starch, so treat them as a measured scoop rather than a bucket.

Why sweet feed is a problem

Sweet feed is the sticky, molasses-coated grain mix that smells like candy. Horses love it, which is part of the problem. It is typically high in sugar and starch, which can reach the hindgut and ferment, upsetting the gut bacteria and raising the risk of colic, laminitis, and ulcers. High-sugar feeds also cause energy spikes that some owners mistake for "attitude," and the ingredient mix can vary from batch to batch.

Sugar, starch, and metabolic risk

Some horses process sugar poorly. **Equine metabolic syndrome (EMS)**, **PPID (pituitary pars intermedia dysfunction, also called Cushing's disease)**, **insulin resistance**, and a history of laminitis all put a horse in the "low-NSC" category. **NSC** stands for non-structural carbohydrates, which are the sugar and starch in feed and forage. A common target for these horses is a total diet under roughly 10 to 12 percent NSC, though your vet will set the number.

For a metabolic horse:

- Test the hay, and choose low-NSC hay.
- Limit or eliminate pasture time, or use a grazing muzzle during the high-sugar parts of the day (early spring, fall, and any time grass is stressed by drought or frost).
- Work closely with your vet. These horses are at higher risk of laminitis, which can be career-ending or life-ending.

Changing feed safely

Any change in hay, grain, or supplement should be **gradual, over 7 to 14 days**. Swap a little at a time, increasing the new feed and decreasing the old. The bacteria in the hindgut need time to adjust, and fast changes are a classic trigger for colic.

Supplement honesty

The supplement aisle is full of promises, so be skeptical. Most supplements are not regulated like medicines, and many lack proof of benefit. Ask three questions of every product: **What problem am I solving? What is the evidence? Is my horse already getting this from forage or a ration balancer?** Stacking five products can double up some nutrients and unbalance others. When in doubt, ask your vet before buying.

Toxic plants and foods

Many everyday plants and foods can hurt or kill a horse. Walk your pasture, check your hay, and keep your pantry out of reach.

Item	Category	Why it matters	What to do
Wilted or dried red maple leaves	**Toxic plant**	Damage red blood cells and can be fatal; most dangerous in fall and after storms	Remove fallen limbs and leaves from pastures and troughs; call the vet right away if eaten
Yew (all parts)	**Toxic plant**	A very small amount can cause sudden death	Remove from the property and never dump trimmings near the paddock
Oleander	**Toxic plant**	Contains cardiac toxins; also dangerous if dried in hay	Remove it; do not grow near horses
Ragwort and tansy ragwort	**Toxic weeds**	Cause irreversible liver damage over time; also dangerous when baled into hay	Pull or control; check your hay carefully
Bracken fern	**Toxic plant**	Causes vitamin B1 (thiamine) deficiency and neurological signs	Control it in pastures; avoid hay with ferns
Black walnut (shavings, leaves, nuts)	**Toxic**	Can cause laminitis; exposure through bedding is the most common route	Never use as bedding; fence horses away from walnut trees
Moldy hay, grain, or feed	**Toxic feed**	Can cause colic, respiratory disease, and neurological problems	Check every bale and bag; throw out anything that smells musty
Lawn clippings	**Hazard**	Ferment quickly, causing colic and laminitis	Never dump in the paddock or feed as a treat
Avocado (fruit, pit, leaves, bark)	**Toxic food**	Contains persin, which can cause colic and heart damage	Keep it out of reach
Chocolate	**Toxic food**	Contains theobromine, which can cause heart problems	No candy or chocolate treats; also avoid cocoa-based mulches
Fruit pits and large chunks of apple or carrot	**Choke hazard**	Can lodge in the esophagus	Cut treats into small pieces and remove pits
Large amounts of apples, sweets, and sugary treats	**Metabolic risk**	Excess sugar can upset gut bacteria and trigger laminitis	Keep treats few, small, and healthy

If you suspect your horse ate something toxic, call your vet right away. Do not wait for symptoms, and do not give medication unless the vet tells you to.

SECTION 7

Hooves, Coat & Dental Care

The hoof

A horse's hoof is a living structure, not a fingernail. The outside wall is tough keratin; inside are the sensitive laminae (the "Velcro" that attaches the hoof wall to the bone), blood vessels, and the **frog**, the V-shaped pad on the underside that helps absorb shock and pump blood up the leg. When people say "no hoof, no horse," this is why.

Farrier visits: every 6 to 8 weeks. Regular trimming keeps the hoof balanced and prevents overgrowth, cracks, and strain on tendons. Some horses may need more frequent visits, especially if shod. Book your next appointment before your farrier drives away.

Pick out hooves daily, and always before and after riding. Use a hoof pick from heel to toe, clear the grooves on either side of the frog, and look for stones, packed mud, cracks, bad smells, or heat. A daily pick-out is also how you spot trouble early.

Barefoot or shod? This is a decision for your vet and farrier, not an ideology. Many horses do well barefoot with a good trim, a healthy diet, and appropriate work. Others need shoes for traction, protection, or correction. Your horse's feet, work, and terrain will tell you.

Know the digital pulse. Run your fingertips down the back of the fetlock and find the small artery. In a healthy horse the pulse is faint. A strong, bounding pulse, especially with heat in the hoof, is one of the earliest warning signs of laminitis or an abscess. Feel it regularly so you know what normal feels like.

Thrush and abscess prevention. Thrush is a bacterial infection in the frog, marked by black, foul-smelling material. Abscesses are pockets of infection inside the hoof. Both love wet, muddy, dirty conditions. Keep paddocks and stalls dry and clean, pick hooves daily, trim regularly, and fix muddy gates and water-tank areas. Hoof cracks usually trace back to long gaps between trims, wet-dry cycles, or nutrition. Keep up with your farrier and call a vet if a crack bleeds, runs deep, or causes lameness.

The coat

Grooming is one of the best ways to build a relationship and spot lumps, cuts, ticks, or heat. Brush before riding to remove dirt that could rub under tack, and after to remove sweat. Healthy horses with a thick winter coat and a run-in often don't need a blanket; clipped, elderly, thin, or ill horses may. Pick a blanket that fits well, never leave a wet one on, and check under it daily.

Keep **fly masks** on during insect season, protect **pink noses** from sunburn with a horse-safe sunscreen or a mask with a nose covering, and wash off sweat and mud after work. For fly control, remove manure daily, keep bedding dry, and drain standing water, since flies breed there.

Dental care

Horse teeth grow continuously and wear down as they chew. Uneven wear leaves sharp points and hooks that can cut cheeks and tongue. The fix is called **floating**: a vet or qualified equine dentist files the points smooth, usually with the horse sedated.

Schedule an annual dental exam for every horse, and twice a year for seniors. Signs of dental trouble include dropping partly chewed feed (quidding), whole grain in the manure, weight loss, head tossing, bit resistance, and foul breath. Teeth are the first stop in any weight-loss mystery.

SECTION 8

Tack, Riding Safety & Groundwork

Tack that fits and lasts

Good tack is an investment, and one place where we tell people to buy once. Lancaster County has a long tradition of harness shops, saddlers, and leatherworkers who make and repair gear built to last decades, and that spirit is what we look for in what we stock. Quality leather tack, properly cared for, can serve a horse and then the next generation. Cheap tack tends to break at the worst time.

- **Saddle fit matters more than saddle price.** A saddle that pinches the withers or presses on the spine can cause pain, soreness, and sour behavior. Have a professional fitter check it, and re-check as your horse changes shape.
- **Bridle and bit.** The bridle should sit comfortably without pinching the ears or rubbing the cheeks. The bit should be the right size and fit, and used with soft hands. Check the teeth if a horse resists the bit.
- **Leather care.** Wipe leather clean after use with a damp cloth, and condition it regularly. Inspect billets, stitching, and buckles before every ride, and fix any wear right away. Keep tack in a cool, dry place.

Rider safety

Wear a **helmet** certified to current equestrian safety standards, every ride, every time, because head injuries are the most serious injuries in riding. Wear boots with a small heel so a foot cannot slip through the stirrup, tell someone where you are riding, and take lessons throughout your riding life. A green horse paired with a green rider is a recipe for trouble.

Trail rides: hydration and recovery

On longer rides, offer water at safe crossings. Walk the last mile to let heart rate and breathing settle, then loosen the girth and walk the horse until it is dry and cool. Check the TPR after a hard ride; pulse and breathing should fall back toward normal within 10 to 20 minutes. If they don't, call the vet. Check legs, back, and hooves afterward for heat, swelling, or soreness.

Groundwork builds trust

Groundwork is the work you do on the ground with your horse before and alongside riding: leading, yielding the hindquarters and shoulders, backing up, standing quietly, longeing, and learning to move around scary things. It teaches your horse to look to you for guidance and teaches you to read your horse. A horse that respects your space and trusts you on the ground is safer and more willing in the saddle.

Transport safety

Hauling is stressful on a horse. Before you travel, check the trailer's floor, tires, hitch, and lights, and make sure your horse loads calmly. Provide airflow without drafts, tie with a quick-release knot, offer water and hay on the road, and stop every few hours on a long haul. Never tie a head so high that it cannot lower it, because a lowered head helps clear the airway.

After travel, give a **cool-down and decompression**: unload calmly, offer water, let the horse walk and stretch, and check its TPR. Skip hard work right after a long haul, and watch appetite and temperature for several days.

SECTION 9

Common Challenges & Solutions

Each entry below follows the same pattern: what you see, why it happens, what to do, and when to call a vet. When in doubt, call. A horse can go from "a little off" to critical faster than most owners expect, and a phone call is cheap.

Colic

What you see: pawing, looking or biting at the flank, stretching out as if to urinate, repeatedly lying down and getting up, rolling, sweating without exercise, refusing food, little or no manure, and quiet or absent gut sounds (press an ear to the flank and listen for gurgling on both sides). **Why:** colic is a general term for abdominal pain, with causes that include sudden feed changes, long gaps without forage, too little water, sand ingestion, parasites, impactions, and twists in the gut. Horses cannot vomit, so a problem in the gut has nowhere to go. **What to do:** remove all feed, call your vet right away, and take the TPR so you can report it. Hand-walk the horse if it is calm and safe for you to do so. **Do not give any medication unless your vet tells you to**, because painkillers can hide signs the vet needs to see. **When to call a vet:** immediately. Colic is an emergency until your vet says otherwise.

Laminitis and founder

What you see: heat in one or more hooves, a strong, bounding digital pulse at the back of the fetlock, a horse standing with its front feet stretched out and weight rocked back on its heels, reluctance to walk or turn, and lying down more than usual. **Why:** laminitis is inflammation of the laminae, the tissues that bond the hoof wall to the bone. **Founder** is when that bond fails and the bone rotates or sinks. Causes include sugar and starch overload (lush pasture, grain, sweet feed), metabolic disease (EMS, PPID, insulin resistance), black walnut shavings, severe illness, and overloading one leg when the other is injured. **What to do:** call your vet immediately, take the horse off pasture and grain, provide soft, deep footing such as sand or shavings, and do not force the horse to walk. Do not give medication unless told to. **When to call a vet:** at the first sign. Early treatment can mean the difference between recovery and permanent damage.

Choke

What you see: saliva or feed coming from the nostrils, repeated stretching and arching of the neck, coughing or gagging, drooling, anxious behavior, and refusing food. **Why:** feed or a foreign object (an apple chunk, dry pellets, a carrot) is stuck in the esophagus, the tube from throat to stomach. Horse "choke" is not an airway block like human choking, but it can still lead to pneumonia if feed is inhaled. **What to do:** take the feed and water away, keep the horse calm with its head low, and call your vet. Do not try to pull anything out or force water down. **When to call a vet:** right away. Many chokes clear on their own within 20 to 30 minutes, but any that last longer need a vet.

Gastric ulcers

What you see: poor or picky appetite, weight loss, dull coat, girthiness (pinning ears or flinching at the girth), crankiness under saddle, mild recurring colic. **Why:** the stomach makes acid all the time, whether or not there is food. Long gaps without forage, high-grain diets, stress, heavy work, and trailering all raise the risk. **What to do:** feed forage more often so the horse is never without hay for long, cut back on grain, offer some alfalfa before work to buffer acid, and reduce stress. Your vet can confirm the diagnosis with a scope and prescribe treatment. **When to call a vet:** if signs last more than a week or two, or with weight loss or colic.

Rain rot (rain scald)

What you see: crusty scabs and clumps of hair along the back, rump, and neck, often painful to the touch. **Why:** a bacterial skin infection that takes hold when skin stays wet for long periods, especially under a damp blanket or heavy coat. **What to do:** get the horse out of the wet, keep the skin dry, gently soften and remove scabs with a mild antibacterial wash, rinse and dry thoroughly,

and do not share tack or brushes. **When to call a vet:** if it spreads, looks infected, or is not better within a week or two.

Hoof abscess

What you see: sudden, severe lameness (often three-legged), heat in the hoof, a strong digital pulse, and sometimes swelling up the leg. After days, the abscess may burst out at the heel or coronary band. **Why:** bacteria enter through a crack, bruise, or puncture and form a pocket of pus inside the hoof. Wet-to-dry changes and muddy conditions make it more likely. **What to do:** call your vet or farrier, keep the horse in a clean, dry place, and follow instructions, which may include soaking the hoof, poulticing, or opening the abscess. **When to call a vet:** at the first sign of sudden lameness. It can look like a broken leg, laminitis, or an abscess, and only an exam can tell the difference.

Lameness

What you see: limping, a head bob at the trot (the head goes up when the sore leg hits the ground), a shortened stride, stiffness, swelling, heat, or a change in attitude under saddle. **Why:** causes include hoof problems, tendon and ligament strains, joint trouble, bruises, abscesses, and injuries. **What to do:** stop work, check the hoof for stones and heat, feel for swelling, and rest the horse in a stall or small paddock. Do not give painkillers before the vet sees the horse, since they can mask a serious problem. **When to call a vet:** the same day for a horse that will not bear weight, has a hot or swollen leg, or a deep wound near a joint; within a day or two for lameness that doesn't improve with rest.

Tying-up (exertional rhabdomyolysis)

What you see: stiffness, hard and tight hindquarter muscles, sweating, trembling, reluctance to move, dark brown urine, often starting during or after exercise. **Why:** muscle cells break down during work, often linked to too much grain, inconsistent exercise, electrolyte problems, or an inherited tendency. **What to do:** stop exercise at once, keep the horse where it is, keep it warm and calm, and call your vet. Do not force a tied-up horse to walk. **When to call a vet:** immediately, because the kidneys can be damaged. A vet can also help plan diet and exercise to prevent a repeat.

Weight loss or obesity

What you see: for weight loss, visible ribs, a prominent spine and hip bones, and lost muscle; for obesity, a cresty neck, fat pads at the tailhead and shoulders, and ribs that are hard to feel. **Why:** weight loss comes from too few calories, poor teeth, parasites, illness, ulcers, competition at feeding, or a harsh winter; obesity comes from more feed or pasture than work, and it raises the risk of laminitis and metabolic disease. **What to do:** score body condition monthly (aim for a 5), weigh with a tape, check teeth and parasite load, and adjust the diet gradually. For thin horses, add forage first, then low-sugar fat and fiber. For heavy horses, reduce pasture and calories (not below 1.5% of body weight in forage unless a vet says so), use a slow feeder, add movement, and skip the treats. **When to call a vet:** for unexplained weight loss or a cresty neck with fat pads.

Heaves (recurrent airway obstruction)

What you see: a chronic cough, nasal discharge, labored breathing with a visible "heave line" along the belly, and wheezing, usually worse in the barn and with dusty hay. **Why:** an allergic-type reaction to dust and mold in hay and bedding, similar to asthma in people. **What to do:** cut dust everywhere: soak or steam hay, use low-dust bedding, keep the horse outside as much as possible, and ventilate the barn well. **When to call a vet:** at the first chronic cough. Labored breathing at rest is an emergency.

Heat stress

What you see: heavy sweating (or, dangerously, none), a high pulse and breathing rate that don't settle with rest, depression, and stumbling. **Why:** humid weather, heavy work, poor fitness, and a lack of shade or water can overwhelm a horse's cooling. **What to do:** move the horse into shade with airflow, offer water, hose with cool (not ice) water, and scrape the water off to keep cooling. Work horses early or late in the day. **When to call a vet:** immediately if the temperature stays above 103°F, sweating stops, or the horse seems dull or stumbles.

SECTION 10

Routine Care Calendar

How often	What to do
Daily	Feed hay by weight, at least two to three times; use slow feeders to stretch eating time
Daily	Check water; scrub buckets or troughs as needed; break ice in cold weather
Daily	Look the horse over head to tail: attitude, appetite, eyes, nose, manure, gait, legs, and any wounds
Daily	Pick out all four hooves, and check for heat, cracks, or smell
Daily	Muck stalls and clean the paddock of manure
Weekly	Scrub water troughs and inspect de-icers
Weekly	Walk the whole fence line; look for loose boards, popped nails, and low spots
Weekly	Groom thoroughly, checking skin for scabs, lumps, ticks, and rain rot
Monthly	Take body weight with a tape and body condition score; record numbers and photographs
Monthly	Check first aid kit and replace what's used or expired
Every 6 to 8 weeks	Farrier visit (trim or reset shoes)
Spring and fall	Vaccinations as directed by your vet; fecal egg count to guide deworming; dental check if due
Summer	Heat watch: shade, water, fly control, sunscreen for pink noses
Fall	Check for red maple and other toxic leaves; stock hay for winter; check fencing
Winter	Make sure water does not freeze; blankets as needed; ice-melt footing at gates
Annually	Wellness exam, vaccinations, Coggins test if you travel or board, and dental exam

SECTION 11

When to Call the Vet

A horse is a prey animal, and prey animals hide pain, so by the time a horse looks sick it has often been sick a while. Learn what normal looks like, and if something seems off, call.

Normal vitals (adult horse at rest)

Take these when your horse is calm and has not just been worked. Write them down when your horse is healthy so you have a personal baseline.

Vital sign	Normal range for an adult at rest	How to take it
Temperature	**99–101.5°F**	Use a digital thermometer, lubricated, inserted about an inch into the rectum and held against the wall for a full reading; stand to the side, not behind
Pulse (heart rate)	**28–44 beats per minute**	Use a stethoscope behind the left elbow, or feel for the pulse under the jaw or at the inside of the cheek; count for 30 seconds and double it
Respiration (breathing rate)	**8–16 breaths per minute**	Watch the flank or nostrils rise and fall; count for 30 seconds and double it

TPR stands for temperature, pulse, and respiration. You can also check **gum color** (healthy gums are pink and moist), **capillary refill** (press a thumb on the gums; color should return in about 2 seconds), and **hydration** (pinch the skin on the neck; it should flatten in about a second). Foals and young horses run somewhat higher, so ask your vet.

Call now — emergencies

If you see any of these, call your vet immediately, and do not give any medication unless your vet tells you to.

- Signs of **colic**: pawing, rolling, looking at the flank, repeated lying down and getting up, sweating, no gut sounds, refusing food
- Signs of **laminitis or founder**: heat in the hooves, a strong digital pulse, rocking back on the heels, reluctance to move
- **Choke**: feed or saliva from the nose, repeated neck stretching, drooling
- **Deep wounds**, especially near joints or tendons, wounds that gush blood, or punctures
- **Eye injuries**: squinting, tearing, a cloudy or bluish eye, swelling, or discharge. Eyes can be lost in a matter of hours
- **Fever**: a temperature of 102°F or higher, especially with dullness or off feed
- **Inability to stand**, or a horse that is down and cannot get up
- **Tying-up**: hard, tight muscles, sweating, and reluctance to move after exercise
- Labored breathing at rest, blue or very pale gums, or a very high heart rate that doesn't settle
- Sudden severe lameness, or a horse that won't put weight on a leg
- Suspected ingestion of a toxic plant or feed

For anything that lingers a day or two, such as poor appetite, changed manure, weight loss, a cough, or mild lameness, call and book an exam.

SECTION 12

FAQ

How much hay should a horse eat per day?

A horse should eat roughly **1.5 to 2 percent of its body weight in forage each day**, which is about 15 to 20 pounds of hay for a 1,000 pound horse. Easy keepers sit near the low end, and hard keepers and working horses near the high end. Feed by weight, because a "flake" can run anywhere from 2 to 6 pounds, and spread it over several feedings or use a slow feeder so your horse is rarely without forage.

How much land does a horse need?

A common rule of thumb is **1.5 to 2 acres of pasture per horse** when you want grazing to supply a meaningful part of the diet, and more in dry regions or poor soil. Smaller spaces can work with more hay and careful management, and a dry lot with a good hay program is often the safer choice for horses prone to laminitis. Whatever the acreage, your horse also needs a run-in shelter, safe fencing without barbed wire, clean water, and the company of at least one other equine.

How much water does a horse drink?

A typical adult horse drinks about **5 to 10 gallons of water per day**, and more in hot weather, hard work, or while nursing a foal, sometimes 15 gallons or more. Water should be clean, fresh, and always available, and ice-free in winter, since horses drink less when it is freezing cold. Plain salt, offered free choice, encourages drinking.

What should I feed my horse?

For most horses, the answer is **good forage first**: quality grass hay and, where appropriate, pasture, fed by weight so the horse eats for most of the day. Add free-choice plain salt and clean water. Many horses then do well with a small daily serving of a **ration balancer** or vitamin-mineral supplement to fill in what hay lacks. Horses with higher energy needs, such as hard workers, hard keepers, lactating mares, and seniors, can add calories from soaked beet pulp or alfalfa. Horses with metabolic problems need low-NSC feeding under their vet's guidance, and every feed change should be gradual, over 7 to 14 days.

Why is sweet feed bad for horses?

Sweet feed is a molasses-coated grain mix that is typically high in sugar and starch. A horse's small intestine can only handle so much starch at once, and the excess passes into the hindgut, where it ferments and upsets the gut bacteria, raising the risk of colic, ulcers, and laminitis. Most horses do better, and cost less to feed, on forage and a ration balancer.

How often should a horse see a farrier?

Most horses should see a farrier **every 6 to 8 weeks**, year-round, whether they wear shoes or go barefoot. Hooves grow continuously and fall out of balance if left too long, which strains tendons and joints and leads to cracks and lameness. Some horses need visits closer to every four to six weeks, so your farrier is the best judge.

What are the signs of colic?

The classic signs are pawing, looking or biting at the flank, stretching out as if to urinate, repeatedly lying down and getting up, rolling, sweating when the horse is not hot or working, refusing food, passing little or no manure, and quiet or absent gut sounds. Treat colic as an emergency: take away feed, call your vet immediately, record the temperature, pulse, and breathing so you can report them, and **do not give any medication unless your vet tells you to**.

How long do horses live?

With good care, most horses live **25 to 30 years or more**, and some reach their mid-30s. Ponies often outlive large horses. Lifespan depends on genetics, nutrition, hoof and dental care, weight management, vaccinations, parasite control, and how the horse is used. Think of a horse as a decades-long commitment: a horse you bring home at 10 may be with you for another 20 years or more, including the retirement years.

How much does it cost to keep a horse?

It varies widely, and the honest answer is "more than people expect." A horse on your own land with plenty of pasture can cost a few thousand dollars a year, while full-care boarding, regular lessons, a horse with special needs, or a high-cost area can run well beyond ten thousand. The biggest ongoing costs are hay, boarding (if you have no land), farrier visits every 6 to 8 weeks, vet care, bedding, and supplies. Keep an emergency fund too, because a single colic or lameness emergency can cost thousands.

What vaccines does a horse need?

Your vet will set the schedule for your horse's age, location, and travel, but the **core vaccines** nearly every horse needs are tetanus, Eastern and Western equine encephalitis, West Nile virus, and rabies. **Risk-based vaccines** include influenza, rhinopneumonitis (equine herpesvirus), and strangles, depending on whether your horse travels, goes to shows, or lives where horses come and go. Most horses also need a **Coggins (EIA) test** for travel and boarding. Pair vaccines with an annual wellness exam, and use fecal egg counts to guide deworming rather than a blanket schedule.

> ***Ready to shop?*** *Start with Horses!. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters.*

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

Before we earn a dime, **10% of every purchase at Walnut Creek Supply goes to no-kill animal shelters across the country.** Not at checkout. Not as an option. Off the top of every order, every day, because we believe responsible animal ownership and community care are the same commitment made in two different directions.

For horse people, that has a particular meaning. Horses are some of the longest-lived, most expensive animals a family can take on, and when life changes, they are some of the hardest to place. If you've read this far, you know what a horse takes: time, money, patience, and the humility to keep learning. That makes you exactly the kind of owner these animals deserve. And if you are in a position to adopt rather than buy, a rescue near you may well have a sound, sweet older horse waiting for a family with a plan.

We are a family business in Christiana, in the heart of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food, keep our own animals, and stock the clean-label, American-made goods we would put in front of our own. **No mystery ingredients.** Clean fuel, no junk. Tack and gear that is built to be repaired, not replaced. If you have a question about your horse's hay, ration balancer, hoof care, or what to put in your first-aid kit, call us at **(717) 983-8069**. We would rather talk it through with you.

Welcome to the next 25 to 30 years with one of the most remarkable animals in the world. Take your time, ask for help early, and enjoy the ride.