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## Where's The Hay?

If you have been looking to purchase coastal hay recently you have probably been asking the same question. A combination of factors last year and this year caused a decreased production of coastal hay and increased consumption by cattle and horses over summer, fall and winter. So as you have discovered there is a severe shortage of coastal hay and a need to explore other roughage options for your horses.

Let's start with the basics. Horses require more roughage than grain in their diets to maintain digestive tract health. Many of us provide this roughage with baled hay and coastal is the easiest and most economical. There are other baled hay choices. However, most of these hays must be shipped from northern climates causing an increase in cost.

Peanut is a locally grown hay with a higher protein and calorie content, much like alfalfa. Shipment costs are decreased but it is more costly to grow and harvest so expect a price lower than alfalfa but higher than coastal.

Timothy and timothy mixes are a mid-calorie, mid-protein, mid-price hay choice. This is a good choice for horses who are easy keepers and provides significant fiber in the diet. Some horses decide it is too stemmy and are unwilling to eat timothy. A timothy and alfalfa or orchard grass blend often helps increase palatability. The addition of alfalfa will increase the calorie content so an orchard grass blend is a better choice for easy keepers.

Straight orchard grass hay can be found at some of the larger hay dealers and your feed store may be able to specially purchase it for your needs. Orchard grass is an easily grown, lower calorie hay compared to timothy. Again, orchard grass is a northern hay so transportation costs are a factor. Most horses find it to be a

very palatable hay and its high fiber content helps prevent colics.

If your horse has a hard time gaining weight, alfalfa is an excellent roughage choice. Alfalfa is the most expensive of the baled hay choices but in return offers a high calorie, high protein addition to your horse's diet. Many horses can even be placed on an all-you-can-eat alfalfa buffet without excessive weight gain, decreased colic risk and a decrease grain bill. Alfalfa is not a good choice for horses with some metabolic diseases or active laminitis or founder.

Processed hays offer a consistent, reliable choice for hay. These hays are sold as either chaff or cubes. Chaff is made by chopping hay into a consistent size then spraying the hay with an oil, vitamin and mineral mixture to aid in preservation and increase nutritional value. There are a variety of chaffs designed for all types of horses from those needing extra calories to those needing none.

Cubed hays are a second processed hay option. They are most readily available as alfalfa cubes but can be timothy as well. Cubes should be weighed to ensure enough roughage is provided. They should also be thoroughly soaked in water to reduce the risk of choke.

Finally, in our search for alternative roughage for your horse, we come to beet pulp. The beet pulp purchased from your feed store is the dehydrated fibrous leftovers of the sugar beet industry. They provide an excellent addition to your horse's diet once soaked in water until fully rehydrated. If your horse is an easy keeper or has certain metabolic disorders you should be sure to look for molasses free beet pulp.

Call us anytime to help choose which roughage choices are the right ones for your horse.