

This winter on the prairies has been quite cold and, more importantly, there are record amounts of snow in many areas. Horse



owners that have their horses out grazing will need to be monitoring their horse's body condition on a regular basis. In many areas the snow is in excess of 12-18 inches deep. This means the horses are required to expend considerable amounts of energy trying to find adequate amounts of forage to meet their energy needs. This is on top of the increased amount of feed required to sustain body weight because of the cold temperature. As a general rule, horses require approximately 50% more feed in the winter than in the nicer times of the year. This means they average mature horse weighing 1100 lbs. will require 20-25 lbs. of feed per day. Owners should ask themselves can this happen knowing how much grass is still in the field and given the depth and condition of the snow. Supplemental hay or grain may be required this year due to the conditions.

Extra caution is going to be required if we get considerable melting and then freezing, when the horses will have difficulty pawing through the snow to reach the forage. Ideally, we would like to have the horses in a body condition score of about 6 on scale of 1 to 9, at this time of the year. Horses in this body condition can easily manage days when the weather is stormy and they do not want to graze. Horses that are less than two years of age cannot meet their nutrient requirements for maintenance and growth by only grazing and thus require supplemental feed.

Research has shown that horses tend to do better and are more active if they have access to a source of water. Horses also require some source of shelter weather it is natural (trees) or a man-made one to protect them from the winter winds.

Time monitoring your horse's body condition can keep you from having your horse losing more condition than is desirable.