AIRWAY RESPONSES IN HORSES FED ROUND BALE VS SQUARE BALES

With the high cost of hay, many people find that feeding hay from round bales is about half the cost of feeding hay from smaller square bales. Recent studies have shown that horses that eat hay from round bales have higher prevalence of airway disease. It was unknown as to why the horses that ate from the round bales were more likely to have airway disease. Since round bales and square bales were usually baled at different times from different fields, the differences in hay could not be ruled out. Perhaps the fields that had round bales had more dust or more allergens.

Larson et al., studied this issue to determine if there would still be this inflammatory response to round bales if the round and square bales were baled from the same field.1 They baled hay from the same field as round bales and also as square bales. They then stored the hay for two months. They took 30 normal horses and had half eat from round bales and half eat from the square bales. They found that the horses that ate from the round bales had more airway inflammation at the end of a six-week period.

This ruled out the field differences in the hay. A theory was put forth that this may be due to the fact that horses bury their noses into the round bale, as opposed to the square bale. Further research is needed to determine if this is the cause. A further experiment could be designed which would be to feed hay from a round bale after the hay has been peeled off compared to the horse eating directly from the bale.

Take Home Message:

- If you have a horse with a chronic cough and the horse is eating from round bales, you may want to change your horse-keeping practice and get the smaller square bales instead.

References: