



Baileys Horse Feeds/BEF Futurity 2011

Factsheet 13

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Body Condition Scoring and Top Line Assessment by Baileys Horse Feeds.

The importance of a good quality fully balanced diet, throughout a youngster's early months and years, cannot be over emphasised and, by providing optimum nutrition, will help to ensure that each individual is given the best chance to fulfil their genetic potential. For this reason, during the 2011 Evaluations, a Baileys nutritionist will work alongside the vet to give each horse an objective Body Condition Score and Top Line Assessment designed to give an indication of the suitability of the horse's diet at that time.

The nutritionist uses a visual and hands-on method to assess the amount of body fat the horse is carrying and the state of its top line and muscular development. The assessment, and any comments, do not affect the horse's Futurity Evaluation score and are designed to give the owner an additional objective view and a point of discussion should they so wish. The results collated over all 15 Evaluation Days in 2011 will help support Baileys' research into the growth and development of the young sporthorse, as well as the BEF's aim to progress the Futurity series further.

Nutritional Background

A visual assessment of a horse's body condition takes into account the amounts of body fat which are present and the level of muscle tone and development overall. The body stores excess dietary calories as fat, whilst dietary protein supplies amino acids which are the building blocks of muscle and other body tissues. Assessing the amount of fat the horse is carrying can give us a good indication of how well its calorie requirements are being met.

Assessing the top line and musculature also gives an indication of the protein content of the diet. Too little, or protein of insufficient quality, can mean that muscle and body tissues remain underdeveloped which could compromise the horse as it matures and is expected to perform. The horse's genetics dictate the numbers and types of muscle fibres in the body, which may be seen as a more rounded, "muscly" stamp of horse, or a leaner one, for example. We cannot change the

horse's genetic make-up through diet but we can help optimise what genetics provide.

Early identification of a horse whose diet is supplying too many calories, causing rapid growth or an "over-topped" youngster, or too few, when the youngster may be unthrifty and its growth interrupted, allows alterations to be made which can help support correct even growth and minimise the risk of developmental problems. Research has shown that it is a high calorie, rather than a high protein, diet which is linked with nutrition-related growth problems in horses, especially when accompanying mineral levels are inadequate.

During the Vet's assessment at the Futurity Evaluation, he/she will be looking for signs of any developmental problem which could affect the horse's athletic potential and future soundness. Whilst such problems are not always or entirely nutrition-related, once identified, the provision of a correctly balanced diet, supplying sufficient essential minerals and vitamins as well as other nutrients, will support growth and help ensure that young limbs have the right nutrients to develop.

Details of the assessment systems that Baileys' nutritionists will be using can be found in the following tables and the nutritionists will be happy to discuss their observations with the owner at the time of the assessment or later in the day, time permitting. They will also be happy to advise on dietary recommendations (**You are strongly advised not to make any significant dietary changes without prior consultation with a nutritionist or vet**).

As a guide, a Body Condition Score of 5, with a Top Line Assessment of Excellent, is ideal for optimum growth, health and performance in horses of all ages.

Body Condition Scoring (BCS) for the Baileys Horse Feeds/BEF Futurity Evaluations

The Body Condition Scoring system used by Baileys is based on the American 1 – 9 system (adapted from Henneke et al 1983) which gives the assessor greater flexibility and detail for the score given. They will be looking at the neck, ribs and rump to assess the horse's overall condition and level of body fat which provides an indication of the calorie intake of the horse in question.

As a guide, a Body Condition Score of less than 4 would indicate that the young horse's minimum calorie requirements are not being met by its diet, whilst one of more than 6 would indicate that its diet is supplying more calories than the horse requires which could lead to potential problems.

Score	Description
1 - Poor Minimum calorie requirements not met	The horse is emaciated with spine, ribs, tail head, shoulder blade and hips prominent with little or no flesh covering them.
2 - Very thin	Slight covering of flesh over scapula, spine and tail head.

Minimum calorie requirements not met	Ribs very prominent. Hollow through quarters, tucked up appearance in front of the stifle.
3 - Thin Minimum calorie requirements not met	Hips and ribs slightly covered. Some hollowness through quarters and tucked up. Top line undeveloped, angular appearance.
4 - Moderately thin Optimum calorie requirements not met	Outline of ribs discernible although covered. Scapula and hips covered. Neck reasonably well covered with some top line.
5 - Moderate Optimum calorie requirements met	Ribs not easily distinguished but can be felt. Well muscled top line, shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body. Fat around tailhead feeling spongy. No hollowness through quarters.
6 - Moderately fat Optimum calorie requirements slightly exceeded	May have slight crease down back. Fat over ribs feels spongy. Fat around tailhead feeling soft. Starting to deposit fat down withers and behind the shoulder.
7 - Fleshy Calorie requirements exceeded	Crease down back becoming obvious. Difficult to feel ribs. Fat deposits on neck and behind shoulders becoming obvious.
8 - Fat Calorie requirements exceeded	Definite crease down back and fatty “pads” around tail head and over shoulders and ribs. Apple shaped quarters!
9 - Extremely fat Calorie requirements exceeded	Large fat pads along ribs, shoulder, neck and over quarters and tail head area. Obvious crease down back and apple shaped quarters.

Top Line Evaluation System (TES) for the Baileys Horse Feeds/BEF Futurity Evaluations

This Top Line Assessment has been developed by Baileys, in conjunction with Don Kapper of Progressive Nutrition, Ohio, USA, and is used in the States at Warmblood gradings to assess the overall muscle development of horses of all ages. The Nutritionist will be assessing the horse’s top line (musculature) from the neck, over the withers and back to the hip and stifle area.

As a guide, a Top Line Assessment of Good to Excellent indicates that the young horse’s diet is supplying sufficient or optimum levels of good quality protein, whilst an assessment of Adequate to Poor indicates that the youngster’s diet is supplying insufficient levels of quality protein to meet minimum requirements.

Good quality protein supplies the necessary range of amino acids required to build strong healthy bone, muscle and other body tissues.

Grade	Visual Description
<p>Excellent</p> <p>Diet providing optimum levels of quality protein</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This horse has ideal muscle development for its body type. • The neck has a smooth or convex top line and blends smoothly into the shoulder and withers. • Muscle is full each side of the withers and along the spinal column so that the vertebrae cannot be seen. • The hip is full and the stifle muscles are defined. • There is no hollowness between the hip and stifle.
<p>Good</p> <p>Diet providing sufficient levels of quality protein</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This horse is adequately muscled although there are some areas of inadequacy. • The neck has a straight top line and there is some hollowing where the neck meets the shoulder. • There is hollowing each side of the withers and along the back. • The hip to stifle area is flatter.
<p>Adequate</p> <p>Diet may not be meeting horse's minimum protein requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The neck has a straight or concave top line and is weak. • Muscle each side of the withers are sunken. • Back and loin areas appear bony. • Vertebrae will be higher than the muscles beside them. • Muscling over the hip and hindquarter is adequate. • The hip to stifle area is weak.
<p>Poor</p> <p>Diet not meeting horse's minimum protein requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The neck has a concave top line and is hollowed. • Poor concave muscling over the entire topline from withers to tail. • The hip bones and the top of the vertebrae on the croup are pointed and the muscles between are sunken in. • The width of the stifles is narrower than that of the hips.

Nutritional Advice

Factsheet 10 on the BEF web site gives a brief outline of how to approach the feeding of the youngster in preparation for the Futurity Evaluations. Further practical advice is available on the Baileys Horse Feeds web site as well as in their new Stud Range Brochure (order online at <http://www.baileyshorsefeeds.co.uk/studareahome/brochurerequest.htm>) or by contacting their Nutrition team direct, by phone or email.

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