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How to Read a Horse Feed Tag

Article courtesy of Alltech. Author: [Emily Dickson](#)

As an involved horse owner, no doubt you have spent time carefully selecting a feed to match your horse's needs.

We are sure that you have read the purpose statement on the feed tag identifying the grain that will best suit your horse's stage of life. You have likely even

studied the guaranteed analysis to determine the feed's crude protein, crude fat and crude fiber levels.



However, while this is a great start, there is a bigger story to be told from each bag's feed tag -- one that is more interesting than you may realize.

Understanding what the guaranteed analysis tells you

The guaranteed analysis is an excellent place to start when reading the feed tag because this table is all about what a feed company can guarantee is in their horse feed. This is important for maintaining consistency.

If you think about all the different ingredients in a bag of horse feed, including forage and grain products, the reason why these guarantees are important becomes more obvious. Ingredient prices and fluctuations due to the weather, the season and other variables can easily change the composition of a bag of feed.

Since rapid diet changes are not ideal for equine gut health, feed companies guarantee that certain nutrient levels (typically in a range, with a minimum and a maximum level) will be included in each bag.

The guaranteed analysis also guarantees that the nutrient levels meet the requirements established by the National Research Council and the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). For horses, guaranteed analysis requirements include:

- Crude protein
- Crude fiber
- Crude fat
- Acid detergent fiber
- Neutral detergent fiber
- Calcium
- Phosphorus
- Copper
- Zinc
- Selenium
- Vitamin A

The guaranteed analysis on many horse feeds will also include lysine, which is the number-one limiting amino acid for horses. Sugar and dietary starch levels are also required to be guaranteed if a horse feed is marketed with any carbohydrate claims.

While each feed's guaranteed analysis will differ, many share similar ranges of nutrients to meet a horse's particular stage of life.

So, if many guaranteed analyses look similar, how does anyone manage to choose the best horse feed? As it turns out, there is quite a bit of information that cannot be found on the tag's guaranteed analysis alone.

Read the complete ingredient list

The second piece to this puzzle involves reading the entire ingredient list on the feed tag. While this sounds boring - and sometimes daunting! - it can actually be quite eye-opening.

Here are a few things to look for:

- Organic vs. inorganic trace minerals
- Organic vs. inorganic selenium
- Any bonus ingredients, such as added probiotics for horses

Decoding minerals

Minerals are the backbone (literally!) of the horse's body, making up every organ, tissue and cell. They play a role in every single body system, from skeletal and muscular development to nervous system function and hair and hoof health.

While only present in very small quantities in a bag of feed, they are crucially important for your horse's overall performance.

Trace minerals make up a very tiny percentage of a horse's daily intake, which is why their bioavailability is so important. Bioavailability has to do with the rate in which they are absorbed AND utilized in the body.

Organic trace minerals (e.g., zinc, copper, cobalt, manganese) are both absorbed at higher levels and are more readily utilized by the horse because they are presented in a form that mimics the form in which minerals are found in nature.

On the feed tag, organic minerals will be listed as the mineral name, followed by the word "proteinate," "methionine" or "amino acid complex."

You can easily spot inorganic minerals because they will be listed as the mineral name followed by the word "oxide" or "sulfate" for instance, the ingredient "zinc oxide" is an inorganic version, which is not as readily absorbed for optimal horse health and performance.

Read the feed tag to check the feed's trace mineral status. Ideally, choose a feed that contains 100% organic zinc, copper, cobalt and manganese.

The selenium connection

Selenium is also considered a trace mineral, and in horses, it is especially noteworthy because too much -- or too little -- can be detrimental and even fatal.

Selenium is a highly important mineral in the antioxidant pathway, which is why it is crucial for recovery, endurance and metabolism.

Inorganic selenium is easy to spot on feed tags and will be listed as "sodium selenite."

Organic selenium, on the other hand, will be listed as "selenium yeast."

Be careful: Some feeds use a mix of both types of selenium. Choose feeds that contain only 100% selenium yeast for best results.

Ingredients to support gut health for horses

Your final task in reading the ingredient list on the horse feed tag is to check for any bonuses. Yes, organic minerals should be non-negotiable, but it is possible for your horse to get even more out of its feed! Think of this like the prize at the bottom of the Cracker Jack box.

One example is added probiotics for horses. However, be careful how you interpret these, because not all probiotic supplements, or good gut bacteria, are created equal. You can always call the feed company to clarify how they source and add probiotics into their feeds to ensure their viability and efficacy.

Look on the feed tag for ingredients such as "yeast culture, "hydrolyzed yeast," "dried brewer's yeast" or any specific strain of probiotic bacteria. These ingredients can increase your horse's ability to fully digest and utilize the feed -- thanks to beneficial bacteria -- while also potentially saving you from having to purchase additional equine supplements.

A final word

While there is a lot more information that you can glean from a horse feed tag, start by looking for these three pieces of information: trace minerals (zinc, copper, cobalt, manganese), selenium and any added ingredients that support gut health in horses.

The guaranteed analysis is a good start, but it does not tell you anything about the quality or forms in which these very important nutrients are included.

Start reading the feed tag ingredient list, and do not hesitate to call the feed company to ask more specific questions. Nutrition is the basis of every animal's quality of life. Take it seriously and you will absolutely see a difference in your horse's health and performance.

STABLE MIX FEEDS

Check the Tag


LET'S TAKE A LOOK

 GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

 ORGANIC MINERALS

ZINC
COPPER
COBALT
MANGANESE

 SELENIUM YEAST

 YEAST CULTURE
BREWERS DRIED YEAST

LACTOBACILLUS
ENTEROCOCCUS
BIFIDOBACTERIUM
ASPERGILLUS



Certified Weed Free Stable Mix™ Futurity

A complete feed for
developing horses in training.

GUARANTEED ANALYSIS:

Crude Protein, (min %) 13	Sodium, (min %) 0.2
Lysine, (min %) 0.4	Sodium, (max %) 0.7
Crude Fat, (min %) 5	Magnesium, (min %) 0.3
Crude Fiber, (max %) 25	Potassium, (min %) 1.2
Acid Detergent Fiber (ADF), (max %) 28	Copper, (min ppm) 30
Neutral Detergent Fiber (NDF), (max %) 40	Selenium, (min ppm) 0.3
Calcium, (min %) 0.65	Zinc, (min ppm) 100
Calcium, (max %) 1.25	Vitamin A, (min IU/lb) 2500
Phosphorus, (min %) 0.35	Vitamin D, (min IU/lb) 250
Salt, (min %) 0.3	Vitamin E, (min IU/lb) 50
Salt, (max %) 0.6	

INGREDIENTS:

Ground Oat Hay, Ground Wheat Hay, Ground Barley Hay, Ground Ryegrass Hay, Ground Alfalfa Hay, Ground Almond Hulls (20%), Rice Bran, Soybean Meal, Ground Oats, Salt, Monocalcium Phosphate, Dicalcium Phosphate, Magnesium Oxide, Yeast Culture, Vitamin E Supplement, Zinc Methionine Complex, Propionic Acid (a preservative), Mineral Oil, Selenium Yeast, Manganese Sulfate, Biotin, Ethylenediamine Dihydroiodide, Vitamin A Supplement, Riboflavin Supplement, Thiamine Mononitrate, Vitamin D3, Supplement, Manganese Methionine Complex, Copper Lysine Complex, Cobalt Glucoheptonate, Brewers Dried Yeast, Active Dry Yeast, Dried *Lactobacillus Acidophilus* Fermentation Product, Dried *Lactobacillus Casei* Fermentation Product, Dried *Enterococcus Faecium* Fermentation Product, Dried *Bifidobacterium Longum* Fermentation Product, Dried *Aspergillus Oryzae* Fermentation Extract, Verxite Flakes, Ammonium hydroxide, Silicon dioxide, Wheat bran, Natural and artificial flavors, Acetic acid, Sorbic acid (a preservative), Benzoic acid (a preservative), and Tartaric acid.

Elk Grove Milling also offers a complete line of feeds for livestock including **Beef Mix, Goat Mix, Sheep Mix, Pig Mix** and **Coop Mix**. Take the guess work (and expense) out of supplement tubs, top dresses, and save on wasted hay!





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