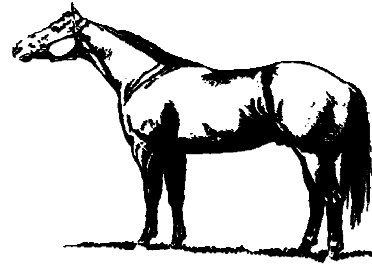


## **Animal Science Horse Information Series**

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### **STALLIONS NEED SPECIAL FEEDING in WINTER**

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**With cold winter weather breathing down our necks, most horse owners are not thinking about the breeding season. About mid-February, horse breeding will begin.**

**Stallion owners and managers need to be focusing on making sure their stallion(s) are prepared for the upcoming breeding season. Currently the breeding stallion is in the pre-breeding management phase.**

**The key at this time is getting the stallion nutritionally prepared and physically fit for the rigors of the breeding season. One of the tools that the stallion owners/managers have is Body Condition Score (BCS). Body condition score, which ranges from 1 to 9, is a visual, hands-on system to estimate the body fat content of a horse. It has been shown that mares gaining weight come into estrus (heat) earlier than mares losing weight. Improving the body**

**condition before the breeding season should have a positive effect on stallions' breeding performance.**

**Pre-breeding may be the most important period for the stallion. Once breeding begins, it is often not possible to maintain a desired body condition on some stallions. The desired BCS for a stallion during the breeding season is a very individual situation.**

**Most would agree that a desired range for breeding stallions would be a BCS of 5.5 to 7.5.**

**The key is how the stallion handles the rigors of the breeding season. Some stallions eat well and maintain their body condition. Others will fret more or be more nervous and lose body condition score, even becoming very thin with a BCS of 3.5 or less by the end of the breeding season. A few stallions will increase in their BCS. Stallions that lose BCS in the breeding season can be preconditioned to a higher BCS, such as 7.5 by the start of the breeding season. There is no advantage for breeding stallions to have a BCS higher than 7.5.**

**It is not as difficult to keep stallions with only a few mares booked during the season in a desired BCS. However, those with a rather large book, especially if they are nervous or fretting stallions, can be difficult to keep at a desired level of body condition.**

**If a stallion is not currently at his desired BCS, now is the time to accomplish this. Breeding stallions are typically fed 25 percent more energy than their maintenance requirement. A 1,200-pound stallion in the non-breeding period needs 17.8 megacalories (Mcal) energy per day. During the breeding season, this increases to 22.2 Mcal.**

**Since pasture is normally not available at this time, stallions are fed 2 percent of their body weight as grass hay or 1.75 percent of legume hay.**

**Stallions should never be fed less than one percent of their body weight as hay. It is a good idea to feed the same grain mix now that will be fed in the breeding season. The grain mix will usually contain about 12-14 percent protein with added fat. Feeding extra protein is not beneficial and results in a strong ammonia odor in the stallion's stall. If grass hay is of lower-quality, feed a 14 percent protein mix or a 12 percent mix if legume hay is fed. Commercial grain mixes usually have added minerals and vitamins. Adding a mineral and vitamin supplement to an already balanced feeding program has not proven beneficial to broodmares.**

**Exercise is important to the stallion, especially as the breeding season approaches. It is critical that the stallion is physically fit before the intensity of the breeding season starts to take effect. It normally takes 6-8 weeks to get a horse fit for light performance, which is what the breeding stallion will experience. The stallion's cardiovascular system must be fit. Some older stallions that died at their first or second breeding of the season were found to have a ruptured aorta. Exercise is a critical management component of the pre-breeding phase. As with BCS, stallion owners/managers will have to design an exercise program tailored for each stallion. Some stallions may stay fit by being turned out daily in exercise paddocks. Others will have to be ridden or lounged to stay fit.**

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