



The Slow Feeding Movement

by Ove Lind

It is extremely important that the horse never can fill his mouth with hay. Yes, I know they love to but I love to fill my mouth with chocolate too even though it is not good for me. When the horse fills his mouth with food he will not chew it enough and the digestion will therefore not be effective. Fantastic things happen when they have learned to eat the natural way. They even graze differently after a winter with a well working restricting feeder.



By restricting the amount of hay the horse can eat per minute instead of the amount of hay available to the horse you will gain in all ends.

- + No more wasted hay.
- + Less consumption because of better digestion.
- + The horse is kept busy eating 16-20 hours as he is supposed to.
- + Obese horses usually loose weight.
- + Thin horses usually gain weight.
- + No more fighting over food since it is always available.
- + No specific feeding times for you to keep (no early mornings or lunch feedings).
- + Your horse will never be hungry and always ready to go.

Important things to consider:

There must be hay available to the horse at all times. 1½ hour after the horse has stopped eating the unstoppable production of gull



will burn the inside of the small intestine and give the horse stomach ulcers. It is not until the horse has forgotten that the feeder ever can be empty that the feeding system starts to work. Then the horses slow down their eating pace, take the pauses they need and each horse in the herd takes care of their individual eating needs (we have Shetland ponies and horses eat together from the same feeders).

Give your horse three weeks to get used to this new way of being fed before passing any judgments.

If you want to know how much they are eating you must look at the average consumption over a three day period because they do not necessarily eat as much every day.

Things NOT to do:

Do not feed servings or portions in the feeders.

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If you believe your horse still gets too much you can always mix the hay with oat straw of good hygienic quality. If you are absolutely sure your horse needs more get hay that contains more (but be careful with alfalfa since the balance between calcium and phosphor is completely off).



There are three different categories of feeders:

1. The grazing feeders where the horse eats through a steel grid with 5x5cm (2"x2") holes that is laying on top of the hay.

- + The hay never get stuck
- + Natural neck angle
- Needs to be cleaned before refilled not to collect old moldy hay in the bottom.
- Some horses don't like to eat with their head in a box where they can see to the sides.

2. The side feeders where the hay is kept in a closet like box and the horse eats through a steel grid with 5x5cm (2"x2") holes that is mounted on one of the sides of the box.

- + The horse can choose to eat close to the ground.
- + The horse does not breathe in dust particles from the hay.
- + Can be built with large storage capacity.
- Many small details can make the hay get stuck inside and make it impossible for the horse to reach it.
- Both material and construction is extremely important to get these kind of feeders to work properly.

Important things to consider:

Place the side feeder so that the horse can eat both from his left and right side.

Do not change the size of the holes to make the feeder to work better. Stay with 5x5cm (2"x2") holes. As long as one single straw is sticking out through the grid the feeder is still working. If there is not one single straw sticking out the container is constructed the wrong way (see generation 2).



3. The soft feeders. This is an easy to build and fool proof construction BUT unprotected nets are

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very dangerous to shod horses.

- + The hay will never get stuck
- + Can be built with a very large storage capacity.
- + Round bales are usually much cheaper than small bales.
- Large nets might need a roof if placed in humid environments.



Important things to consider:

Do not go for a net with larger hole than 4x4 cm (1/6" x 1/6").

I was a little worried at first if the eating height would be a problem but experience shows that it is not. They only eat high for a couple of days while the bale is large. Since they combine eating high and low we have not seen any tooth related problems.

We have our feeders on a large bed of pea gravel and that has created very nice hoof improvements on our horses. Since the horses do spend quite some time in the feeding area (not all the time though) the massaging pea gravel helps reducing thrush



problems. The pea gravel is very easy to mock but it needs to be mocked frequently not to be congested with stepped on pup. Small hay particles falling from the feeders do congest the pea gravel and I will experiment with different way of clean it during next summer.

I'd like to point out that all traditional experience and knowledge about feeding (amounts and concentrations) comes from horses being kept and fed the traditional way. No one really knows what you horse will need when being kept and fed a more natural way. Our experience is that the horses seem to handle the nutritional aspects very well themselves when given the chance. To me it sounds reasonable that a perfectly working digestive system on an animal made for surviving in spars environment is capable of extracting what the animal need as long as the food contains reasonable amounts of necessary ingredients.

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A haynet big enough for a whole round bale and last about 9 winter days for our two arabians and two shetland ponies. They live together and the eat together.

This is our second winter with this net and it is still completely intact. It took the horse just a couple of minutes to find out that if they bite the net with their teeth they will not get any hay but if they pull out the straws it works just fine.

We were a little worried that it would be a problem that they are eating to high up from the ground but this is only a problem the first couple of days when the bale still is big. There were no signs of any problems when we had the teeth checked on our horses after the first winter. I believe that because our horses graze for about half the year and only eat high for a couple of days on each new bale they manage their teeth anyway.



The holes are 4x4cm (1.6x1.6 inches) and the material is 3mm (1/8 inches) thick nylon. 4x4cm on a nylon net is at least as much as 5x5cm on a steel grid.

I googled "nylon net" and found the producers for safety nets for golf courses and hockey arenas. Three days later they delivered this net that is 3x5m (10x17 feet) with a rope around the edges. Very well spent money. Now I can sleep in for a week without bad conscience. No not really, because some one has to take out the droppings.





My friend Patty did send me an email with the following content:

I've never believed that two big meals per day is healthy for horses, but until I kept them at home, it was never practical to feed more than twice a day. Once I brought them home, I began feeding 6 smaller hay meals a day. I felt that this was better for the horses, but still not perfect (luckily my husband works from home and could do the mid-day feedings). When Erin forwarded the link, I was awed by Ove Lind's simple feeders. His concept is brilliant and exactly the way that I wanted to feed but had not thought of myself!

I built our version of Ove Lind's Swedish feeder in the breezeway of my barn. The horses eat from the breezeway. The hay is stored behind the feeder. The feeder itself cost about \$35 to make. I bought a used "wire deck" with 2x4 inch mesh openings. The wire deck is used with steel pallet rack systems. Wire decks come in all shapes and sizes and can hold 2500 lbs. Think of Home Depot and how they store and display all of their product. They use pallet racks with wire decks. My wire deck is 48x60 inches and cost \$21 from Craigslist. The rest of my feeder is a \$2 2x4 piece of wood and a \$12 sheet of plywood and some cable ties. I attached the wire deck to my existing Priefert pipe panel with cable ties. I cut two 3x3 ft squares from one end of the piece of plywood to make the ends of the feeder. I nailed on a piece of wood to each end at a 45 degree angle to support the sloping board. The sloping board is a 3x5 ft. piece of the plywood. Two edges of the wire deck have a "waterfall" which is a curved edge. The plywood ends fit nicely into the waterfall area. The whole feeder can be taken apart and moved to another location very easily. The feeder is 5 feet long so both horses can eat together. The feeder does not need a lid because the wire deck is tall enough so they can't reach through the pipe panel into the top.

At first, I was afraid that Cinco, the Haflinger, would park himself in front of the feeder and not move all day until the last scrap of hay was gone, but that is not the case. He'll eat for a while then go mosey around and come back and eat some more at leisure. Baron, the old Percheron/Thoroughbred cross is getting the hang of it. They eat side by side with no fighting.

