

# The *One* Most Critical Element of Horse Management

October 2012

How often in the hot summer months have you gone out to your horse corral and been swarmed with flies?



How often have those flies migrated up to the house and plagued your summer barbeques?

How often has your farrier told you there was fungus in the hoof wall of your horses' feet and you needed to treat it?

How often has your horse been lame and the vet came out and told you there was compacted dirt and feces in the hoof, that the horse was essentially walking around on tennis balls and had developed a pressure abscess?

How often has your horse developed cracked, chipped hooves?

How often have your horse's hooves been too soft?

How often in the winter have your horses been crawling around knee deep in muck?

How many times have you de-wormed your horses and that darned de-wormer hasn't worked?

If it were possible for you to improve the aesthetics of your barnyard, control the fly population, control parasites, improve the condition of your horses' feet, and cut down on your farrier and vet bills, all in one fell swoop, would you jump at the chance?

My guess is you'd be all for it. That is, until I tell you what it is. Because once you hear that the key to proper horse management lies in proper manure management, you immediately think, "That doesn't apply to *me*. I live on a *farm* and my horses are in corrals and the pasture, not in stalls; we don't pick up manure on the *farm*."

I'm here to tell you that it most certainly does apply to you. I've lived on my farm for 12 years and each winter the muck was getting a little deeper and less and less water was draining out of the corral. Every time the farrier came out there was more and more fungus, bacteria, and infectious agents of all sorts in the white line of my horses' hooves and every time I'd promise to treat it with Betadine. My horses were continually walking around with balls of something stuck to the bottom of their feet. And the flies! Ach! They're terrible!! I considered getting

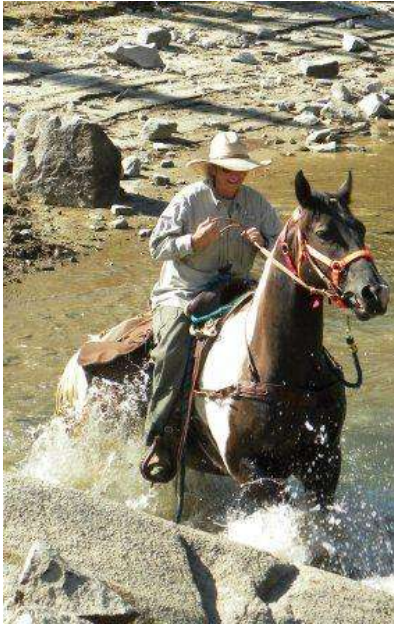
those parasite control insects that you sprinkle on manure to control the fly population. And, get this: when you de-worm your horses but don't pick up the manure, guess what? The horses re-ingest those parasites and within 3 to five days are fully infected with worms again.

But if the manure wasn't there, the flies wouldn't congregate as much, because there wouldn't be all that juicy, warm, delectable feces to eat and lay eggs in. If the manure wasn't there, the worms wouldn't be there waiting to be re-ingested or to burrow into the soil and lay in wait to be re-cycled into the host horse. If the manure wasn't there it wouldn't get compacted into the hooves, causing the hooves to remain damp and soften and to grow infectious agents. If the manure wasn't there you wouldn't have so many health issues with your animals and you wouldn't have to call your vet so often. And your vet would.....love you for it, because you are *finally* managing your barnyard the way it should be managed, and your animals are healthier for it, and that is what your vet ultimately wants. If all that manure wasn't there you would look at your corrals and think how clean and well-kept they look, and you wouldn't be tracking manure into the house.

So how do you tackle such an ominous task, get on top of it and stay on top of it, because we all know that horses don't just eliminate what you feed them; they poop exponentially to what you feed them. Such as: 2 slices of hay twice a day equals 20 lbs of hay plus 18 gallons of water = 40 to the *n*th power = 5 tons of poop per day per horse. That's a lot. What are you going to do with it all? Well, first of all, it's not all that much. I have eleven horses, and if I pick up after them twice a day (which, yes, it does need to be done twice a day) I can stay on top of it, and it generates two to three wheelbarrow loads each time (each corral cleaning).

And then what do I do with it? Fortunately, I have 10 acres in either pasture or hay, and a small manure spreader, so I empty the wheelbarrow into the manure spreader and when the spreader is full I go spread it on my pasture or hay field. I ask my vet about spreading it all over what the horses will eventually eat, and he said as long as the parasites are under control, it's a perfect solution; it's just additional fertilizer. You DON'T want to spread it on your pasture with parasites in it, because obviously you're just infesting the whole pasture which will in turn re-infect the horses. So this time of year, de-worm them with any quality de-wormer, wait 3 to 5 days to be sure all the worms are dead, and then spread the manure. Then after the 'killing frost', de-worm them with Ivermectin. (The killing frost does not kill all the parasites, but it kills the plant growth) Ivermectin after a hard frost will kill stomach bots in addition to other worms, so you can be bot-free. But to be truly bot-free, you have to remove the bot eggs from your horses' legs. Bot eggs are the little golden fly-speck-looking things on your horses' front legs. The horse ingests these eggs by rubbing, biting or licking its legs; the eggs get in the mouth, then into the stomach and digestive tract where they become full-fledged worms again.

Get a package of disposable razors (one razor won't do the trick) and go out and shave your horses' legs.



If it's not possible to spread the manure, you can compost it. This is best done *away* from the house and barnyard as far as possible because of the odor and the flies. By composting it --- and even if you spread it in the summer, you might have to compost in the winter when it's frozen and won't spread---it allows the manure to break down, and also 'bakes' it, as it gets hot in the compost pile. This baking will kill the parasites because they cannot tolerate high temperatures. There are websites with a plethora of information on composting.

There are, of course, logistics to be worked out in the Manure Management Quandary. The logistics will take some innovation on your part. The important thing, for the health of your horses and your pocketbook, and the sound management of your stock, is to get that *stuff* out of the corrals so they are not walking and standing in it, lying in it, and eating it. Oh, and did you know that you can teach your horses to urinate in one place? Yes, you can! Where ever they are urinating now, put some wood shavings in that spot. When they urinate on the shavings, move the shavings to the area where you want them to urinate and they will eventually relocate to that spot to urinate. This is beneficial because then they have one wet spot in the corral instead of several wet areas to stand around in all day. The acid in urine is very caustic to horse hooves, and standing in urine or urine-soaked dirt or bedding is one of the main reasons horse hooves get (and stay) soft and moist, leading to infections in the hoof.

So get out there and control those flies and parasites, improve the health of your horses' hooves, and cut down on your farrier and vet bills. They'll *all* love you for it!