

DONKEY SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC

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FEEDING THE DONKEY

By Pat Streefkerk

We all feel the effects of a drought when it comes to feeding our donkeys. Feed prices are rising sharply. It is fortunate that donkeys do not need large quantities of rich food.

The feeding of a donkey varies with different areas and pasture conditions so it is not possible to give precise information concerning the type and amount of feed required, but the following guidelines may help you to work out a suitable regime for your donkey.

If you are not prepared to feed your donkey adequately during the drought, please look for a new owner for him, [or local agistment]. Do not assume that a drought-stricken paddock will suffice.

PASTURE and HAY

Dry grass still has nutritional value until the time when there we actually get good rain, which bleaches the food value out. Therefore, if some pasture is still available, good quality grass hay may be all that is required as a supplementary feed. It should not be dusty or mouldy and should smell sweet.

It is best to feed from a hayrack if possible. If you use hay net it is most important to ensure it is tied up high so that the donkey cannot become entangled in it. Remember that it will sag when empty. Racks and hay nets cut down on wastage of the now expensive hay you are feeding. If fed on the ground the hay gets trampled on and contaminated.

PRE-MIXED HORSE FEEDS

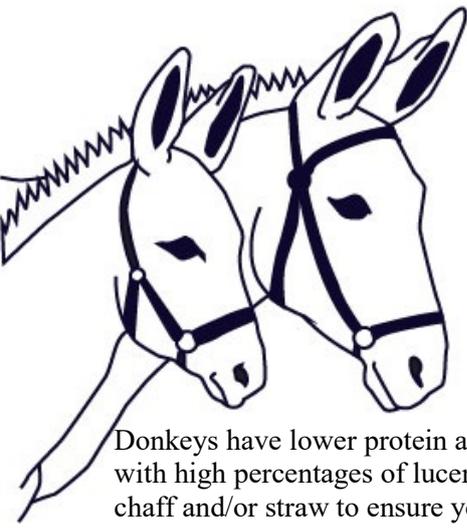
Donkeys, like most animals, vary in their food requirements. There seem to be 'good doers' and 'poor doers', the latter tend to have a faster metabolism and require more food, or a higher energy feed to maintain their condition.

In general, young donkeys that are still actively growing, pregnant and lactating Jennies and donkeys that regularly perform hard work have higher nutritional requirements. In this case it is best to use a small quantity of a balanced pre-mixed horse maintenance feed, [as against one designed for 'Show' or 'Performance' horses] mixed with some oaten chaff for extra bulk. A very little Lucerne hay can sometimes be used, Lucerne hay is too rich for most donkeys, however it is a good supply of calcium; in this case always have good grass hay or straw available for bulk. It is best not to feed grain to donkeys except in special circumstances.

WHEN LITTLE OR NO PASTURE IS AVAILABLE

It is virtually impossible to give any hard and fast rules as to the amount of feed a donkey requires in this case.

However, a rough guide, for an animal with no special requirements, where little pasture is available, would be up to a maximum of a 2 litre ice-cream container of ready-mixed [maintenance] feed combined with the same amount of oaten chaff once or twice a day, plus a biscuit of hay taking the size and condition of the donkey into account. We mostly use Coprice M which is rice based and in pellet form. It keeps well and is easy to handle. Coprice is a concentrated feed so only a cup or two of the Coprice mixed with 2 litres of oaten chaff and perhaps a very little Lucerne chaff, plus grass hay should be sufficient. If using a low protein horse maintenance mix, equal quantities of the mix and oaten chaff should be about right. In simple terms when choosing pre-mixed horse feeds for your donkey, choose a mix that is designed for horse maintenance.



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Donkeys have lower protein and energy requirements and higher roughage requirement than horses do, so avoid feeds with high percentages of lucerne and /or grain. Bulk the mix out with at least equal portions, or more, of plain oaten chaff and/or straw to ensure your donkey does not get too fat.

ROUGHAGE

Bulk is most important to a donkey's health. If the donkey is overweight and needs to have a restricted feed intake, oaten or barley straw provides bulk (and entertainment) and also helps a donkey keep warm in cold weather, as the chewing increases the rate of their metabolism.

If you are having trouble obtaining suitable hay, oaten hay can be used, or even wheaten hay cut before the grain is in it. Oaten hay fed continuously needs a supplement of calcium, either in powder form or some Lucerne.

MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS

It is also necessary to provide a salt and mineral lick in a covered area where it will not dissolve in the rain. This is particularly important in drought, when the pasture is generally lacking in minerals. Make sure you use a lick designed for equines. Some cattle licks contain urea, which can kill your donkey. Unflavoured licks (generally white or yellowish) are preferable and prevent your donkey eating his block too quickly. Molasses and aniseed flavoured block taste good but the idea of course is that the donkey uses it when he requires minerals and not when he feels like something tasty!

It takes a couple of weeks' adjustment before a donkey obtains full value from any supplementary feed. Try to anticipate your animal's requirements, changes in the pasture, and activity level for working animals. In this way you can gradually build up or decrease the feed and adjust the type of mixture to obtain maximum benefits. Remember to make all changes very gradually. Also, if you can, it is better to divide the daily ration into several feeds rather than giving it all at once, donkeys have a comparatively small stomach and are naturally continuous grazers. This also prevents wastage.

Please remember that this feed advice is an approximate estimate only, and any particular donkey may need more or less. Please monitor your donkeys condition regularly, feel his neck, feel his ribs. His neck should not be too fat, and you should be just able to feel his ribs. They should not be visible but nor should they be covered by a layer of fat. Shop around for a supply of hay, watch the advertisements in the paper and try to buy directly from the farmer for less cost. Feed stores have to charge for the double handling of their hay. Remember that the drought may go on for several months, or more if we do not get rain next spring. You must be prepared to maintain your donkey for all this time and plan finances and feed supplies accordingly.

It is imperative that an adequate volume of clean water is available at all times!!!