

## Horse World Facing Tough Times

Redwings is bracing itself for one of the toughest Winters we may ever have to face. Our yearly intake of horses normally averages around 140, but last year we admitted 264 in total. This year looks to be no different, with over 220 new arrivals already, and the coldest and hardest months of the year yet to come.

This long-lasting recession has had a double-effect on Redwings. It has had an impact, along with many other factors, on the amount of horses that need our help – but it has also meant a drop in the number of donations we are receiving. Our donations are down by 10%, but the amount of horses that have come into sanctuary care has increased by much more than that.

Every week we receive calls from over 30 horse owners who are experiencing serious financial troubles. Some are losing their jobs, homes and businesses, meaning their horses are becoming an additional financial burden. Sadly, many welfare charities can no longer provide a home for these horses, as the amount of rescue cases we deal with continues to grow in number. But we can help financially troubled owners by giving practical and useful advice.

This year has seen many equine essentials soar in price. At the forefront of many horse owners' minds is this year's poor hay yield and consequent rising prices. At Redwings, we produce a proportion of our hay in-house, but this year it has

been a difficult task. We cannot take any chances with our hay supplies, because of the huge number of equines in our care, so we have contracts in place to supply the majority of our hay needs. However, the increase in the price of hay will have a knock-on effect on other essentials such as feed.

With the potential for a hay crisis on the horizon, now is the time for horse owners to start thinking outside the box. You can find some practical tips to help prevent this concern becoming a crisis overleaf.



Rachel Austin, Brand Assistant for Spillers, with Nicola Markwell, Redwings' Press and Communications Manager

### Help is at Hand for our Horses

Feed manufacturer Spillers has generously donated over 14 tonnes of feed to Redwings! The company lent us a helping hand by donating 1kg of feed for every new fan to their facebook page.

**The campaign has been incredibly successful and will be a huge help to our rescued residents this Winter. Thank you to everybody that contributed!**

Inside  
**this  
edition**

### HAY CRISIS

Hints and tips on how to manage your hay requirements going into Winter.

**PLUS** meet Oscar, Sunshine and the Chelmsford Seven...



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# HAY CRISIS

## Make hay while the sun

Quite literally, this has not been the case. In fact, the sunny weather has contributed to a national hay shortage. A tough Winter, late Spring and dry Summer has meant that the grass grew much later than normal and was therefore much shorter when it was time to cut. East Anglia has felt the brunt of the shortage, as the climate is drier compared to the rest of the country. Now, a very wet Autumn has prevented farmers from being able to take a second cut.

*This has left horse owners with two problems:*

**1. Hay prices have soared. Reports suggest that small bales of hay are reaching prices of up to £8 each.**

**2. Farmers could run out of hay. Horse owners that have not already stocked up on Winter supplies should be prepared to find alternatives to feed their horses this Winter.**

**Yet, this IS the time to make hay while the sun shines.**

There are several things you can do now before the Winter kicks in to stop yourself from getting into difficulties. Review your horse's management needs, and think about alternatives to hay that you can use. If you cannot find one that is suitable, then you can make savings in other areas of horse care to be able to afford the soaring prices.

### 1. 24-hour turn-out

Consider leaving your horse out overnight if grazing is available. Quite simply, turning out for longer means you will use less forage. Twenty-four hour turn-out has endless benefits for horses – including fulfilling their instinctive needs for space and to graze.

However, do not overgraze your land, otherwise you'll end up with a bigger problem. Approach farmers and landowners for extra grazing, as it may be cheaper in the long run than forking out for bales of hay. Make sure your horse has natural or manmade shelter available, and provide your horse with a good quality rug if he needs it.

All of Redwings' equine residents are turned out 24 hours a day all year round, which is not only great for their psychological wellbeing, but helps us to keep our costs down too.

### 2. Check your horse's body score

Getting your horse on a set of scales is no easy feat. An easier option is to assess your horse's body condition



*All of our equines live outside all year round and only come into a stable when vet care is needed.*

using a five-point system. A score of 3 is ideal, with 0 being emaciation and 5 being obese. Redwings produces a pocket-sized body scoring chart, which you can obtain by emailing or calling us.



Use a weigh tape in conjunction with body scoring your horse. You can buy a weigh tape relatively cheaply from a feed manufacturer –

but make sure you get one that suits your horse's build otherwise you won't get an accurate reading!

If you find your horse is creeping over a score of 3.5, you may find you don't need to feed your horse as much hay or hard food, making you a financial saving. Continue to body score your horse every two weeks.

Please get in touch with us for a step-by-step guide to body condition scoring by emailing [welfare@redwings.co.uk](mailto:welfare@redwings.co.uk) or calling 01508 481008.

### 3. Call a nutritionist

Feed companies often employ a nutritionist who will give free advice and help you tailor a diet based on your horse's needs – including age, breed and workload. Give the nutritionist the results from your latest body condition scoring session for more accurate advice. They can also advise on alternatives to hay if you are struggling with sourcing it.

You may find your horse does not need so many 'extras', such as hard feed and supplements. Cutting back could make you a saving.

# shines!



Using a haynet will reduce the amount of hay wasted and will keep a horse occupied for longer.

## 4. Review wastage

Although it does have recognised health benefits, feeding hay from the floor could result in wastage. It may get kicked around the stable or field – or in some cases, urinated on! Using a small-holed haynet during hard times will mean hay goes a lot further – and will give your horse something to occupy his mind with if he is in a stable.

Make sure haynets are tied high and securely on a piece of string to prevent your horse from getting his foot stuck.

## 5. Have your horse's teeth checked

Feeding your horse long fibre food when his teeth are in bad condition is wasteful – not to mention painful for the horse. Fibrous food is tough and needs a lot of grinding



Brecon has worn down teeth meaning she cannot cope with long fibre food like hay.

before it can be swallowed. Keep an eye out for dental discomfort by checking for signs of quidding (dropping food), breath smelliness, and 'naughtiness' when being ridden.

If you find bits of hay in your horse's droppings that are over 4cm long, your horse might be struggling to chew

## Some things to bear in mind

Horse ownership is never going to be cheap. Never cut back on essentials such as farriery and veterinary care. Of course, discuss shoeing needs with your farrier, as you might find your horse doesn't need to wear shoes – but make sure you always invest in the essentials.

Beware of thieves at this time. Farmers are reporting an increase in hay thefts, so be vigilant and store hay safely. You can cut the strings on your hay bales as a deterrent, as this will make them harder to steal.

Any change in diet should be made gradually. Even slight changes in diet, like a new batch of hay or switching to haylage, can trigger colic. A horse's diet should always be high in fibre.

You can find more cost-cutting tips written by Redwings staff and members of the National Equine Welfare Council at [www.redwings.co.uk/welfare](http://www.redwings.co.uk/welfare). If you need more advice, please call us on 01508 481008 or email [welfare@redwings.co.uk](mailto:welfare@redwings.co.uk)

and digest long fibre foods. Seek veterinary advice, then replace hay with soft food like soaked high-fibre nuts.

Horses need to have their teeth checked at least once a year by a professional. Golden oldies should be seen at least once every six months.

## 6. Try haylage

Haylage may be easier to obtain in your area – although it may be just as expensive as hay. However, it is high in nutritional value, so you won't have to feed as much of it. Haylage is easier for farmers to bale and horses think it's pretty tasty, meaning less of it will be wasted.

Haylage comes pre-wrapped in water resistant bags, meaning it's easy to store. However its pre-wrapped state means that it is hard to assess quality before buying.

## 7. Don't feel consumer loyalty!

Shop about for hay and other items! If you feel you're paying too much for your hay, ask around for other prices. Many of us feel an obligation to stick with a specific supplier, but you might find a much better price somewhere else.

However, check the quality of cheap hay. You might find a good deal, but be watchful for signs of dried ragwort. Horses generally stay away from ragwort in paddocks because of its bitter taste, but dried ragwort is not bitter, whilst still retaining the same toxins.

## 8. Join forces!

Buddy-up with others at your yard, or with other local owners, to trace a supplier and order hay and other items in bulk. Find a way of collecting your hay, rather than having it delivered, and share petrol costs between your group.

# The Chelmsford Seven



Oscar and Sunshine bask in the evening sun after making a full recovery, above.

Each equine in the group was underweight and suffering with other conditions, below.

**Redwings has seen a huge amount of welfare cases over the last year, and it does not look like the situation will ease any time soon. Earlier in the year, Redwings assisted the RSPCA with the rescue of several large horses after a member of the public spotted a dead horse in a field in Chelmsford.**

An RSPCA inspector visited the site and found one dead and seven live horses that had clearly been neglected. Amongst the seven were Friesians, Appaloosas and Quarter Horses. After confirmation from a vet that the horses were in a state of suffering - or likely to suffer if they stayed in those circumstances for any longer - the RSPCA contacted us to remove the horses and board them at one of our centres.



Luckily the removal of the horses was relatively straightforward as we had help from the mounted police who closed the road where the horses were located, meaning we could easily manoeuvre our fleet of horseboxes. However, once back at the Sanctuary, the recovery of the horses was not quite so clear-cut.

Most of the horses were emaciated, had poor teeth and skin conditions, and had blood disorders including anaemia.

A beautiful Friesian named Inca had a body condition score of 0.5 and a serious case of rainscald. She was also diagnosed with severe anaemia caused by a heavy worm burden, and a liver condition. Very sadly her condition deteriorated and despite several months of hard work by everyone at Redwings we had to make the difficult decision to put her to sleep.

The group's owner was prosecuted by the RSPCA and was given a £5000 fine, as well as a ban on keeping horses for five years.

The rest of the group have gone on to make a full recovery since their rescue. They spent their first Summer at Redwings lapping up attention at our Caldecott Visitor Centre, near Great Yarmouth, where they have been sparking great interest amongst our visitors. We hope that the group will soon begin the backing process and will be ready to find a new home soon.

**If you would like to find out more about re-homing a Redwings horse, please go to [www.redwings.co.uk/rehoming](http://www.redwings.co.uk/rehoming). All re-homing applications are taken online.**

## Keep in touch

If you would like to receive editions of **Welfare Matters** in future please complete the details (right), detach the form and send it to The Welfare Team, Redwings, Hapton, Norwich, NR15 1SP, ring us on 01508 481008 or email [externalwelfare@redwings.co.uk](mailto:externalwelfare@redwings.co.uk).

If you do not wish to be added to Redwings' general mailing list please tick here  Redwings **DOES NOT** share your details with any third party organisations.

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