

ASK the Experts

**Marylanders
want to know
about:**
• HAY •
• RABIES •

Q: Late last winter and this spring it was very hard to find good quality hay and prices were outrageous. What are the chances that it will happen next winter and can I do anything to avoid getting caught without hay again?

A: The drought of 2002 reduced hay yields throughout much of the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions. The drought was followed by a long, cold winter, which required feeding more hay than normal. The combination of a short supply of hay due to the drought and more hay being fed due to the longer winter feeding period resulted in no carryover supply of hay for this year—barns were completely emptied last winter/spring. It is unusual to not have a carryover supply. Without a carryover supply we have no 'cushion' if this year's hay supply should be short.

And if that were not bad enough, the spring/early summer period this year was unusually wet, delaying first cutting of hay by as much as 4 to 6 weeks. It is early July when I am writing this response and we should be well into second cutting of hay at this time. But instead we are still harvesting first cutting. Due to the lateness of first harvest, many hay growers will have one less cutting this year, which may result in a

reduced supply of hay.

This also means that a lot of first cutting hay will be of lower quality because of delayed harvest and rainy weather. First cutting alfalfa, orchard grass, timothy and alfalfa/grass mixtures may have coarser stems and you will see more rain-damaged hay. The supply of high quality, rain-free hay is likely to be in short supply this year, especially if the weather turns hot and dry in mid- and late summer. While hot, dry weather is favorable for hay making, it severely limits crop growth so we could be looking at reduced yield of mid- and late summer cuttings.

If you can find high quality hay now to match the needs of your horses, I would suggest purchasing or contracting for enough hay to assure you a supply through April of next year. While there may be an abundance of lower quality hay available, there is little doubt that the supply of high quality hay will be limited. So, it would be advisable to line up your supply as soon as possible rather than waiting until the time you need it next winter.

Dr. Les Vough is a Forage Crops Extension Specialist at the University of Maryland.

Q: I read in *The Equiry* that a horse tested positive for rabies last month in Anne Arundel County. Will it affect my horse that is not vaccinated against rabies?

A: An Anne Arundel County horse named Coup de Harmony tested positive for rabies in June 2003. The horse showed signs of abnormal behavior after being purchased by an individual and transported to NJ. After being shipped back to MD, the horse was tested and was later definitely diagnosed with rabies. The only way to do a definitive diagnosis of rabies is post-mortem using brain tissue. The MDA is investigating whether horses were exposed to the infected horse, but the likelihood of infection in those horses is low.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects warm-blooded animals including horses and humans, however it usually affects wildlife spe-

cies. Rabies is transferred from the saliva of an infected animal into the eye, nose, mouth or open cut of a horse. Horses and humans are likely to get infected with rabies from a bite by an infected wild animal. Clinical signs of rabies in horses are inconsistent but may include abnormal or aggressive behavior, unexplained paralysis, esophageal paralysis causing excessive drooling, colic, depression, and evidence of distress. Diagnosis of the disease is often difficult in the early stages, but may be made by the presences of fresh bite wounds from wild animals, appearance of clinical signs, rabies positive blood tests and post-mortem exam of the brain tissue. There is no treatment for rabies and horses are euthanized once diagnosis has been made.

The news about the infected Maryland horse does affect you and your horse because your horse is in danger of contracted rabies since it is likely kept in close proximity to wild animals. Also, infected horses can pass the disease onto the human caretakers. Since rabies is easily preventable in the horse by the administration of a killed virus vaccine approved by the USDA, it is recommended that all Maryland horses be vaccinated against rabies by their local veterinarian. Foals should receive the first booster against rabies at 3-4 months of age, second booster at 5-6 months, and then once every year after they reach one year of age. Performance and pleasure horses should be vaccinated against rabies each year. Broodmares should be vaccinated each year just before breeding. Contact your veterinarian to discuss vaccinating your horse against rabies and other diseases that are of high risk in Maryland.

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Got a Question? Get an Answer!

Equiry readers can ask questions about their horses or horse farms and a panel of experts with the University of Maryland and Cooperative Extension Services will answer them. If you would like the panel to answer your question directly, you must e-mail it to Dr. Amy Ordakowski Burk at ao38@umail.umd.edu. Or, you can fax your question to 410-489-7828 or mail it in to P.O. Box 610, Lisbon, MD 21765, and the questions will be forwarded to the panel, but only e-mailed questions will be answered directly. Written questions only will be accepted, and select questions may be used for publication in an upcoming issue of *The Equiry*.

