



Turning Point Donkey Rescue

Quarterly Newsletter

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Pasturing Considerations

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Hopefully, spring is just around the corner. Owners will be wrestling with the choice of either pasturing their equids or keeping them in stalls/paddocks. If any pasture opportunities are available, that is preferable for herbivores, e.g., our horses, donkeys and mules. They evolved to walk and graze for 16 to 18 hours per day. When they are eating *naturally*, the risks of digestive upset and stereotypies (vices, such as cribbing and weaving) are minimized. Pasturing has the advantage of lower feed costs, which is a big factor with the feed shortages and the feed costs of 2007. Exercise linked with turnout and pasturing increases the opportunity for exercise and helps maintain optimal weight, reduces boredom and all the problems that come with that, e.g., chewing on/eating the barn and fences, increased facility repair costs, stereotypies, etc. A lowered incidence of disease, especially respiratory, is another advantage. Animals breathing clean, fresh air, minimizes their exposure to dust and molds common in barns. When allowed to move at will, they continually exercise their muscles and joints. This is especially beneficial for older and/or arthritic equids - the opportunity to move keeps joints supple. Research at Michigan State University has shown that young horses or horses in training have increased bone density and fewer exercised-induced injuries when kept on pasture compared with standing in stalls for much of every day.

If you are fortunate to have enough land and don't have to worry about pastures being damaged by your equids during spring's transition from melting snow, to mud, to overzealous grazing when little vegetation is present, this may not be an issue. Animals kept on pasture year-round usually adjust to the new grass as it grows. Careful management of pastures is necessary for both the productivity of the pasture and the health of the equid. Most management problems occur when individuals have been confined, fed a hay-grain ration through the winter, and are then abruptly turned out on pasture in the spring. As with any dietary change, it is necessary to gradually introduce equids to new pasture growth in order to avoid digestive upset.

Spring pasture is very nutrient-rich. Spring grass tends to be much higher in moisture content (75 to 85 percent), protein (greater than 20 percent), energy, vitamins, and minerals, than at most other times of year. Energy and protein content of foliage can be as much as 50 percent higher in early vegetative growth, compared to late vegetative growth 12 weeks later. In addition, equids kept in stalls/paddocks through the winter, then abruptly turned out onto pasture, will overeat because of the palatability of the lush green foliage. This over-consumption can put the equid at risk for certain nutrition-related concerns:

- **Overweight/obesity:** dependent on individual metabolism, some horses, especially *easy keepers*, ponies, miniatures, and donkeys, will gain excessive weight on pasture alone. Equine metabolic syndrome (EMS) has been associated with obesity and lack of exercise. EMS has also been known as

hypothyroidism, peripheral Cushings, or Insulin Resistance (IR). Obesity will also make your donkeys and ponies more susceptible to Fatty Liver/Hyperlipidemia.

- Loose stool: the higher moisture content of the ration can trigger a loose stool.
- Colic: not common in this instance, but any sudden ration change can cause excessive gas or an intestinal upset and lead to colic.
- Founder (laminitis): always a concern when energy in the diet increases abruptly, such as the transition from a hay-based to a pasture ration or a sudden increase in the amount of grain consumed (grain overload). *Easy keeping* ponies, donkeys and horses are more susceptible. Spring grass also contains high levels of carbohydrates, especially sugars called fructans. Consumption of large amounts of fructans, which are similar to other forms of simple carbohydrate (grain) overload, can lead to the development of laminitis.

There are several ways equid owners may prevent or minimize problems when introducing animals to pasture in the spring. Feed hay immediately before they are turned out on pasture during this adjustment period. When equids have a full stomach, they are less likely to overeat when turned out. In addition, since they are less hungry, they will be more selective about what they eat. Secondly, restrict grazing time. Initially, allow no more than 30 minutes of grazing once or twice a day on the first day of turnout. With subsequent days, grazing time can be increased by five to ten minutes per day until they are grazing four to six hours a day and have adapted to the green grass.

Another time when restricted grazing is important is in the fall. Increased rainfall often leads to rapid plant growth and lush pasture. The nutritional value is similar to that of spring pasture, and health issues (obesity and laminitis) are again a major concern. Equids differ in their energy utilization. Carefully monitor your equid's body condition score (BCS). An equid's BCS is judged on a 1 to 9 scale. One (1) is emaciated and nine (9) is very obese (refer to previous newsletter). Separate criteria have been developed for horses compared with donkeys, although the principles of rating their BCS are the same. Owners should try to maintain their equids in a healthy range, a BCS of 5.0 to 6.0. At this BCS, the ribs are nicely covered, but can still easily be felt. Individuals with a BCS greater than 6.5 will need limited pasture time to avoid founder and obesity. Slight or no fat cover indicates the animal's BCS is between 2 and 4, and is too thin. Owners that suspect their equid's BCS is less than 4 should contact their veterinarian for help in determining whether this is a dietary or medical problem, or both. Owners uncertain about their animal's BCS should contact a veterinarian and consider having a physical examination done.

It is as important to maintain the health of your equid, as well as that of your pasture. The amount of nutrition available from pasture will depend on a number of criteria, such as animal density, rainfall, length of growing season, soil type, plant species, and pasture management. Typically, to provide total nutrition from pasture, one to two acres per 1000# individual is necessary in mid-Michigan. Acreage needed may increase for the harder to keep thoroughbred and be less for an easy-keeping pony or donkey. Also, the amount of acreage will vary dramatically depending upon rainfall, growing season, and soil type.

Owners should also be aware of the considerable damage that can be caused to a pasture if it isn't properly managed. When determining pasture size, it is preferable (and in some instances, essential) to have multiple, small pastures rather than one large pasture. This allows for more frequent pasture rotation, giving pastures a chance to recover and re-grow, and minimizes pasture damage. In the spring, when the ground is wet from snow and rain, animals will destroy the ground and turn the area to mud. It is wise to postpone grazing and wait for drier conditions. It is also best to allow plants at least five to six inches of growth before beginning spring grazing. When the pasture has been grazed to about 3 inches, animals should be rotated out and placed on a new pasture. In addition, they should be removed from the pasture any time when it is excessively wet, such as in the fall, to prevent destruction of the grass root system. Likewise,

anytime pasture is not growing due to excessive drought, they should be removed before it becomes overgrazed.

Overgrazing pastures forces animals to browse too close to the ground, destroys root systems and can lead to excessive sand ingestion and sand colic. During these times, house your stock in dirt paddocks and feed hay in a manner to protect it from mixing with the ground. Also, supplementation of pasture with hay in an off-the-ground feeder makes up for unavailable *natural* feedstuffs and reduces the time spent grazing, i.e., minimizes overgrazing, but provides needed nutrition. Maintaining a healthy pasture helps prevent unwanted plant growth, such as weeds and toxic plants. Also, overly hungry animals are more likely to eat toxic plants, which they otherwise would not consume. This is a concern anytime pastures are overgrazed, supplemental hay is not provided, and excessive weeds are present.

To minimize parasites on the pasture, it is advisable to pick up manure piles at least twice a week. However, this is often impractical from a labor standpoint. Another option is to drag the pasture. Drag pastures on a hot, sunny, dry day, to maximize destruction of parasites. Dragging a pasture when it is cool and wet does not destroy parasites, it just serves to spread them even more broadly throughout the pasture. Don't use your pastures as a way of disposing of fresh manure when cleaning the barn. Composted manure is much more beneficial to your pasture and does not carry the risk of infecting it with more parasites.



Consider the benefits of pasture this spring. Pasturing leads to happier, healthier equids and creates less labor and cost for you. Your extension agent or veterinarian is an excellent resource to help you maximize your pastures' productivity while controlling feed costs.





- Thanks to all who have new donkeys in their barn. We are deeply appreciative of all the new, and forever, homes of our donkeys!

Adopter	Donkey's Name
Lansing Dressage	Chester
Edie Hulbert	Victor
Jodi Geerlings and her mom Phyllis DeHaan	Wes
Lugthart Family	Noah and Ivan
Brenda Moyer	Conrad and Paco
Tim & Peg Hickey	Noble

- Do you have a desire to help with time available?
 - Are you a great organizer with some extra time? There are always things to be done! Contact Sharon at akaminiaturedonkeys@michcom.net

- Donkeys available for adoption:
To see if your favorite donkey is still available for adoption, visit us at our website www.turningpointedonkeyrescue.com or at www.petfinder.com

Donkey name's	Pertinent comments
<p>Monty</p> 	<p>Monty is a 4 year old, small standard gelding, recently rescued from an animal sale. He and his friend Winchester were both in the kill pen after their owner refused to pay for Coggin's testing of these great boys. Both donkeys have since been tested by TPDR and are negative. Monty is a quick learner and needs a home with someone interested in spending a little time teaching this boy the basics. He has been in training at his foster mom's for the past two months and is very cooperative with everything that has been asked of him. Monty will make a great companion for another donkey and is very willing and eager to learn new things. If you are interested in giving Monty a new home, please contact Sharon Windsor at 517-623-0000 or: email akaminidonkeys@michcom.net</p>
<p>Jerry</p> 	<p>Meet TPDR JERRY. A ten year old, lovely red roan Mammoth gelding. I don't suspect that the past has been very kind to Jerry. We found him at a large horse auction in the so-called "dead pen" destined for slaughter. A man had transported Jerry for a neighbor who just didn't want to bother with him any longer. When asked why he wasn't sent through the regular sale ring, we were told that "sometimes you get more money for the "\$#@%&*%" this way! When we got Jerry he evidently had not had his hooves trimmed in quite some time. He also had a fairly significant cut/rope burn on a rear pastern. Our first attempt to have Jerry's hooves trimmed told the story of just how terrified he was. He knew what was about to happen and was prepared to do everything in his power to defend himself. He would AIM and KICK with all he had. Then he would stand looking at us with eyes huge and shake almost to the point of falling over! THAT WAS ENOUGH. We put him back out in his pasture and rescheduled another farrier visit in two weeks. This time, he was sedated for his trim. Yes, all went well and we will continue this course for as long as needed. Jerry is a sweet and loving donkey with a heart about as big as he is. He is wonderful with all of his pasture companions and people alike. He is always right up at the fence to say "HELLO" to anyone that will come to see him. He leads very well, loves brushing, is no problem to catch, halter, load, etc. Jerry like so many of our rescue donkeys has TOLD ME WHERE HE HAS BEEN. It is very evident that big, handsome Jerry has had his share of very rough hands on him. I would ideally like to place him in a home with one or two other equines only. I am looking for someone that will enjoy all of his friendly overtures and at the same time understand and forgive his fears. HE WILL GET BETTER - THEY ALL DO IN THE RIGHT HANDS! Poor Jerry is just where he needs to be. Edie is a very kind and patient woman. We decided that Jerry never had been special to anyone EVER ... JUST USED, as so many of our donkeys are. Edie reports that Jerry is quietly stoic and appears to be resigned to whatever happens to him. He is extremely passive. The ONLY thing he tries to defend himself from is rear hoof trimming. I can well imagine how that was done to him in the past. There is no question that Jerry is looking for that very special someone to love him. When it is time to come into the barn in the evening, he quietly comes to the gate, drops his big head into Edie's arms for a hug. He is getting lots of those hugs now. And THE BRUSH!! Oh, how he has learned to love that brush! Yes, Edie is working on brushing those hind legs too. Jerry's " Special Someone" is out there. When they contact Edie about adopting him she know will if you are that person. If interested, contact Edie Hulbert at 517-669-5698 or e-mail her at edythe@tir.com</p>

<p>Winchester</p> 	<p>Little Winchester is a high stepping, adorable little brown gelding standard. He doesn't seem to have been abused as much as neglected. When he arrived at his foster home, he didn't know much about humans and was extremely shy, but he is losing that shyness after some time at his foster farm. He definitely needs a home where he will be given lots of attention. He is learning the basics right now and does quite well as long as he is not overwhelmed. For more information, contact Sharon at 517-623-0000 or email akaminidonkeys@michcom.net</p>
<p>Rudy</p> 	<p>Meet Rudy. This handsome fellow came to us last fall along with former herd mates Sparky, Ben, and Speedy G. The boys have been in rehab foster homes since their arrival. Rudy, foaled in 2002 is a very sweet gelding that is about 36 inches tall. He has a very passive and compliant nature. He leads very well, learned quickly to load and is a gentleman for picking up all four feet. Rudy along with his three half brothers all came to us as a result of the passing of their former owner. The original herd numbered about a dozen donkeys. The family has kept several of the senior herd members, and that left the four geldings in search of new homes. The boys had a very loving home and had received excellent veterinary and farrier care. They were all gelded at a young age, so no left over jack issues to deal with. The ONLY difficulty we have experienced with Rudy (AND THE OTHER THREE BOYS TOO) is they are very difficult to catch. The previous owner's son told me that his dad went out each evening, sat with the donkeys and fed them a bag of carrots. The only time they were EVER CAUGHT was for farrier and vet visits. They had ONE halter for the entire herd! Sweet little Rudy will be a wonderful pet for someone willing to work on his CATCHING KINK! After all, he did learn early on NOT to be caught when he was chased. I have met many donkeys in my life, BUT NEVER ONE THAT A HUMAN COULD OUTFIGHT!!! Things work much better when you teach your donkey to come to you! If Interested contact Toni Jones at boyzbulldogs@yahoo.com or contact Sharon Windsor at 517-623-0000 or email her at: akaminidonkeys</p>
<p>Mr. Phips</p> 	<p>Mr. Phips is a real sweetie! He will mature to a small standard. My best guess is about 39-40 inches. He is the most lovely, pale pink-silver color with a large white blaze with lots of small dots in that blaze. What a handsome young man he is! Phips has been pastured with other donkeys, mules, and horses both extra small, and extra big too and gets along with them all. Children as well as adults have handled this yearling gelding. He has NO issues and would be a real easy one to train to drive, show, or be a best friend to your other equines. For more information, contact Sharon at 517-623-0000 or email akaminidonkeys@michcom.net</p>
<p>Jimmy</p> 	<p>Jimmy is eight years old, very dark brown, and very well -trained. He leads, loads, picks up all four feet when asked, and is just a super nice donkey. He has been to church for living nativity engagements as well. He arrived at TPDR on July 4th, and was gelded two days later. He spent the last few months in our rehab center and is now ready for adoption! This gorgeous guy is a real people lover and should go to someone that will use him to his full potential. With the training he evidently has had, Jimmy would be a wonderful choice as a therapy animal to visit nursing homes etc. For more information, contact Sharon 517-623-0000 or email her at akaminidonkeys@michcom.net or contact Robyn Haney at 269-598-8822 or e-mail her at: bkwrdcowgrl@gmail.com</p>

➤ **What a Rescue is all about!** With Chris Wilson's excellent website and the addition of the web page "Donkeys in rehab", this section of the newsletter is being replaced by a "green" helpful hints section. Do you have "hints" that made your life, your donkey's life and the environment better? Please share your ideas or articles? Email your hints/articles to marteniu@cvm.msu.edu

➤ **Green Hints for you, your donkey and the environment!**

- With spring just around the corner, the barnyard “To Do” lists are starting to become a priority. As you gather up all the yard and pasture debris, consider chipping and mulching the material and using it for your landscape and pasture needs, rather than sending it off to the landfill or burning it (if your area allows burning).
- What to do with manure is becoming an increasing concern. It is essential both from an environmental aspect and a legal aspect not to allow manure or manure run-off to contaminate surface waters, such as streams, ponds, swampy areas and drainage ditches. No one wants a visit from the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) or the Department of Agriculture. Several options are available:
 - Spreading raw manure on crop or hay ground (often not an option for many people due to land availability).
 - Composting the manure, which can then be safely spread on pastures or used in landscaping without concern from a disease and parasite aspect. Manure (once composted) may be used to enhance your relationship with the neighbors rather than being a liability. You may even be able to sell the compost rather than pay for manure disposal. Composting manure will decrease the volume by at least 50%. For more information on composting, visit:
<http://www.canr.msu.edu/horseadults/index.html?url=publications/publications.html>
 - A new, novel way to remove the material from your farm now exists. If you reside within an 85-mile radius of Flint, MI, Genesee Power Co. has approval to burn manure that is mixed with wood bedding (shavings, sawdust, wood pellets, etc). Although there is a charge to pick up the material, it is quite cost affective when compared with disposal charges.
- Now is the time to repair, and place birdhouses. Not only will you be helping maintain the songbird population, you will be adding enjoyment to your day both watching and listening to your feathered friends.
- If you are adding to your landscape plantings this year, consider planting trees, scrubs and flowers that are both native to your area and benefit the wildlife. For more information, visit the National Wildlife Federation: <http://www.nwf.org/>