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BEWARE OF FALL PASTURE -- LAMINITIS RISK INCREASES!

As temperatures begin to dip, Dr. Juliet Getty, equine nutrition specialist, wants your horse to make the transition to winter feeding in good shape, and that means understanding about the sugar and starch that lurk in your fall pasture growth.

If you have horses that are overweight, insulin resistant, or suffer from equine Cushing's disease, you know about keeping them off of spring grasses. The non-structural carbohydrate (NSC) content is too high for free-choice grazing to be safe, increasing the risk for laminitis. But don't think you're out of the woods once spring is over. True, summer is safer, but as early fall nights cool down below 40 degrees F, the dangerous carbohydrates once again increase.

Grass accumulates NSC (sugars and starch) as it is exposed to sunlight. The levels reach a peak in the late afternoon. During the dark hours, the grass uses this fuel for itself, and by morning, the levels are at their lowest. But, cold nights prevent grass from using as much NSC, resulting in a higher NSC concentration during the day.

Don't be fooled by the brown grass you see in the late fall. Spread it apart and you'll likely see some green at the base, which is high in sugar and starch. If it hasn't rained in a while, your grass will look dried out; but be careful – dry grass can actually have a higher NSC percentage than long, lush-looking grass.

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