

This column features questions from readers submitted via the website. To submit a question to Small Acre Sam, visit BarnyardsandBackyards.com. If your question is featured, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Barnyards & Backyards!*

ask Sam

question

Dear Sam,

"I've heard I need to feed my horses weed-free forage before we go on our hunting trip. What is it? Why do I need it? Where do I get it? And, how long do I feed it before our trip?"

– Heather, Cheyenne

Dear Heather,

Weed Free Forage is forage certified as being free of noxious weeds. In Wyoming, forage is inspected and certified as weed-free by county weed and pest control district personnel. Purchasing weed-free products helps prevent spread of weeds and protects our natural resources. Noxious weeds displace native plant species, diminish the beauty of the landscape and recreational experience, decrease wildlife habitat and ecosystem biodiversity, and increase soil erosion rates sending sediment into streams. Removal is very difficult and costly once a noxious weed species is widely distributed.

A quarantine restricts entry of non-certified hay or straw into certain areas. In Wyoming, this includes, but is not limited to, Teton and Park counties, all national forests and grasslands, National Park units, and other federal, state, and local areas. The Wyoming Hay List is an excellent resource for locating certified product for sale. Go to www.uwyo.edu/ces, click on Extension Educational Program Areas on the left-hand side of the page, then on Ag and Natural Resources, then under Crops.

An inspector examines a hay producer's field for certification. If no noxious weeds are found, then it will meet North American Weed Free Forage certification standards. To be sure you are purchasing certified hay, one of the following is required: a transit certificate, tags (one tag attached to each individual bale), trademarked yellow and purple twine, or compressed bale strapping (specific to Idaho).

In a study by Brett Olsen at Montana State University, horses were fed known quantities of weed seeds. Manure was collected at nine intervals over 72 hours. Findings ranged from 0 to 2 percent viable weed seeds in manure. Two percent may not sound like

much, but when you consider the volume of seed present and the fact it is deposited along the trail with built-in fertilizer, that 2 percent has excellent opportunity to germinate and thrive. With this said, it is recommended to start feeding weed-free forage at least 72 hours before entering quarantined lands.

– Sam

ANSWER



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