

# Peace of mind

**AFIA's Safe Feed/Safe Food program offers protection for the average horse**

BY KENNETH L. MARCELLA, D.V.M.

**T**HE MID-ATLANTIC Nutrition Conference was held in Maryland in March, and a general theme for the equine section focused on the biosecurity of horse feeds.

Papers were presented on various types of equine food threats, including fescue toxicity in hay, ionophore poisoning in processed feeds and supplements, and mycotoxins or mold produced poisons in equine grains and forages.

The safety of equine foods is a hot topic. Weather conditions throughout much of the U.S. over the last few years—including droughts followed by heavier than normal rainfall and hot summers—have produced conditions favorable for mold growth, increasing the chances of finding contaminated grains in horse feeds.

Changes in weather patterns also may be contributing to the increases in foxtail and blister beetle problems found in hay in some areas. Because of increased incident re-



porting in local news and national horse magazines, the public is more informed about the occurrence of feed mill errors and the potential that exists for problems in processed horse foods and supplements. The

average horse owner is typically more aware and more concerned than ever before about the quality and safety of what goes into the feed bucket.

Fortunately, because of programs like the American Feed Industry Association's (AFIA) Safe Feed/Safe Food Certification Program, the average horse is also better protected than ever before.

### Program origins

AFIA is the world's largest organization devoted exclusively to representing the business, legislative, and regulatory interests of the U.S. animal feed industry and its suppliers. AFIA was founded in 1909 and represents the entire feed industry. Its members include more than 500 domestic and international companies and state, regional, and national asso-



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The American Feed Industry Association's Safe Feed/Safe Food Certification Program gives care providers knowledge that horse feed is produced in an inspected plant and exceeds all U.S. Food and Drug Administration requirements

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ciations. Recognizing that “the feed industry makes a major contribution to food safety, nutrition, and the environment,” the AFIA seeks to play a crucial positive role in the production of healthy, wholesome meat, milk, fish, and eggs. Additionally, more than 75% of the 165-million tons of commercial feed in the U.S. is manufactured by AFIA members.

The Safe Feed/Safe Food program was developed by AFIA in 2003-2004 in response to a lack of general knowledge about feed industry practices in the manufacture of safe feeds. Feed-producing companies wanted a way to supply assurances about the quality of ingredients, the safety and cleanliness of production and processing facilities, and the maintenance of high standards in feed manufacturing to their food animal customers.

The Safe Feed/Safe Food Certification Program mission is “to establish and promote generally accepted food safety guidelines designed to ensure continuous improvement in the delivery of a safe and wholesome feed supply for the growth and care of animals.”

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**What does the Safe Feed/Safe Food Certification Program stand for?**

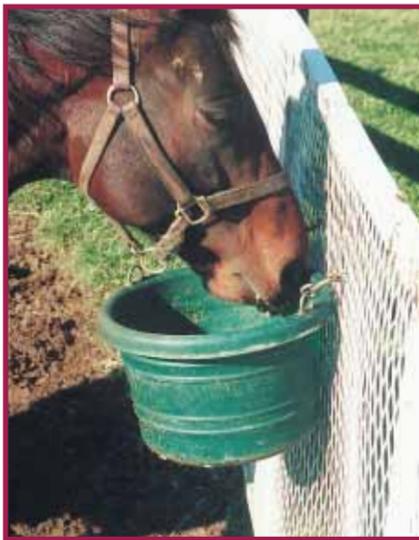
- Reducing risks
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- Protecting hard-won brand value
- Lowering product-liability insurance rates
- Decreasing waste, shrink, and customer complaints

Initially a program for essentially food animal (cattle, pigs, and chicken) feeds, the Safe Feed/Safe Food program has been expanded to include equine feeds. Additional expansion of this program is slated by AFIA for this spring and will feature a more dedicated equine feed producer emphasis and possibly a new logo that is more equine oriented.

In order for companies to be accepted into the Safe Feed/Safe Food program and allowed to utilize the certified facility logo on their products, they must undergo independent third-party facility and conduct inspection.

“We don’t think of our Safe Feed/Safe Food program as a regulation but as an adjunct to regulation and a program developed to highlight the high standards the industry already has

Biosecurity measures involving feed are key to ensuring horses are not only eating right but staying healthy



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above the basic regulatory requirements for feed,” said Richard Sellers, vice president of feed regulation and nutrition of the AFIA.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the individual state administrations are the primary regulators of feeds and have been since the 1880s. Yet, the FDA,

like all federal agencies, must prioritize its resources.

“AFIA is ahead of the curve in this crucial area, and this direction simply makes sense since the FDA cannot do it alone,” said Stephen Sundlof, D.V.M., Ph.D., former director of the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine.

AFIA has tried to augment the standard feed safety programs and incorporates many aspects that exceed the FDA’s requirements for the manufacture of feed.

“Under the new Food Safety Modernization Act or FSMA, more reg-

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## FEED & NUTRITION

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ulations for feed manufacturing will be written over the next two years, Sellers said. "But AFIA's Safe Feed/Safe Food program will meet all of those and exceed several."

The idea of being on the advancing edge of industry standards is the backbone of the Safe Feed/Safe Food program and is encapsulated by AFIA's statement that companies associated with the program know "that getting ahead of the

curve today means being in a position to succeed tomorrow."

Essentially, better feed is simply better business.

### Quality control

"The Safe Feed/Safe Food Certification Program offers peace of mind," said Brian Rittgers, national sales manager of the Elanco Animal Health's Dairy Business Unit. "When I'm dealing with a facility that believes in this program, I know that it's using the same standards



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Pennfield Corp., makers of Pennfield Feeds and the 2008 official feed of the U.S. Equestrian Federation, has four AFIA Safe Feed/Safe Food certified facilities.

"Our number-one priority is to have a top-notch quality control process," said Pennfield's Jeff Katalan. "Anything less than 100% vigilance to ensure a safe feed supply for our customers is not acceptable."

Southern States Cooperative is another member of the Safe Feed/Safe Food Certification Program, and its equine feeds are uti-

lized by horse owners throughout the Eastern U.S.

"American consumers are more concerned than ever about how their food is handled," said Jim Moore, vice president of the feed division of Southern States. "Animal agriculture is a critical component of the food industry, and the feed industry is critical to animal agriculture. Feed safety programs such as the Safe Feed/Safe Food Certification Program will take the industry to new heights in providing safe feed products for animals."

The bottom line for horse owners and barn managers is that when you see an AFIA Safe Feed/Safe Food

Certification Program logo on a bag of equine feed or a particular feed supplement, you can rest assured that the product was produced in a plant or facility that was independently inspected and that it has exceeded all FDA requirements. That feed or equine additive that you are pouring into a bucket for your horse to eat is the very best that the American food industry has to offer. ▀



Kenneth L. Marcella, D.V.M., is a practicing veterinarian in Canton, Georgia.

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