

PROBIOTICS FOR HORSES

REVIEW OF RESULTS FOR 1987

“Excellent results were obtained following the use of probiotics in brood mares and their foals at studs and when used in competitive animals,” said Bruce Manley, Manager of the Bacton Stud when announcing the commercial availability of probiotics.

During the 1987 foaling season 80 thoroughbred foals were treated with Probiotic Liquid for five days commencing soon after birth. The dams too were treated as a routine measure with Probiotics in their feed. Once the foals were eating solid food they also received Probiotics in their feed.

Mr Manley, who is also director of Probiotics International Ltd said that the cost of Probiotic feed supplementation was a few pence per day.

Results showed that when compared with controls the growth rates and general condition of the Probiotic fed animals was improved by around 20 per cent as a consequence of better feed utilisation.

Scour in the young foals was drastically reduced.

Respiratory problems were found to be more readily controlled by antibiotic therapy following the use of Probiotic formulations.

Mares showed less signs of stress during parturition, and better conception rates at the first oestrus after foaling were recorded. In addition mares fed with combination Probiotics, produced a good bloom on their coats showing a distinct improvement over controls.

And around 500 horses in training on the flat plus twenty eventers were fed a proprietary brand of combination Probiotics during 1987.

These Probiotic fed horses consistently achieved better results and won more races than previously. Form was maintained longer, too.

Several major Group Races were won by horses being fed regularly on combination Probiotic Supplementation and the horse which finished second in the major Three Day Event at Burghley was being fed a Probiotic combination Preparation.

Equine nutrition consultant, Miss Deborah Lucas referred to the horse as a trickle feeder with a digestive system designed to contend with small, very frequent meals of high fibre, low soluble carbohydrate feeds.

The anatomy of the equine digestive tract reflects this emphasis, she continued, with the large intestine - the area for fibre digestion containing a vast microbial population - making up 63 per cent of the total volume of gut.

Thus the microbial population is of vital significance in digesting fibre and in the production of certain vitamins.

But, she said, the stresses imposed upon the modern horse often predispose this microbial population to very severe disruption, which can result at best in reduced efficiency of digestion, and at worst, allow the invasion and establishment of undesirable and pathogenic bacteria.

She considered that the inclusion of probiotics in the diet of horses subjected to stress- racehorses, broodmares, youngstock and competition horses - enables the microbial population to be maintained and replenished to ensure that wellbeing and performance is not affected.

In conclusion she said that both the prophylactic and corrective use of Probiotics have been shown to improve performance and condition in almost all categories of horses.

NOTE TO EDITORS

Miss Deborah M. Lucas has an honours degree in Biological Sciences and a Masters degree in Equine Science where her thesis was concerned with the mineral and vitamin nutrition of the horse.

Deborah is an independent equine nutrition consultant working for individual clients in addition to acting as technical consultant to several of the major companies in the field of equine nutrition.