

## Feeding the Donkey with Dental Disease

Donkeys with dental disease require specialist feeding which often requires major changes to feeding and management. All donkeys should have a dental examination with a gag at least once a year. Below are tips on feeding animals with dental disease safely whilst avoiding other problems such as colic and laminitis:

### DO'S

- Do assess the donkey's ability to chew long fibres (hay, straw and haylage)
- Do take in to account the donkey's consumption of bedding (straw), if the donkey tries to eat bedding that it can't manage advise a change to non-edible wood shavings
- Provide a good quality, soft hay if the donkey's teeth allow it
- Donkeys with very poor teeth may need all long fibres replacing – use the 'haynet in a bucket' concept (see below)
- Feed according to body condition, donkeys with poor teeth are often still overweight!
- Encourage owners to feed 'little and often' to ensure donkeys are trickle feeding as they would in the wild, if possible encourage *ad lib* feeding of hay replacers
- Assess grazing management, very short or fibrous grazing may be difficult to eat, restricted areas of medium length grass may be more appropriate in some cases
- If the donkey has had extensive dental work consider using soaked high fibre nuts in the 3-7 days afterwards to encourage sustained energy intake

### DON'TS

- Avoid all cereal based feeds, donkeys can be maintained and encouraged to gain weight on fibre based products without the need for inappropriate cereal feeds
- Don't feed dry feeds, always make sure they are damp, donkeys with dental problems will often choke on feeds that are dry as they are swallowed whole rather than chewed
- Don't provide very fibrous alfalfa products as hay replacers as they are too difficult to chew
- Don't feed unmanageable treats e.g. chopped carrots/apples, these are better grated or puréed

### POSSIBLE DIETS

Long fibre forages may need supplementing or completely replacing depending upon the severity of the problem.

Donkeys able to manage some hay but that are not maintaining weight can be provided with supplementary feeds, we have successfully used the following:

- Soaked high fibre nuts (Spillers High Fibre Nuts and Saracens Donkey Diet)
- Speedi Beet (made by British Horse Feeds) – excellent as a top dressing for high fibre nuts to increase palatability
- Fibre Beet (made by British Horse Feeds) – high calorie alfalfa-based product, excellent as a bucket feed for very underweight animals
- Happy Hoof / Hi Fi Lite – chaff to be used as a sole bucket feed or to mix with above

Donkeys unable to manage any long fibre – use 'Haynet in a Bucket' concept with short chopped fibres designed as hay replacers, we have successfully used the following:

- Happy Hoof – feed to underweight / geriatric animals, provide 2 – 3 kg per day to satisfy appetite
- Hi Fi Lite – more suitable for ideal weight or overweight animals, provide 2 – 3 kg per day to satisfy appetite.
- Short chopped hay replacers can be fed in conjunction with the bucket feeds outlined above