

## Feeding the Donkey with Liver Disease

Donkeys with liver disease require specialist feeding which is similar to the approach that would be used for a horse with similar problems.

Below are tips on feeding these animals safely whilst avoiding other problems such as colic and laminitis:

### DO'S

- Do provide a low fat diet (< 5 %)
- Do provide a low protein diet (< 12 %)
- Provide a good quality hay if the donkey's teeth allow it, if not provide short-chopped hay replacers, this should form the vast majority of the donkey's diet
- Consider providing B vitamin supplementation, Brewers Yeast may be an affordable source if owners do not want to pay for more expensive veterinary formulations
- Encourage owners to feed 'little and often' to ensure the liver is not overloaded if supplementary feeds are required
- Encourage owners to have 'tempters' available for encouraging inappetent animals to eat – things to try include: apples / carrots, apple sauce, apple juice, peppermint cordial, dried mint leaf (available from most horse feed merchants), fenugreek (again from feed merchants) and molasses (small quantities only)

### DON'TS

- Don't feed high protein haylage
- Avoid high protein alfalfa chops
- Don't feed 'senior' or 'conditioning' feeds even if the donkey is underweight, these feeds are too high in proteins, fats, starch and sugars
- Avoid the donkey becoming overweight or gradually reduce weight if this is already a problem
- Avoid all cereal-based feeds
- Ask owners to avoid feeding excessive treats, encourage the feeding of 'safe' treats such as apples, carrots and high fibre nuts

### POSSIBLE DIETS

Good quality forage should be available at all times; depending upon the body condition of the donkey this should be composed of variable ratios of hay and straw, depending on the time of year, with restricted grazing. For those donkeys that have poor dentition and struggle with long fibres try providing short chopped hay replacers that are not alfalfa rich. Products that we have successfully fed to donkeys with liver disease are:

- Happy Hoof as a 'bucket feed' and complete hay replacer
- Spillers High Fibre Cubes – excellent as a basic diet, can be fed with Happy Hoof
- Saracens Donkey Diet – excellent as a basic diet, good for safe weight gain
- Speedi Beet – ok for these cases unlike more 'traditional' molassed beet products, good as an appetising 'top dressing'
- Fibre Beet – a product with alfalfa but low protein and oil content so ok as a conditioning feed in small amounts