

# The Case Against Rye/Clover Pastures for Horses

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**Where shall I start! Read on, then you'll understand why rye/clover is 'disaster pasture' for horses!! It causes a wide array of health and behaviour problems, some of them so common we think they are normal, some way more severe causing frustration, accidents, loss of confidence in people, and unnecessary suffering and euthanasia of horses. Without a doubt, they directly impact your safety, enjoyment and pocket!!**

1. **MYCOTOXINS.** Invisible and insidious, they are produced by endophytes inside the rye-grass. Everyone knows about the **Lolitrein B** which causes the staggers in late summer and autumn. But more harmful is **Ergovaline**, prevalent at this time of the year. Ergovaline is a nasty vaso-constrictor, (cuts off the blood supply to). When the blood supply is constricted to the skin you get heat stress because it raises their core body temperature. When this happens to the uterus you get abortion, to the hind-gut you get colic. Other lesser symptoms in horses include agitation, sweating for no reason, sweating in the float, running around the paddock for no reason, grumpiness, girthiness, belligerence, bucking, aggressiveness, prolonged gestation, no top-line, hard to keep weight on. **What about low-endophyte rye-grasses? Still totally unsuitable because of reasons 2,3,4,& 5 !!!**
2. **PHOTODYNAMIC PIGMENTS** are the pigments in all varieties of rye-grass, clovers, lucerne, St John's Wort, Buttercup, plantain, parsley which make them the very dark green color. These pigments fluoresce, are activated by light, and are known to cause photophobia and photosensitisation. This is the true cause of 'mud-fever', 'sun-burn' and I believe head-flicking/shaking syndrome. When you remove these plants from the horse's diet these conditions go away.
3. **MINERAL IMBALANCES.** Rye-grass likes a slightly acid soil (5.8) So do all sorts of fungi. The more acid your soil, the more fungi in and around the base of the plants, such as facial eczema spores, aspergillus, rust moulds and hundreds more. Then when the grass grows quickly, which is often in our climate especially when nitrogen or super is applied, it tends to leave behind the minerals. When you realise what a huge requirement horses have for minerals like calcium/magnesium just to run their large muscles, their brain and their nervous and circulatory systems, you will go to great lengths to ensure your horse doesn't lack a molecule!  
**It is a waste of money and counter-productive** to feed separate minerals in isolation. Whilst you think you are fixing one problem you will be creating another imbalance. Feed mixes that supply everything in the correct balance.
4. **FRUCTANS.** Whilst clovers and lucerne store their sugars as starch which is easily digestible, all varieties of rye-grass store their sugars as fructans which horses cannot digest. When fructans reach the hind-gut the streptococcus bacteria have a feast, immediately proliferate and devastate the good flora, cause sloppy manures, metabolic chaos and trigger laminitis.
5. **EXCESS CARBOHYDRATE.** Rye/clover pastures are selected for rapid weight gain and milk production in livestock. The exact opposite of what we want for our horses! Rye/clovers are very high in NSC's (non-structural carbohydrate or sugars) and when kept at a young stage of growth by grazing they are also low in fibre.
6. **PHYTO-OESTROGENS.** Clovers especially red clover and sub-terranean clover contain phyto-oestrogens which interfere with hormones and reproduction. These can turn mares into nymphomaniacs and geldings into stallions! They also increase the number of services to conceive.

**There are way safer grasses to feed your horses. If possible change to cocksfoot, brown-top, any of the Poa's, silver tussock, Yorkshire fog, prairie, or timothy and enjoy horses that are 'good to go' all year round!**