

Over Coming our Hay Feeding Dilemma

By Lezley Golding - Stevley Park Suris

Over these past few years we have always had problems with feeding hay to our alpacas. We started by feeding Lucerne at times when the girls needed something extra. They would pick through the Lucerne, nibble the leaves off the storks and leave the storks on the ground, which I would then have to then pick up and throw on the garden for mulch. While the hay was on the ground they would also take great delight in rolling in it, to show me just how much they could get into their fleece. Grrrrhhhhh !!!!!

Easter, we planned to go away for a holiday, as we had friends to look after the farm and animals. We decided to get in a large square bale of sub clover, we knew they would eat all that we put out and not leave storks like the Lucerne. Prior to leaving, we peeled off sections of hay from the big square and put a pile in the corner of each paddock shelter. This would keep the alpacas happy and our friends would not have to feed out while we were away. Day 2 of being away our friends rang to say one of our stud males had a very red eye and they had to call the vet. On closer inspection the vet found a barley grass seed embedded in the corner of his eye. We came home earlier than expected from our holiday and when checking all the alpacas we found one of our girls had a closed mucky eye. I bathed it open and dug out 2 barley grass seeds. Another visit from the vet. A closer inspection of the hay revealed barley grass seeds and thistles through it. We rang our hay man who was very apologetic and came and collected the remainder of the big bale, and replaced it with small squares. We also spent several hours gathering up all the suspect hay from the shelters and burning it. We then had to check each animal and remove the barley grass seeds and thistle heads from their fleece, because it was on the ground they had rolled in it as well. WHAT A DISASTER..... we were now faced with a \$500 vet bill. I am happy to report that the animals with the seeds in the eyes have all recovered 100%. Thank goodness.

We sat down and thought about how to feed hay to our alpacas. I searched everywhere for small feeders that would hold a couple of small square bales. There was nothing available. We certainly weren't buying big squares again, you just cannot see what is inside them.



OK now for some ingenuity, we decided it was time to design our own feeder. We drew up a design and took it to the local farm gate manufacturer and had one made up. We trialled it for a week, and made a few minor changes and then had several more made, one for each paddock shelter.

We have finally overcome our hay feeding dilemma. The alpacas can easily pull the hay out through the mesh and only a small amount falls on the ground, which they eat. We have found that not only, can they NOT ROLL in the hay, but there is no wastage, they eat it all. Also, the feet on the feeder keeps the bottom of the feeder off the ground and stops the hay getting musty and wet.

We are very happy with our new hay feeders.

This reminds me of the old saying, '*Necessity is the mother of invention*'.

Updated April 2020. This article was written some time ago, these hay feeders are now widely used on small farms throughout the VER. Feeders now come standard with stabilizer bars on legs to prevent them spreading. Lids are also available to keep hay dry. They are available from Markfi Gates, Pakenham Produce and probably others.