



AGISTORS' GUIDE TO TRANSITIONING TO EVIDENCE-BASED WORMING

Efficient operation of an agistment facility is a huge responsibility - as an agistor of horses you wear many management hats – horses, horse owners, visiting professionals, environmental/pasture, biosecurity, financial, legal and more. And, just when you think you have a handle on it all, along comes a completely different paradigm for effective parasitic strongyle worm management! EBW recognises this and has prepared this Infosheet which we hope will assist you as you move towards this new direction.

WHY CHANGE IS NECESSARY

Horse and livestock industries worldwide are experiencing an increasing prevalence of parasitic strongyle worm resistance (similar to antibiotics resistance) to all currently available anthelmintics, largely due to improper use. Currently, there are no new anthelmintics being developed and this has created an imperative to find new ways to arrest the evolution of resistant worms through improved, evidence-based management practices. Evidence-based worming is based on the scientific premise that only a few horses ('high-shedders') are responsible for the greatest degree of pasture contamination with strongyle worms. This process identifies these horses which are then targeted for anthelmintic treatment¹.

The following guide aims to provide you with a practical means of transitioning all horses on your property from routine/interval worming to worming only when based on the evidence from faecal egg counts (FECs).

INTRODUCING NEW HORSES FROM OUTSIDE YOUR PROPERTY

What	AT LEAST 14 DAYS PRIOR TO ARRIVAL <ul style="list-style-type: none">The horse owner should organise a faecal egg count reduction test (FECRT) for their horse through their veterinarian or FEC provider. The process involves an initial FEC test, treatment of any worms, and an additional FEC (known as an FECRT) at 14 days post treatment.If the FECRT indicates a low risk of resistant worms, the horse can be admitted to your usual biosecurity measures before joining the herd. If not, the horse owner should seek veterinary help to try to eradicate any resistant worms before entering your herd.
Why	There is a risk that new horses may introduce resistant worms to your pasture and once they are there, you may always have a problem with them. The FECRT can show the effectiveness of the prior treatment – horses with resistant worms will still record an egg count which indicates that the treatment has not been entirely effective. Although this will be an unlikely event, if you do come across it you should request your new client to seek veterinary advice re treating the resistant worms prior to admitting the horse/s to your property.
Hint	There is no such thing as a completely worm-free pasture. This should not create issues for healthy, adult horses unless the worms are resistant to anthelmintics. The evidence-based worming approach aims to prevent the accidental introduction of resistant strongyle worms onto your property.

TESTING YOUR EXISTING HERD

1. Hold a meeting

What	Hold an agistees' meeting to explain your intention to move towards evidence-based worming and provide the rationale for doing so.
Why	It is a good idea to have all your clients fully informed about the reasons for the change in order to increase the likelihood of everyone working cooperatively.
Hint	You are in the driver's seat for change, persuading all your agistees may not be immediate but should be pursued until everyone is comfortable with the new approach towards worm management.

¹ Evidence-based worming is for pasture management of strongyle worm populations and is not intended as a veterinary diagnostic procedure.

YOUR EXISTING HERD (Cont.)

2. Set the date

What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decide on an Action Week. Early spring, when the weather warms up, is ideal – worm counts should be at their highest at this time. ▪ Inform your agistees of the date so they are ready to collect samples from each of their horses.
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having the FECs undertaken within a single, short timeframe will allow you to establish a herd benchmark database from the outset.
Hint	For horses in shared paddocks, identify one of the owners who might be willing to co-ordinate for their paddock herd. It will be easier for you to deal with one reliable person than many.

3. C(ollection)-days

What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Over a period of a week or so, agistees must collect a single, FRESH good-sized pellet from each of their horses, package it and send it to their FEC provider who could be their local vet, the NSW Department of Primary Industries, a private provider such as EBW or a provider located via internet search. Shop around – prices vary greatly! ▪ MAKE SURE THE COLLECTOR KNOWS WHICH HORSE THE SAMPLE CAME FROM. ▪ For each sample, the owner should record the date, the horse, the owner and any other details you might wish to record (such as the paddock identification). ▪ If you are organising a bulk FEC purchase, samples can be refrigerated but do not freeze them!
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is very important the samples do not get muddled up and that each sample is accompanied by key information for that horse. ▪ Freezing may make the eggs of any parasites un-identifiable (the egg membrane may collapse).
Hint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you identify each of your paddocks by a name or other identifier? This can be very useful in evidence-based worming as it might assist you to find out whether some paddocks might be wormier than others which will allow you to make management decisions about those paddocks. ▪ Horse not co-operating? One trigger for aiding ‘defecation on demand’ is walking the horse next to an open horse float. Are there other ethical triggers that might help the shy horse to poo?

4. The results are in!

What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure each agistee provides you with a copy of the results. ▪ Create a simple database (eg an Excel spreadsheet) and enter the details. ▪ Horses with elevated egg counts (> 200 EPG) should be treated with a targeted wormer ▪ Obtain proof each high egg-shedding horse has been treated (eg, an empty, labelled syringe).
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing a database will allow you to track the egg-shedding status of each horse on your property. Over time, the data will reveal which horses will need more frequent FECs, and which can be left for longer periods between FEC testing. ▪ The data sheet may also reveal which paddocks might be wormier than others. ▪ High-shedders should have a FEC test 4 times a year; low egg-shedders less frequently.
Hint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have your own FEC schedule well established, but don't discourage your agistees from seeking FECs at any time they wish. ▪ Download the free <i>NSW Department of Primary Industry Guide to Horse Wormers</i> from our website.

WHAT NEXT?

Aim to do a full FEC test for each horse on your property once a year. Other tests will be on a per-horse basis which will be the agistee's responsibility but as the agistor, you have a right to request test result evidence from these horses for your database. In time, you might consider learning the FEC technique yourself or skilling up one of your agistees to do the testing for your property.

Remember, adopting FEC testing for your property means you will be contributing to the important goal of retarding the development of resistant strongyle populations. In addition, there will be less anthelmintic residue contaminating your property which is good news for protecting any dung beetles you may have invested in.