

# THE LEADING REIN

*A UGA Extension Agents' Newsletter for Horse Owners and Professionals*



## PREPARING EQUESTRIANS FOR WINTER WEATHER

*By Ashley Best*

Even though we are looking forward to the holiday season, this time of year is never the favorite for equine enthusiasts. The days are shorter and the weather becomes cold and wet. Horse requirements for energy, shelter and hoof care change in the winter. In this issue of The Leading Rein, we will cover some basic winter care tips for equine owners to ensure your equine partner thrives during the frosty season.



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EXTENSION

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# WINTER HOOF CARE

*By Brenda Jackson*

Hooves can become dry in winter, more brittle similar to our hands and nails. It is important that hooves get sufficient exposure to moisture to retain natural water content, elasticity and function. Excessive dryness can lead to hoof splits or cracks, cast shoes or lameness issues. Being turned out regularly can provide the moisture required but sometimes human help may be necessary. Possible ideas might be: a “spa” area where they can wet their hooves on occasion, a change in your nutrition plan with the addition of vitamins or even one of many moisturizing products for hooves available on the market.



“  
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”

It is important to limit these uses because prolonged exposure to too much moisture can lead to other hoof problems. When the ground is soft and wet, not only can the hoof not land heel first, but the actual mechanics of the hoof can change. Some horses will almost tip toe through the mud. Horn (keratin) production can decrease and circulation is not stimulated as much. Softer conditions may also lead to the potential for thrush.

What is thrush you ask? It is a foul odor that emanates from the hooves, especially around the frog area. It is typically caused by bacteria or fungus and is caused by dirty, damp bedding or extended periods standing in wet muddy pastures. Consult your farrier or veterinarian for recommendations for topical astringents, should they be required. Your farrier can also help you by trimming the frog area to remove any necrotic tissue that could develop.

Inspecting and picking out feet is important because finding and treating thrush early can limit damage. For horses that are regular barn residents, you must provide clean dry bedding to ensure they are not standing in dirty, damp shavings for an extended period. A low-lying area in your paddock or pasture can be filled with pea gravel, which is smooth, small, and allows drainage but the horse needs to be able to move off of the pea gravel if he chooses. A little extra care over the winter will ensure our horses are healthy and ready for a new season of riding next spring and summer.



# BODY CONDITION SCORE

*By Brooklyne Wassel*

You might not even realize you are doing it, but when you glance at your horse and start to put hands on them to get a general feel of their health, you are well on your way to determining their body condition score. Body condition score is a great way to evaluate overall health. Body condition score (BCS) was developed in the 1980's following a PhD thesis by Dr. Don Henneke of Texas A & M and thus is referred to as the Henneke Body Condition Score. This scoring system is widely utilized throughout the equine industry from veterinarians to the backyard horse owner. This wide scope of use gives a glimpse into its importance and ease of use.

Body condition score takes a look at the fat deposits on the horse's body to determine a score on a scale of one to nine with one being extremely thin and nine being obese. The ideal body condition will fall around five depending on the horse's use. A thoroughbred on the track would likely fall in the range of a four and be a healthy athlete at their peak, but a five is considered the happy medium when it comes to the majority of our recreational horses.

# BODY CONDITION SCORE

## *Continued*

What can body condition score actually tell us? Body condition score can be an indicator of overall health. While it is not the end all be all of equine health, it does build a good foundation. If a horse is not depositing fat “properly”, you need to start asking some questions:

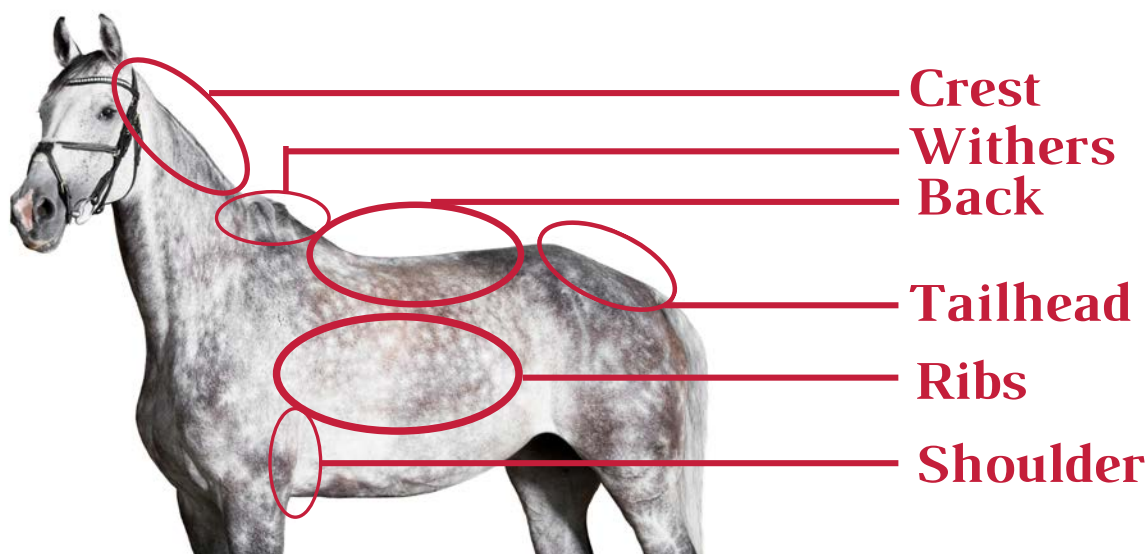
- How old is the horse?
- What was his BCS last month? Last year at the same time?
- Has something happened recently to cause the low BCS such as a change in forage or herd dynamics?
- Is this horse involved in heavy work?

If the horse is depositing too much fat, it can still be a concern. You will need to consider if there are issues to address or if changes need to be made to help ensure the horse's health.

- How old is the horse?
- Is the horse showing any other symptoms of metabolic concerns such as abnormal hair coat?
- What time of year did they start to deposit more fat/ change BCS?
- What is their current feeding program? Does it match their nutrient requirement and work load?

To start the process of determining the BCS of a horse, first make a visual assessment of the overall horse. Stand close enough to the horse to be able to see each individual body part but far enough away get an overall picture. Ideally, you should visually assess from the side view to be able to see: crest of the neck, withers, shoulder, back, tailhead and ribs. If the ribs are visible, the horse should not score higher than a BCS 4. If ribs are not visible, the horse will be a BCS 5 or above.

Once you have determined the portion of the scale 1 through 9 that you are working with, start with the crest of the neck and with a firm but gentle hand, palpate each of the six fat deposit areas that were visually assessed. You will be feeling for structure and fat cover. Structure will feel hard and clearly be bone while fat has more of a spongy give when felt. Use each of the six areas to determine a score. While some people like to get an overall feel of the horse before determining a score, others like to give each area an individual score 1-9 and then divide by 6 to get an average for the horse. This can be an effective method for breeds that like to deposit fat disproportionately in areas such as those that tend to get “cresty” such as Paso Finos and Morgans.



# BODY CONDITION SCORE

## *Continued*

**1** A horse which is at a BCS 1 will not be exhibiting body fat deposits. Spinal processes, ribs, hips, and shoulder will all be highly visible with no fat covering. This condition needs to be immediately examined by a veterinarian to help determine a course of action. A BCS this low will likely only ever be seen in extreme cases.

**2** A horse which scores a BCS 2 will likely need veterinary attention as soon as possible. This horse will be very thin with minimal fat deposits. Fat deposits will just start to deposit around base of the spinal processes and other structures but will not fully cover.

**3** A horse which scores a BCS 3 will have fat deposits which start to make structures appear smooth but are still discernable. Ribs are visible. Withers and neck are accentuated and will lack smooth cover.

**4** A horse which scores a BCS 4 will have visible ribs and smooth fat cover throughout. Fat and structure can be easily found through visual and physical examination. This horse is likely an athlete or young horse. This BCS is rarely a concern unless it is a sudden change or if the horse is old and needs additional BCS for health.

**5** A horse which scores a BCS 5 is the industry standard and baseline for which most recommendations are made. Again, this is not for every horse, but serves as a great baseline. This horse's ribs are not visible but are easily palpable upon inspection. This horse has a blended appearance and smooth lines are created by fat cover. This horse's back is level and does not peak at spinal processes.

**6** A horse with a BCS 6 is considered fleshy. This horse may start to develop a crease along its back due to fat deposits along the spine. Fat deposits covering the ribs, along the withers and behind the shoulder will feel spongy.

**7** A horse with a BCS 7 is very fleshy with fat deposits that start to interfere with palpating structures. Fat will feel spongy in all areas. Individual ribs may be difficult to feel at a BCS 7. The horse's back will likely develop a crease due to fat deposits along the spine.

**8** A horse which score a BCS 8 is considered fat. This horse will have a noticeable crease down its back, very difficult to palpate the ribs and area behind the shoulder. The crest of the neck will be well-filled and firm. A horse with this BCS may have issues and should be addressed with your veterinarian.

**9** A horse which scores a BCS 9 is obese. This horse has structures which are covered in visible fat deposits. This may make areas look dimpled and abnormal. This horse has large fat deposits at the tailhead, over the ribs, and crest of the neck. This horse's back has an exaggerated crease. This BCS should be examined immediately by a veterinarian to determine a safe weight management plan and check for any underlying issues.

Knowing your horse's BCS can be a useful tool in keeping your horse healthy through the seasons and catching when he is not feeling his best. If you are just starting to learn this system, ask your local Extension agent or veterinarian for help assessing your horse's current BCS.



# SHOULD I BLANKET MY HORSE?

*By Caitlin Jackson*

Every year when the weather starts to get chilly I always get a few calls asking if and when owners should begin blanketing their horses. Horses are naturally equipped to deal with all the seasons, so the decision to blanket your horse should be based on their living environment and level of competitive activities.

It takes a healthy horse about 10-21 days of cold temperatures to develop a full winter coat. This thick layer of hair will adequately protect most horses from cold temperatures and wind. However, they might start to get cold if they are exposed to rain or freezing rain in addition to cold temperatures and wind. This is where their living environment comes into play when making a blanketing decision. Do your horses have access to a shelter where they can escape the elements? In general, horses can withstand two out of three extreme environmental conditions (cold temperatures, wind, and rain) but when exposed to all three may need a blanket. What exactly do I mean by cold temperatures? When the temperature drops below 5 ° F or the wind chill is below 5 ° F, which we may or may not experience in a Georgia winter. Keep an eye out on horses with body condition scores of three or less or very young or old horses as they will not have the same tolerance for winter weather as healthy horses.

One thing to really consider when blanketing is your competitive level during winter months. If you are actively showing and do not want your horse to grow a thick winter coat then blanketing is highly recommended to deter hair growth. You will also need to blanket if you have body clipped your horse. It is important that you have the correct blanket size for your horse as improperly fitted blankets will cause sores and rub marks. To correctly measure a horse for a blanket all you will need is a long measuring tap, a fabric measuring tape works best. Place the tape in the center of the horse's chest and wrap over the point of shoulder around to where you want the blanket to end, as some people prefer the tail portion to extend to the top of the horse's tail where others prefer the blanket to stop short of the tail. Before you put on a blanket always check for rips and that all the buckles and snaps are functional. You will also want to make sure that you are able to remove the blanket if temperatures rise so the horse does not sweat under their blanket.

Georgia certainly has some odd weather sometimes and that can be challenging when it comes to blanketing. Honestly, there is no "right" answer when it comes to the question "Should I blanket my horse?" as it just depends on your situation.

# Tack Corner

By Ashley Best

Source: Derrick and Ashley Kowalsky, Kowalsky Saddle Shop

Saddle fit... This is a subject that looms in the horse industry. Something to be so highly politicized is really very simple. A saddle that fits will make you more correct in riding and allow the horse to perform properly. There are many theories from all aspects of the industry, with gullet width being the focal point of saddle fit. The truth is gullet width is far from a single importance theory. We could talk for days about this subject, but we are only going to touch on a few main points to help you understand saddle fit a little better. The most important factor in saddle fit is bar shape, not gullet width. The function of the bars is to distribute the weight of the saddle and the rider across the horse's back.

**Gullet width is denoted by the double arrow in red on the Western saddle pictured. Gullet width is created by the swell (where the horn rests) and forks (just below the gullet where the saddle contacts the horse).**



There are always a few things that will help you distinguish that your saddle may not be fitting properly, the most common being dry spots. In the pictures shown, dry spots can show up as small spots with ruffed up hair or a large dry area. The small ruffled areas are definitely more of a concern than the larger just dry areas. The small spots are normally a more localized pressure point from the saddle tree that will more than likely sore the horse in time. These spots are usually no bigger than your palm and the hair is ruffed up. The bigger dry spots are normally there because of the bar not making correct contact with the horse and might not be as of a concern.



## HORSE CLUB ACTIVITIES

### CHECK IT OUT

Help students bring concepts to life by evaluating saddle fit with their horse and tack. Include this as a follow up activity to a group trail ride or practice. Have them find evidence of poor or proper fit by looking at sweat patterns on their horse. Discuss potential changes to make to help improve fit for future rides.

### BITS AND PIECES

Learning tack identification can be daunting but also rewarding. Collect multiple pieces of tack from different disciplines if possible. Tack can be dissembled for the more advanced group. Make labels out of card stock that has the name of the different pieces. Have the students work together to properly label all of the tack. You can have them assemble bridles, harnesses, etc. before labeling or label the individual parts.

# Tack Corner

Continued

There are several things that can cause dry spots, but always check your pad. A good pad can fix a lot of problems. We would suggest a 3/4 or 1 inch contoured pad with natural fibers to be a good basic pad. By having a contoured pad, this allows room for the withers and shoulders to move properly. The second thing to look at when assessing the fit of your saddle on the horse is to make sure it is level, as seen on the grey mule.

If your saddle sits too high or too low in the front, the bars might not fit properly as seen in this picture below. This saddle on the sorrel is too high in the back and does not sit level.



This is just a tip of the iceberg on saddle fit, but using these tips to assess saddle fit will improve your horse's comfort. If you have more questions on saddle fit or padding concerns, contact Ashley Best, Newton County Extension, or work with a local knowledgeable saddle fitter/maker to help you make the correct decisions for you and your horse.



# The Senior Horse: Golden Years

By Ashley Best

The saying goes, “You’re only as old as you feel.” The same applies to our equine partners. Horses in today’s world are living longer because of the research and improvements in nutrition and care. The chronological age of a senior horse is any horse over the age of 18 years old. The horse’s physiological age can be assessed by how they feel and move. Horses that show signs of weight loss or loss of vigor may be experiencing other symptoms like lameness or dental issues.

Some signs of aging include:

- Grey hairs around face
- Increased napping
- Decreased muscle strength
- Joint stiffness
- Reduced digestive efficiency and increase of colic
- Gum and dental diseases
- Reduced tolerance to extreme heat and cold
- General slowing down and not interested in movement

As horses being seniors, having their teeth checked on a regular basis is essential. By having a veterinarian or licensed equine dentist check your senior horse twice a year, you can prevent many issues that may occur. Horses with dental issues can experience worn enamel, sharp edges, loose teeth and infections.

Some signs to look out for include:

- Dropping feed
- Excessive salivation
- Slow to eat
- Quidding- Wads of chewed up feed
- Choking
- Bad breath
- Weight loss

# The Senior Horse: Golden Years

## Continued

Older horses tend to lose muscle mass and replace it with fat deposits. Extra weight is hard for older horse joints and they could potentially develop a condition like type 2 diabetes. Older equines should maintain a Body Condition Score of 5-6.

For the energy requirements for an older horse, you want to look at the carbohydrates and the fats in the feed. Carbohydrates, or the starches and sugars, will break down to glucose. Laminitis or colic can occur if the starches are fed at high amounts. Many senior horse feeds limit the amounts of starches and sugars. Fats are an easy to digest, concentrated energy source. To add calories to a horse's diet and improve the hair coat, you need a higher fat content. Some supplemental fat sources would include vegetable oils, rice bran or flax seed. Look for higher omega-3 fatty acids (n-3) to reduce the inflammation in your older equine. "Supplementation with n-3 fatty acids in horses may help manage chronic inflammatory conditions such as osteoarthritis, equine metabolic syndrome, laminitis, and thereby help to improve longevity of sport horses" (Hess & Ross-Jones, 2014).

**5-6**

Body Condition  
Score

**2%**

Of body weight  
in forage daily

**>5**

Gallons of  
water per day

**n-3**

Dietary  
Supplementation

Protein needs are usually met by most commercial feeds, but occasionally the senior horse will need a higher protein to meet their needs to combat the loss of muscle due to aging. Lysine is an indicator of the quality of the protein. Lysine is an essential amino acid and cannot be made by the horse so it must be present in the feed. Vitamins and minerals are required for normal body functions. Vitamins can be supplemented, and it is recommended for horses to have access to the free choice minerals. The most important part of a senior equine diet is fiber or the forage. Many senior feeds are fed as a complete feed and it can meet the total fiber requirement. Horses need around 1.5-2.5% of their body weight in dry matter forages. This means that a 1000 lb horse will need around 20 lbs of forage per day. The grass and hay should be the center of a horses diet. Check out the "Hay is for Horses" article in the September issue of The Leading Rein for more information of quality hay and forage.

Hydration in older horses should be of a concern. Horses drink between five and ten gallons of water per day and dehydration is a common cause of impaction colic. Water should always be fresh, free choice and at an acceptable temperature. Older horses may not drink in the winter time

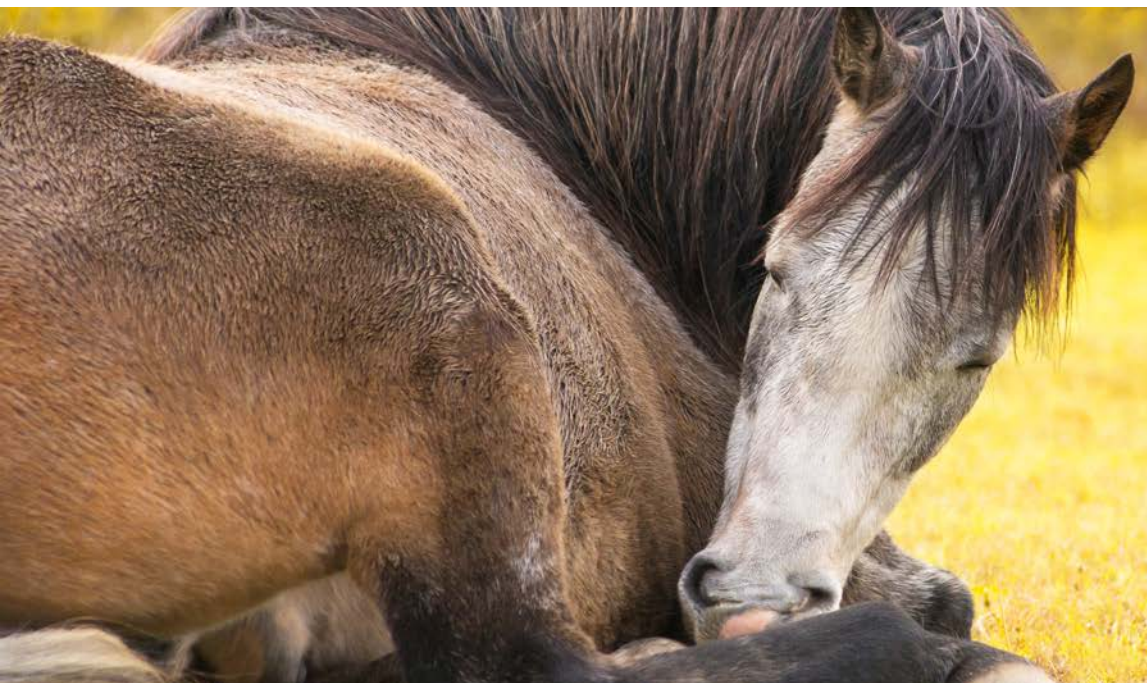
# The Senior Horse: Golden Years

## Continued

because of the water temperature being too cold. They may have a loss of enamel and it hurts their teeth. Be sure to regularly check the mouth for dryness and for gum color, which should be a pale salmon pink. Top dressing the feed with electrolytes can help keep your older horse hydrated. A vet can help make these feed recommendations.

Two common diseases that occur in older horses are Cushing's disease and equine metabolic syndrome. Cushing's also known as equine pituitary pars intermedia dysfunction (PPID) is a complex progressive disease of the pituitary gland. Horses with Cushing's disease are prone to chronic infections such as tooth and hoof abscesses. They typically have a long curly hair coat that doesn't shed out. You can speak with your vet about a TRH test to determine if your older horse has Cushing's and how you can manage it. Horses that experience equine metabolic syndrome (EMS) have increased adiposity or fat deposits, insulin resistance and a predisposition to laminitis. EMS is typically seen in middle aged horses, but can affect all ages from 5-20 years old. You can reduce the risk of laminitis by managing the horse's diet and regular exercise. With any PPID or EMS horse, regular check ups, blood work, as well as dental and hoof maintenance will keep detection and management of these diseases easier. (Adams, 2013)

To combat the signs of aging, maintain the senior horse's topline with regular exercise. Adding stretch exercises with treats will increase flexibility in the back and neck. Be concerned with the reduced circulating blood volume. Older horses are less efficient to build muscle, increase cardiovascular output, and dissipate the heat. Take multiple breaks when working with a senior horse. To evaluate how an older horse feels on any given day, it is best to lunge them first and observe their movement and gait. If they are moving stiffer, then it might be best to skip the day of work. Older horses need turn out as much as possible. Talk with your veterinarian about anti-inflammatory drugs, as they can aid in reducing the stresses of arthritis. Supplements like Glucosamine and Chondroitin have evidence to support their use in the older equine. Joint injections are another measure that you and your vet can take to ensure your senior horse is more comfortable. Eventually, you will have to stop riding your mount. Know the signs of declining quality of life. A horse that can't maintain good body condition or lie down and get up with ease is of concern. Talk to your veterinarian about any changes you see and have a plan ready for when it's time for euthanasia.



Adams, A. (2013). Understanding the Differences between EMS and PPID. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from <http://equine.ca.uky.edu/news-story/understanding-differences-between-ems-and-ppid>

Hess, Tanja, & Ross-Jones, Trinette. (2014). Omega-3 fatty acid supplementation in horses. *Revista Brasileira de Zootecnia*, 43(12), 677-683. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1516-35982014001200008>

# Mark Your Calendar

12/28

## 2021 Virtual Invitational Horse Quiz Bowl

12/28 - 1/3 | Virtual | Email [crbenn@uga.edu](mailto:crbenn@uga.edu)

Prepare for Horse Quiz Bowl or just put your horse knowledge to the test! Divisions: Pee Wee (3rd Grade and Under), Junior (4-8th Grade), Senior (9-12th Grade) and Adult. [Register by December 23](#). This free contest will be held December 28 through January 3, 2021.

1/12

## Basics of Managing Equine Health: First Aid

6:30-8:00 pm | Zoom | Email [rlstew2@uga.edu](mailto:rlstew2@uga.edu)

Is it an emergency? Do you need to call your vet? What should you do in the meantime? [Learn about equine first aid](#) and ask the DVM during the webinar, First Aid & When to Call the Vet with Dr. Caitlin Quinn.

1/15

## 4-H New Year Showdown Horse Show

9:00 am | Morgan County Ag Center | Email [crbenn@uga.edu](mailto:crbenn@uga.edu)

New year, new 4-H horse opportunities! This [show will take place January 15-17, 2021](#) rain or shine. Come practice before State Show or come see what 4-H horse project is all about! You do not have to be a current 4-H member to participate. All state divisions offered!

2/27

## Newton Equine Series 5: Equine Reproduction

10:00 am | Newton County | Email [abest22@uga.edu](mailto:abest22@uga.edu)

As breeding season approaches, get a head start on mare preparations and gather a better understanding of the [whole equine reproduction process](#). Depending on local conditions, this event may become virtual.

Thurs

## UGA Forages

7:00 pm | Facebook

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# THE LEADING REIN

## *Meet the Team*

### **Ashley Best**

UGA Extension County Agent - Newton County  
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Ashley received her BS in Agricultural Education from UGA and her MS in Agriculture Communications, Leadership and Education from University of Missouri. She enjoys teaching and presenting equine topics, barrel racing, and other equine endeavors. She has two horses, Dally (APH) and Dino (AQH), as well as a miniature donkey. She has been a lifetime equine enthusiast and loves all equine disciplines.



### **Brooklyne Wassel**

UGA Extension County Agent - Pike County  
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Brooklyne grew up surrounded by horses in Gainesville, GA. She received her BS and MS in Animal Science from Auburn University where she focused on non-structural carbohydrates and hay soaking. She enjoys educating the public on numerous agricultural topics, spending time with her family and taking care of Catalina (AQH) and Yankee (MH).



### **Caitlin Jackson**

UGA Extension County Agent - Monroe County  
[crbenn@uga.edu](mailto:crbenn@uga.edu)

From Paso Finos to Hunters and everything in-between Caitlin has done “a little bit of everything” when it comes to horses. Caitlin earned a BS in Agricultural Economics from Clemson University and Master’s in Agriculture from Colorado State University. Caitlin, her husband Brennan and their daughter Teagan Rose live on a small horse farm in Jones County with their eclectic small herd of horses.



# THE LEADING REIN

## *Meet the Team*

### **Brenda Jackson**

UGA Extension County Agent - Murray County  
[bljack@uga.edu](mailto:bljack@uga.edu)

Brenda Jackson is the County Extension Coordinator, Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent for Murray County Extension. Brenda is a graduate of Berry College with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science and Equine Science. Her Master's degree is also in Animal Science, from University of Georgia. Prior to coming to UGA, she was the assistant breeding manager on an Arabian farm.



**From The Leading Rein team: Thank you for reading!**

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