



Slobbers

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We had many calls this year from owners worried that their horses were salivating excessively. Horses typically produce about 10 gallons of saliva daily, but it's almost all swallowed. In addition to helping break down food particles and assisting in swallowing, saliva is an important source of bicarbonate that counteracts the acidity of the stomach. Since horses produce more saliva when actually eating, more acid is controlled (and ulcers prevented) with pasture horses that are constantly eating, than stalled horses that eat twice daily.

This past year many horse owners witnessed their horses producing far more than 10 gallons of saliva. In the spring and summer, particularly in wet and cool years, both red and white clover can be a source of slaframine. Slaframine, an alkaloid produced by the fungus *Rhizoctonia leguminicola*, stimulates excessive salivation, sometimes in astounding quantities. Affected horses have a normal attitude and appetite, but fail to swallow the excess saliva and owners will see it streaming from the horse's mouth. While dramatic and quite messy to be around, it is not dangerous and will resolve rather quickly if the horse is removed from access to clover.

Slaframine levels and thus horse symptoms will vary from season to season and year to year, as temperature and humidity ranges are critical for fungal growth. During most years, slaframine "poisoning" is quite prevalent in Missouri in mid to late June and early July, but it was common all summer and early fall this year, probably due to our continued rainfall. We may see this occasionally this winter also, as hay made from affected clover can also cause the "slobbers."