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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Please don't eat the buttercups!

HorseSense reminds horse owners to beware buttercup toxicosis. An uncommon but serious problem for grazing horses is caused by buttercups. The relationship between the "juice" of buttercups and skin ulcers has been recognized since ancient times. This toxicosis may be seen in all types of livestock, including horses, cattle, sheep and goats, and usually occurs during the spring and summer. The animal will have severe gastrointestinal irritation including salivation, diarrhea and colic. The lips, gums and tongue may be bright red and irritated. Depression, bloody urine and blindness have been reported. In severe cases, horses will convulse and die. Clinical signs associated with Ranunculus, the toxin in buttercups, are much more severe than those observed with sloppers.

Fortunately, horses don't like buttercups, so this type of poisoning is rare. If pasture quality is poor, however, horses may start to graze them. If your horses start eating buttercups, remove the animals from the pasture immediately and contact your veterinarian.

What you can do: If you were hoping to control your horse's or pony's weight problem by keeping the pasture poor - it's time to rethink the problem.

1. Making a "sacrifice paddock" (a fenced area kept bare) will give you a way to limit grass consumption. Buttercups love acid soil, so start putting down lime on the field and reseed if possible. This will give the horses an alternative to eating harmful weeds. Remember that dehydrated lime is caustic to horses, so don't let them graze until after a good rain has washed the lime off the grass.
2. Since a horse/pony without forage is a horse/pony with ulcers, provide a low-calorie forage such as threshed (no seed heads) wheat straw to keep the gut healthy.
3. Don't forget that chromium supplementation has been shown to dramatically reduce body fat when combined with a high nutrient, low calorie diet.

For further advice, call 540-253-9987 during normal business hours.