**Green Grass Colic and Founder**

The recent rain has had many of us dancing for joy – our 4-legged friends included! Unfortunately, for some, it has led to a slump after the initial excitement, and our horse population has seen a spike in colic cases and founder issues. ARRGGGH!

Fresh new “pasture” growth will contain more sugars which is attractive to animals. This increased consumption of sugars will change the fluid, electrolyte and bacterial balance in the intestine, particularly the hind gut of the horse. This can then precipitate episodes of diarrhoea or lead to hind gut bacterial overgrowth. This changed intestinal environment will often mean the development of gas which can cause significant discomfort. Sometimes it is just the change in gut motility associated with less fibrous food causing pain. Horses in pain will look at their belly, roll and paw at the ground.

These same feed conditions will mean that animals that are predisposed to founder events will show signs of sore feet. Weight gain and high sugar diets will cause susceptible horses to develop symptoms that may range from mild to quite severe. Affected horses will be reluctant to move around, many will lie down a lot to take the weight off their sore feet. When they do stand they may lean back on their feet, trying to escape the weight and pain. Founder usually impacts all 4 feet but appears worse in the front legs.

Horse owners may also see horses displaying single limb lameness. For the last 3 years most horses have had rock hard feet from the dry conditions but they are now standing on damp ground. This can allow the hoof capsule to relax, the connections to weaken, and micro-tracking of soil bacteria into the hoof creating a hoof abscess. These horses typically have a non-weight bearing lameness in one leg.

Awareness and prevention are our best management tools and essentially consist of:

* maintaining access to fibre sources such as hay,
* maintaining your routine feeding regime despite the appearance of available feed,
* restricting access to lush plant growth and
* use of preventatives such as Founderguard.

If the chicken has flown the coop and there are already signs of foot pain or colic episodes then stick to previous hand feeding routines, place horses in deep sand yards for foot pain and seek professional assistance.