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## Bee Pollen Product Increases Appetite, Study Shows

by: **Stephanie L. Church, Editor-in-Chief**  
 October 12 2006, Article # 7869

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Keeping weight on a horse that's in intense training can be difficult; his appetite can fall off just as soon as you think he's reaching his athletic peak. Researchers at Michigan State University (MSU) have reported in a pilot study that a bee pollen-based product shows promise in improving athletic horses' feed intake, and it could be applicable in this type of scenario.

Brian Nielsen, PhD, PAS, Dipl. ACAN, associate professor in Equine Exercise Physiology at MSU, says, "I was as big of a skeptic on bee pollen as the world has ever found, but these owners of the company (WINNERS Bee Pollen Co.) were willing to put their money where their mouth was," notes Nielsen, and he says this quality is rare among supplement product companies.

Nielsen and his colleagues investigated the efficacy of supplementing Dynamic Trio 50/50 on several different variables. Their results were published in the *Journal of Animal Physiology and Animal Nutrition*. "Our main goal was to see if it would improve exercise performance," he says. "People were also saying how it helped with nutrient absorption, so we wanted to take a look."

Ten Arabians underwent a standardized exercise test in a gate walker and were pair-matched by sex and fitness, and they were randomly assigned to either a bee pollen group (receiving 118 g of Dynamic Trio 50/50 daily) or a control group (receiving a placebo) for 42 days. The horses received identical amounts of grain and were given free choice hay. The researchers collected urine from six geldings on days 18 to 21 (it

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was too difficult to get a clean sample from the four mares) that they used to determine how well the horses digested the fiber and retained nutrients.

According to Nielsen, all of the horses became more fit than he and his co-authors had expected, so they weren't able to pick out any exercise differences between the control and bee pollen groups. They were unable to draw any conclusions about immunological effects other than there was a trend for lymphocyte (type of white blood cell that fights infection) counts to be lower in the bee pollen horses than the control horses on Day 42 of the study. This reflects and refutes what has been found in other horse and human studies. "The occurrence of conflicting results between this study and other studies is a common finding when comparing studies with exercise and immune function," the researchers say in the paper. "It's difficult to conclude that such modest effects on lymphocyte numbers altered the horses' overall health or well-being."

What really surprised Nielsen was the bee pollen groups' hay intake. "What we were seeing was that the fiber digestibility on the treatment horses decreased a little bit, but their total amount of fiber digestion went up," he says. "But all of the treatment horses ate more hay (free choice) than any of the control horses on any of the days (an average of 9.4 kg/day consumed as compared to 6.3 kg/day in the control group). That explains it--they were just eating so much more." Horses that consume more dry matter intake have faster rates of passage through digestive tracts and therefore lower fiber digestibilities.

But why were the horses eating more? Nielsen suggests two thoughts: "It is stated or believed that bee pollen has high amounts of vitamins, particularly B-vitamins such as thiamin," he says. "Normally horses synthesize all the B-vitamins that they need. In theory, if you have a heavily stressed horse, he might not be able at times to synthesize enough B-vitamins and therefore might need thiamin, which is one of the reasons why horses conceivably go off feed. One of the difficulties we often have with hard working horses is keeping their appetite up." Thiamin supplementation has been shown to increase feed intake in chickens, so thiamin could be the reason for the horses' hunger, Nielsen says.

"After (the current) paper was accepted for publication," he continues, "I read some interesting information about bees, synthetic pollen, and phagostimulants (substances that encourage feeding), how bees prefer natural bee pollen to synthetic, and how the natural bee pollen increased diet consumption in the bees. This could be what's going on with the horses."

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Additionally, the bee pollen-supplemented horses showed more retention of nitrogen and phosphorus, which could be encouraging, but this could have been simply because they were taking in more nutrients than the control horses, says Nielsen.

The study is considered a pilot study because of its group size. "A reviewer would love for you to repeat this," Nielsen explains. "One reviewer even made the suggestion to feed it to six horses for a week and see if it makes a difference in feed intake. But I don't think you're going to see these differences in just your regular old school horses...I think they have to be working pretty hard. In order to repeat this study, it would be costly, so my work with bee pollen is probably done. But I'd love to see more studies on it get completed.

"The people that have their horses in heavy duty training really seem to like using bee pollen in their horses," Nielsen continues. "I talk to a lot of trainers who swear by it. I'm not going to swear by it, but I'll at least say that the results of the controlled study showed some big differences there between the two groups."

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