

So it's August in our province and most horse enthusiasts are out trail riding, competing or attending clinics. Other people are vacationing, some are gearing up for back to school, and farmers are dealing with their crops. Many farmers this year are dealing with a lack of crops and for horse people this should set off an alarm bell. Although thinking about what may happen in February 2010, aside from the Olympics, is probably hard to do in the few summer months this province gets, we need to do so.

Our seasonal reality in Canada is that it will get cold and snow and our horses will need to be provided with a winter feed source. The problem this year is that many areas have experienced reduced hay crops and other areas have had almost nothing growing at all. This creates a high demand for something that may not be readily available. If we don't prepare now, by November it could be too late.

There is hope that farmers will get a second cut of hay in some parts of the province, as long as the weather behaves, but banking on a big hay influx in September is not a realistic approach. As horse owners, we have a responsibility to care for our animals and poor planning for the winter ahead can have devastating effects. For example, last winter some horse owners in the south who normally rely on pasture for part or all of the season had to supply sufficient feed due to the heavy, hard snow pack. Most owners were prepared with a supply of hay on hand, but at least one large herd of horses suffered and came under the authority of the SPCA as a result.

