

## TIRED OF THROWING AWAY \$\$\$\$

Many home owners are discovering the benefits and advantages of heating their homes with wood pellets as an alternative energy source. Wood pellet stoves only require to be filled once a day, and there is no messy cords of wood to be brought into the house. In addition, the rising costs of fuel has rendered this environmentally friendly way of heating a very attractive way to reduce hydro and oil expenses. But can these benefits extend to the barnyard? "Absolutely," said Morag O'Hanlon, who operates Hawkridge Farms, near Elgin, ON. "We have found that using pellets greatly reduces the workload for the staff, and that in itself is a significant benefit, as the labor costs is a huge component of operating a riding facility," O'Hanlon explained.



## IN THE MANURE PILE?

### WHAT ARE WOOD PELLETS?



Wood pellets are the byproduct that is produced from recycled wood at sawmills and they usually come from sawdust or wood shavings. No tree is ever cut down to produce wood pellets—they are manufactured using only forest industry waste wood. Resins and binders (lignin) occurring naturally in the sawdust hold wood pellets together, so they usually contain no artificial additives, making them an ideal choice for organic farming.

"We are seeing a strong demand for the use of wood pellets as horse bedding in the last few years," commented Marie Ferguson who along with her husband Earl operates Ferguson's Energy Systems, in Frankville, ON. "The availability of shavings has been affected by the many sawmill closures, as well as by the competition for the raw material from industries such as the wood pellet heating industry," she said.

Ironically, this shortage of shavings is exactly what brought O'Hanlon to try wood pellets in her stalls at Hawkridge, and she has never looked back since. "My stalls are cleaned in less than half the time," she said. O'Hanlon also finds that buying wood pellets from vendors who are knowledgeable about horse health is very important. "I've tried 8 different kinds of pellets from different vendors, but I'm very happy that I've switched to Ferguson's. They're great people and they really know their product," she said.

### MORE ABSORBENCY

The majority of wood pellets manufactured in Canada are of premium quality. The process alters the composition of the fiber by generating enough pressure and then heat so that basically, through the process of drying, the wood fiber has the ability to take on moisture internally. "Shavings and straw only absorb on the surface, but wood pellets will absorb more than 2 and a half times its weight," explained John Swaan, executive director of the Wood Pellet Association of Canada, located in Prince George, BC. Swaan also notes that in addition to its use as bedding for horses and other livestock,

chicken farmers have observed a lower rate of chick mortality by switching to wood pellets. Pellets offer a healthier environment for animals by reducing exposure to ammonia and moisture, hence adding to their overall comfort. Much like cat litter, wood pellets will remain clumped or contained for easy removal, and the superior absorbency wicks away moisture from the manure.

### COST CONSIDERATION

Fine bedding allows for easier manure removal, so good bedding is not removed with the manure. "We are removing less than half the waste that we used to," confirmed O'Hanlon. Ferguson recommends adding a new bag to the stall only once a week, and stripping the stall every couple of months instead of every week, which significantly reduces the cost of bedding and labor. "The moisture content of the waste material is ideal for composting, and results in an excellent compost product," Ferguson added.

*HorseLife thanks Morag O'Hanlon and Hawkridge Farm manager Janice Joag for their help in producing this article.*

## Step By Step WOOD PELLET STALL



Remove all bedding from your stall. For a 12 x 12 stall, use as few as two to five bags and as many as 10 bags.



Fill the bags with water, enough to cover the pellets.



Let stand for 20 to 30 minutes.



Cut the bags open and let the bedding onto the floor.



The bedding will expand to approximately three to four times its original depth



Spread evenly over stall floor.



The optimum moisture content is reached when the bedding feels slightly damp to the touch.



Nothing but the best for Selena O'Hanlon's event horse Columbo!

*photography by Vanessa Maxwell*

## Ferguson's Energy Systems



## Superior Wood Pellets and Delivery Service

### 100% Softwood Premium Quality Horse Bedding

Earl & Marie Ferguson  
RR#1, 18 Leacock Rd  
Frankville, ON, K0H 1H0

**613-275-2734**

[www.fergusonsenergysystems.com](http://www.fergusonsenergysystems.com)