

Sunday, April 18, 2010

## New Beginnings



The last of the horses we had for sale left yesterday for their new home. It was a day of mixed emotion; one of sadness of passing of a dream, but more importantly, one of excitement for the beginning of a new dream.

It has been nearly 10 years since we have had only three horses in the pasture... it looks empty!! Lucan (looking ever so lovely to the left) is coming home from Saddle Ridge this week. He has been there for 10 weeks and hopefully knows a lot more than us. Then there will be our four horses at home. Now really begins the learning.

Bob and I are taking riding lessons and will be for most of the year. We have no expectations of being competitive riders. I really like Sally Swift's Centered Riding approach. We just want to be able to safely hack with our horses here at the farm and over other trails with friends.

Next step is getting Lucan and Mirage back into harness so we can also be driving here and away.

Despite being a horse owner and breeder for over 10 years, I am not under the illusion that I know it all or even a small fraction of what there is to know. I am constantly learning something new about horse nutrition, behavior, health, hoof care, training... and so the list goes on.

The luxury of having only four horses is that I can start looking at the individual nutritional needs. I have been doing this with the assistance of a wonderful web site called FeedXL from Australia. The most obvious lesson I have learned is unless you get your hay analyzed and adjust the horse's supplement requirement based on that analysis you are just wasting your money on supplements. So few of them even come close to meeting the horse's requirements; they overshoot in some nutrients and are so low on others you would need to feed hundreds of pounds to meet daily requirements. The net result is we were overfeeding and under nourishing the horses. Hay samples are leaving this week and will be done every year from now on.

The other lesson that I have learned is the markup on these supplements is astronomical. By custom mixing our own supplement we will be able to save hundreds of dollars a year and have better results. With some supplements we literally were pouring dollars into the manure pile while they excrete unneeded vitamins etc. Obviously you need to work hard with an animal nutritionist.

With only four horses I can really focus on more timely hoof care. We have been trimming our own horses for four years now and with 14-16 horses it was tough work. It was everything I could do to keep them on a 6 week trim schedule let alone a preferable 4 week schedule. Now I can address issues and imbalances as I see them... and with trimming monthly, I doubt I will ever

use my nippers again.

Finally, I will go through my horse stuff and be able to sell items I will never need again... and maybe use the money to get a new saddle.

TTFN  
Laurie