

THE LEADING REIN

A UGA Extension Agents' Newsletter for Horse Owners and Professionals



IT TAKES A VILLAGE

By Ashley Best

We are all in this together. Mud, cold and the lack of sunshine has us all a bit sad, but good news is Spring is coming. In this issue of The Leading Rein, we will explore how to prepare for spring, while handling those winter blues that are still lingering. Needles are something that most horse owners will come in contact with. Develop some comfort utilizing needles with this needle knowledge article. It takes a community to make the horse industry work, so find out how the Athens Area Horse Community and our newest Extension specialist are bringing horse people together of all ages.



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NEEDLE KNOWLEDGE



By Brenda Jackson

Whenever working around horses, we all know it is best to avoid loud noises and fast movements that might startle them – that’s common sense. This is especially important when giving injections because you are about to poke them with a sharp object and you want to avoid any negative associations when managing the health care of your horse. Always have a lead rope and halter on hand with someone holding the horse for you when giving any injection. Do not wrap the halter rope around your hand or arm to avoid being dragged if the horse runs.

There are three different routes of injections you might need to give, either for best health management practices for equine health, as a treatment or in emergency situations. They are intravenous (IV), intramuscular (IM), and subcutaneous (Sub-q). In more common terms: in the vein, in the muscle or under the skin.

It is rare for most horse owners to give IV injections; these are most likely done by the veterinarian. If you are required to give an IV injection or draw blood, your veterinarian will instruct you on the best procedure to do so.

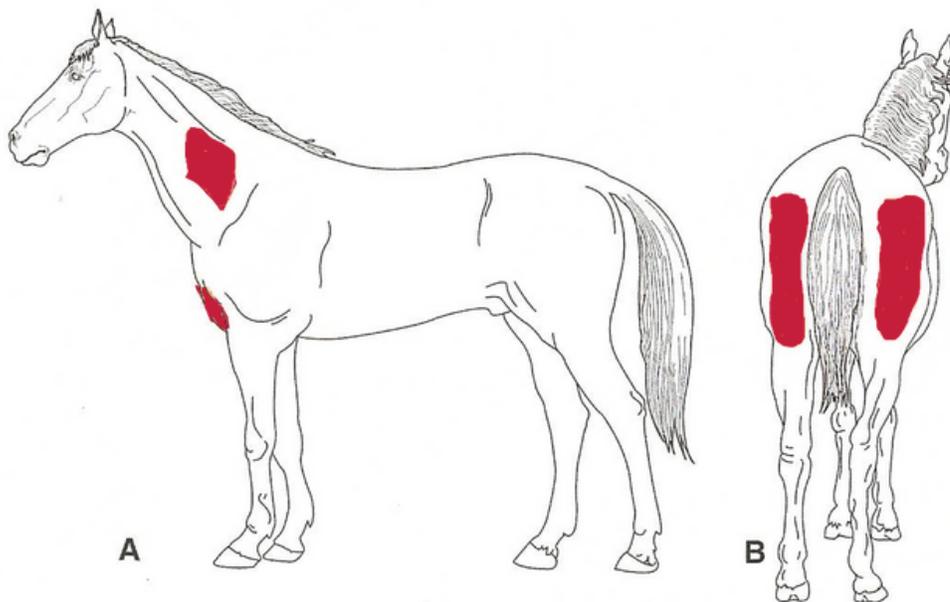


Figure 2-1 Sites for intramuscular drug delivery. **A**, Lateral view. **B**, Posterior view.

There are three locations on the horse where IM injections would be appropriate, depending on volume of injection. The cervical muscle, which is a triangular area formed by the cervical vertebra, the front edge of the scapula and the neck ligament (IMAGE A), is for volumes of less than 15 ml for a single location. Another is the pectoral muscle, the muscle between the front legs (IMAGE A), which can be used for volumes greater than 20 ml for a single location. Lastly is the rump area on either side of the tail, from below the tuber ischia (lower protuberance of the pelvis) to where the muscle joins the tendons (IMAGE B), which can also be used for volumes greater than 20 ml. Ideally, we don’t want to give more than 15 ml in any single IM injection spot as large volumes can increase pain and swelling at the injection site.

NEEDLE KNOWLEDGE

Continued

Always follow the label directions for the recommended location for that specific vaccine or medication as well as the required size needle and syringe. Never change what is recommended on the label unless specifically instructed to do so by your veterinarian. For both IM and Sub-q injections, you should clean the injection site with an alcohol pad until dirt is removed before inserting the needle.



Needle Know-How

Needles are measured in gauges. The larger the gauge, the thinner the needle.



For IM injections, you can either pinch the skin next to where you insert the needle or tap firmly with your finger before inserting. This helps prepare the horse that something is coming so they don't jump away from you. You should insert the needle through the skin up to the hub and aspirate (pull back syringe plunger) to ensure you didn't inadvertently puncture a vein in the process. If you see blood, redirect the needle and aspirate again. Once you aspirate cleanly, you can inject the medication or vaccine and remove the needle. If you have to give a volume higher than that one location can hold, rotate to another until you've given the total volume recommended so you don't injure the muscle.

For Sub-q injections, shorter needles are typically used and the label recommendations will tell you. Insert the needle at a slight angle $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch and aspirate to ensure you haven't punctured a vein. If you get blood into your syringe, redirect the needle and aspirate again. Once you aspirate cleanly, you can inject the vaccine or medication. While doing so, place a finger over the injection site, you should feel a slight "bubble" form. Remove the needle once the injection is completed. This "bubble" will decrease as the liquid is slowly absorbed by the body. There are some potential side effects to watch for when giving any sort of injection – abscess, muscle soreness and swelling at the injection site. Severe cases will require you contact your local veterinarian for recommended treatments.

SPRING IS COMING

By Brooklyne Wassel

While many horse owners are ready to cut back on their hay and feed bills and enjoy the bounty that spring has to offer, for some it means grazing muzzles and metabolic issues are on the horizon. What is the big deal with spring grass? Who has to be careful and why? Let's look at the components of the spring time conundrum: equine dietary changes and forage growth cycle.

EQUINE DIETARY CHANGES & FORAGE GROWTH CYCLE

The equine digestive tract is created from start to finish for small, frequent meals, made of primarily forage, throughout the course of the horse's day. As horse owners, we have adapted the horse to tolerate and even perform well under different conditions, but that does not change the horse's biology and digestive function. From a relatively small stomach to a hind-gut fermentation vat called the cecum, horses rely heavily on consistent forage for overall health. When they undergo sudden changes in the diet, bad things can happen to an otherwise healthy horse.

Most owners know how to safely transition from one feed type to another or one hay to a new option, but not every manager thinks about the changes happening in the pasture. Though a "natural change," it still can cause digestive upset in the horse to rapidly move from hay and concentrate to spring pastures. Simply stated, the microbial population in the horse's cecum cannot adapt to the change in time to utilize the forage properly if not given enough prep time.

Why is the spring pasture so different? Much like moving to winter hay feeding schedules over the course of a few weeks, horses need to be transitioned back to fresh forage in much the same way. There are a few differences to note though, since most spring pastures have the ability to be an overall higher quality than a lot of winter hays. When our warm-season grasses begin spring green-up, they are proportionally higher in non-structural carbohydrates than later in their growth cycle. While we see tender, green grasses, horses taste fresh, juicy sugars without all those pesky structural carbohydrates that later help grasses extend into the sky as they mature. This can lead to problems.

SPRING IS COMING

Continued

Horses tend to overeat these delicious delicacies since it's like being released to an all you can eat candy buffet after eating health-conscious meals all winter. On top of the potential of eating too much of a good thing, this high proportion of sugars can be a shock to the horse's system, specifically the microbial population in the cecum. When the cecum microbiome is disrupted, bad things can happen such as: colic, laminitis, founder, etc. To help prevent a sugar overload, pasture management strategies should be employed.

MANAGING THE SPRING TRANSITION

When choosing the proper management strategy for spring grazing, consider both the horses on the system and the pasture itself. Most pastures benefit from reduced stress, limited grazing and traffic, during green-up. This helps a healthy stand of grass to become established for the duration of the growing season. Knowing that it's also good for the pasture, consider the types of horses in your herd. If you have otherwise healthy horses, some general feed transition strategies should serve as a sound basis for the spring transition management. If some horses or ponies have metabolic conditions or are prone to laminitis, spring might call for some larger safety measures.

Once green-up is well underway and the grasses have been established, start by grazing for short periods on the new forage, approximately 30 minutes per day for the first couple of days. Increase grazing time by 30 minutes each day until you reach a 3–4-hour daily turnout time. Stick with this maximum for a week or two before reaching the final desired total turnout time. Some additional strategies to ensure horses do not gorge on their new sugary feast is to make sure they have had a meal or access to hay prior to turnout so they are not as hungry and limiting the size of the pasture during turnout.

When body condition scores, cresty neck scores, and histories of laminitis are high, slowly transitioning through timing may not be enough to ensure the horse's health during spring grazing. Additional measures such as grazing muzzles may be needed. If using a grazing muzzle to slow down spring pasture consumption, be sure to ensure the safety of the fit and check on these horses routinely. Muzzles should be secure enough to limit forage but not rubbing or at risk for getting caught up on something in the pasture. Be sure to not leave these on 24/7 as it will need cleaning and inspecting. Your horse's mental health will also thank you for these grazing muzzle breaks. If you have concerns about metabolic conditions that might be negatively affected by spring pastures, be sure to speak with a veterinarian prior to spring turnout.

Spring can be a great time to own horses from temperature for riding to picturesque views in the pastures. Be sure you are prepared for all that spring has to offer before it is pawing at the pasture gate. Have a plan in place to make spring a pleasant and safe grazing transition.

WINTER TIME BLUES

By Pam Sapp, Jefferson County ANR Agent, Guest Writer

Does the winter time give you the blues? With all the cold we have had lately, it sure can dampen a rider's spirits. And speaking of dampening, all this rain makes me wonder if I need floaties for my horses? Even in the South, the cold and wet weather can bring on concerns for our horses.

Colic

One of the most serious concerns is that of gut impaction. Many times when the temperatures drop, horses tend to drink less water because the water is so cold. At the same time, they are consuming lots of dry matter (hay) to provide the extra warmth they need from the digestion process. This "perfect storm" of events can quickly lead to colic due to gut impaction from a dehydrated system. Dealing with impaction type colic can be very difficult to say the least. As fall approaches and green grass wanes, transition your horses to dry hay before your grass is gone. The sudden change from the high-water-content green forage to a dry hay, can put the brakes on your horse's digestive system. Make sure your horses have a free choice mineral available at all times. This is especially important for horses out on pasture where daily water intake may be challenging to monitor. Not only do the minerals balance what may be lacking in the diet, but it encourages your horse to drink. When water troughs freeze over, be sure to break and remove the ice several times per day to allow horses the ample opportunity to drink freely. Provide slightly warm water in those icy conditions if you are able. All of these steps can help reduce the risk of impaction.



Healthy Hoof

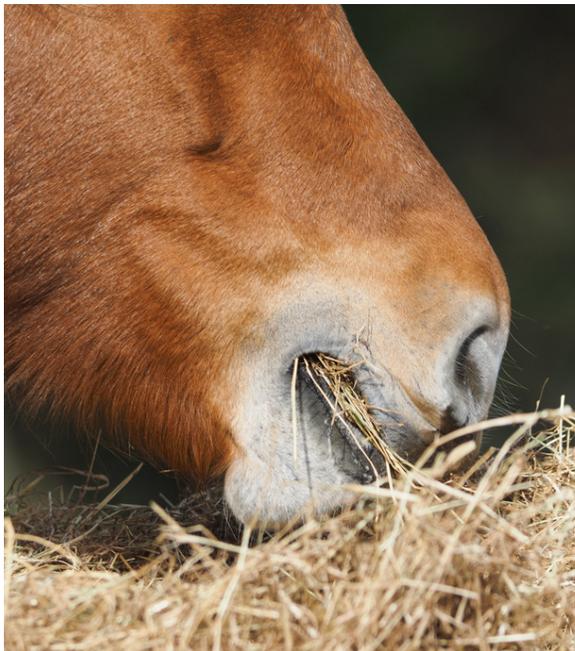
Keeping a healthy hoof can be a challenge in our typical rainy Georgia winters. Continual soggy conditions are a big invitation to fungal and bacterial pathogens that cause common diseases like thrush and white line disease especially when there is high concentration of fecal matter. Having pastures subdivided to allow for rotating your horses around is healthier for your pasture and your horses. Create a good routine of picking and cleaning hooves to remove debris also offers you the opportunity to find any problems early. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.



WINTER TIME BLUES *Continued*

Blanketing

So, what about blanketing? Can that really pose problems? The answer is: it depends. Georgia winters rarely get into low enough temperatures to merit blanketing pastured horses. I know, I got some raised eyebrows there. We all get that warm, fuzzy feeling to look out and see our horses all snug in their blankets on a cold winter's day. The fact is that horses on a good nutritional plane begin laying down a layer of insulative fat in the fall to prepare their bodies for winter. If hay is offered free choice, all that hind gut fermentation is like a built-in heater for your horse as they digest the nutrients. That long hair that they grow creates an insulative air space to keep them warm in addition to the added warmth of the extra hair. When we blanket horses, it actually compresses that air space and the hair loses some of its insulative properties. A very light blanket on a really cold night will actually cause your horse to be colder because you lose that insulative space of the hair coat. On the other hand, a heavy blanket that may make a horse sweat will also create problems. Turnout blankets also need to be waterproof and changed out after a rain to allow proper drying. A wet blanket on a cold horse can certainly make for a sick horse! Remember to remove the blanket frequently to brush your horse and look for any problems such as rubbing, fungus, etc. Wash blankets frequently to keep a healthy coat and skin. Keeping a proper fit and checking straps to make sure they are not too loose nor too tight is an important safety precaution to check daily. Some situations that merit blanketing are older horses that are hard to keep weight on, pastured horses without any type of shelter or wind break, or an older horse or injured horse that has difficulty moving around. Mobility is so important in keeping a horse warm. All that running and bucking is your horse's way of creating heat to keep warm.



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Lastly, maintaining good nutrition is an important factor to keep all these issues at bay. Whether it is concerning gut health, healthy hooves or keeping your horse warm through the winter, nutrition plays a vital role. Should you have any questions concerning your horse's proper nutrition, contact your local county Extension agent. They have resources to share with you and access to UGA Extension nutrition specialist that can help you determine a healthy plan for your horse's nutritional needs. And remember, don't let the winter time blues spoil your horse-riding fun!

The Athens Area Horse Community

By Ashley Best

The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man. Horses are what bind us together with our friends and family, and even new friends that become family. The local horse community is facing growing pressure for the green space our horses require to survive. Every day we lose green space to development – not just the land where our horses live, but also farms where grain and hay is grown, and the open spaces where we ride.

This is where AAHC's potential comes in – AAHC exists to help local horse people solve the problems we collectively face and to offer opportunities. I have the pleasure of working with and assisting The Athens Area Horse Community on their mission. The mission says AAHC is dedicated to the growth of the local community so that horses are here for future generations. The local horse community faces such a complex variety of problems that AAHC has multiple initiatives for land conservation, education and providing resources for the horse community. AAHC is working to unite the horse community – to partner with county and state level leadership, fighting for sustainable development of green space, offering education for both horse lovers and general public.



Land conservation is at the top of the goal list for Athens Area Horse Community. They are currently working on equine improvements to the Heritage Park in Oconee County. Many members of the local horse community are either not aware that the Heritage Park covered arena exists, that the park has equestrian facilities, or are aware of the park but know that the arena is not horse-friendly. This park has a covered arena that requires improvement in the footing, fencing and potentially new riding arenas. Interested in helping with the Heritage Park Initiative? The easiest thing you can do is talk to your friends and neighbors. Do you know someone who would be interested in showing at Heritage? Or maybe a show organizer that is looking for a facility to host events?

AAHC has a lot of land conservation initiatives in the works:

1. Heritage Park
2. Survey of Equine Economic Impact. This is important data that we need to understand the issues facing our community as well as presenting the anonymized data to our leaders to show the strength, diversity, and significance of horses in our area.
3. Connected trails throughout the Athens area.
4. Website "wing" – to provide information for landowners and community members. Inspired by ELCR.org.
 - Organize information by county to help educate the community and get involved in issues every horse owner faces.
 - Programs that farm owners and land owners can use to ensure that their farms stay green space for generations.

Athens Area Horse Community

Continued

Educational Opportunities

The Youth Educational Program is a dream at AAHC of a 501c3 organization. The initial project will likely be an afterschool program where they partner with 4-H or the Boys and Girls Club to introduce and teach children about horses who may not have been introduced to horses in their everyday lives. A later program may connect program graduates with internships and apprenticeships to help the local equestrian community solve the problem of not having enough workers and professionals. If you are interested in the Youth Educational Program, please send an email so you can be added to the list of contacts who want to be involved in this project as volunteers or supporters. The educational opportunities offered by AAHC aren't limited to youth. There are many events that are targeted toward riders of all ages. These events and articles are designed to educate horse lovers of all skill levels.

Lastly, the **website resources** that AAHC offers is applicable to equestrians of all kinds. The facility map offers an interactive way to find riding arenas, covered pens, boarding barns, trails and other equine interests. They also have a merchant directory for things like local farriers, saddle fitters, trainers and more. The merchant directory is a great place to look for professional services with equine experience, tack and feed stores, as well as farm and barn related merchants. Local organizations rely on volunteers to keep their programs running. Luckily for them, volunteering has a ton of benefits. It can help individuals feel connected to the community and make friends. Volunteering is good for your physical and mental health – the inside and outside of your body. There are a lot of opportunities to volunteer in the local horse community. Those can be found on the website [athensareahorsecommunity.com](https://www.athensareahorsecommunity.com). My favorite part of the website is the events calendar. If you are looking for a way to meet new people and have fun with your horse then the events calendar is the place to start. There are events like Equestrian's Night Out, group trail rides, clinics and even volunteer clean up days. You can find all the resources and more updates on project at the website:

<https://www.athensareahorsecommunity.com/>

NEED HELP? ATHENSAREAHORSECOMMUNITY.com
has a TON of resources for local horse owners!

Calendar of Events

- Single location for all horse events within an hour drive of Athens
- No charge to add an event
- Members can add/manage their own events

Merchant Directory

- 130+ local horse businesses
- Categories like: Boarding Facilities, Vets, Farriers, Clubs, Farm and Barn, and many more.
- Members can add/manage their own listings

Interactive Map

- Boarding facilities
- Places to ride
- Feed Stores, Vets, and other local businesses

Also on our Website

- Updates about AAHC Community Initiatives
- Articles and Topicals
- Buying and Selling Horse Farms
- Members Only Content
- Classifieds
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Help with Problems the Community Faces

Allison Creek Farm Services

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EXTENSION SPECIALIST SPOTLIGHT

By Ashley Best

Kate Whiting

Extension Specialist Animal Science Programs- Equine & Poultry

Brief Bio:

I hold a Bachelor of Science and Masters of Agriculture in Agricultural Business and Economics from Auburn University and have been with UGA Extension since 2006. I was previously the Peach County Extension Coordinator and 4-H Agent before transitioning to the role of Extension Specialist, 4-H Animal Science Programs- Equine and Poultry. I've been involved in the equine industry my entire life. As a youth, I competed in all-around events in 4-H and at Quarter Horse Shows. In college, I rode on the Auburn Equestrian team showing horsemanship and reining and worked for Meneely Show Horses. I have been a member of and shown in the American Stock Horse Association, American Ranch Horse Association and AQHA. My background has allowed me to work shows on a national level where I ring steward, scribe, and announce.

Position:

As the Extension Specialist, 4-H Animal Science Programs- Equine and Poultry, I coordinate all the Georgia 4-H equine and poultry programs. This includes coordinating state contests like Horse Quiz Bowl, Horse Judging, Hippology, State Horse Show, and Poultry Judging. In addition to coordinating events, I serve to support, train, and educate UGA Extension faculty and staff, create curriculum and support youth projects.

Goal: To build a 4-H equine program that supports our county Extension faculty and staff as well as our youth in the state.



Kate has nearly two decades of working with youth and animal science programs.



Tack Corner- Bit Basics

From Bulletin 1379: Bits 101

BIT SELECTION is a critical area of consideration for riders of all disciplines and levels. Bit selection is often regulated by various breed and/or horse show associations. For many horse enthusiasts, lack of knowledge about bit types and functions, as well as common misconceptions held in the horse industry, can make choosing an appropriate bit a difficult process. Utilize these tips to understand and select the correct bit for you and your horse.

1. **Type-** The first consideration is to determine the appropriate or desired type of bit (snaffle or leverage). The two basic types of bits are snaffle bits and leverage (curb) bits. These differ in the areas on the horse where each applies pressure. In addition to these two types of bits, there are hackamores, which generally do not have a mouthpiece. Hackamores may either be true hackamores (bosal or sidepulls), which are direct pull devices, or mechanical hackamores, which employ leverage.
2. **Size-** Bit width is the distance between the two cheek pieces. Standard bits are 5 inches wide and are the most common. Pony bits are generally 4 1/2 inches wide, and bits that are designed for Arabians and other light-boned, refined horses are 4 3/4 inches wide.
3. **Material-** They are often composed of some type of metal, although bits made of other materials like leather and rubber can also be found. Stainless steel is commonly used to manufacture bits today because it doesn't rust. However, a rust covered bit does not necessarily indicate decreased quality. Bit makers often use sweet iron when designing quality bits because it is very palatable to horses and thus is often a popular choice among experienced horsemen. Copper is often included in bit mouthpiece because it causes the horse to salivate to increase contact.
4. **Mouthpiece-** The more broken (jointed) the mouthpiece is, the more it will conform to the horse's mouth. A mouthpiece that is broken in several places will conform around the tongue more than a mouthpiece that is solid or only broken in one place. A mouthpiece that is solid will place more pressure across and over the tongue while one that is broken in the middle will take some pressure off the center of the tongue when the reins are pulled, thereby placing pressure more on the bars of the mouth and the sides of the lips.

When using a snaffle bit, the main factors that affect severity are diameter and mouthpiece texture. A larger diameter mouthpiece results in the pressure applied to the tongue and bars being diffused over a larger surface area. For curb bits, the length of the shank contributes to severity. Although there are many different factors to consider when selecting a bit, it is important to understand that there are always exceptions and modifiers to most rules.

For more information view the full publication, [Bits 101](#).

HORSE CLUB ACTIVITY

BITS AND PIECES

Try to name the type of bit and describe their action after reading Bit Basics.



Mark Your Calendar

2/28

Elevated Equine: Dental Do's and Don'ts

7:00 pm | [Virtual](#) | [Register Here](#)

This Elevated Equine program is designed to give you the dos and don'ts about equine dentistry so your horse can have a long useful life. Learn more about the equine mouth from DVM and certified equine dentist, Dr. Diane Febles of Veterinary Equine Dentistry.

3/1

State 4-H Horse Show: Intent to Show Deadline

8:00 am - 5:00 pm | [Statewide](#) | [Contact your local extension office](#)

4-H members are encouraged to participate in the State 4-H Horse show. To be eligible, an intent to show form must be completed the first week of March. To learn more about state horse show opportunities and deadlines, contact your local 4-H office.

3/25

Showmanship and Horse Judging Clinic

9:00 am - 2:30 pm | [Newton County Agriculture Center](#) | [Register Here](#)

This clinic aims to help both novice and experienced youth with aspects of showmanship to prepare for state show and horse judging to prepare for state contest. You may attend both sessions or simply pick one. Contact abest22@uga.edu for more information.

3/27

Elevated Equine: Conformation

7:00 pm | [Virtual](#) | [Register Here](#)

Selecting a horse is not solely based on training and personality, conformation plays a large role in the longevity and usability of the animal. Learn about selecting horses based on conformation and how that effects overall usage.

4/24

Elevated Equine: Healthy Joints

7:00 pm | [Virtual](#) | [Register Here](#)

We ask a lot from our performance horses. Learn how to protect and prevent joint issues and the science behind joint supplements. We will also touch a bit on injections and other joint maintenance options.

5/31

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6/3

State 4-H Horse Show

8:00 am- 8:00 pm | [Perry, GA](#)

The state 4-H Horse Show returns this year a little early! Be sure to put the 2023 dates on your calendar.



Follow us on Social Media

[Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)



Click to follow each event registration underlined in red



THE LEADING REIN

Meet the Team

Ashley Best

UGA Extension County Agent - Newton County
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Ashley received her BS in Agricultural Education from UGA and her MS in Agriculture Communications, Leadership and Education from University of Missouri. She enjoys teaching and presenting equine topics, barrel racing, and other equine endeavors. She has two horses, Dally (APH) and Dino (AQH), as well as a miniature donkey. She has been a lifetime equine enthusiast and loves all equine disciplines.



Brooklyne Wassel

UGA Extension County Agent - Pike County
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Brooklyne grew up surrounded by horses in Gainesville, GA. She received her BS and MS in Animal Science from Auburn University where she focused on non-structural carbohydrates and hay soaking. She enjoys educating the public on numerous agricultural topics, spending time with her family and taking care of Catalina (AQH) and Yankee (MH).



Brenda Jackson

UGA Extension County Agent - Murray County
bljack@uga.edu

Brenda Jackson is the County Extension Coordinator, Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent for Murray County Extension. Brenda is a graduate of Berry College with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science and Equine Science. Her Master's degree is also in Animal Science, from University of Georgia. Prior to coming to UGA, she was the assistant breeding manager on an Arabian farm.



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