
Exercise during yearling preparation: a cohort study.
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In order to obtain detailed information on the activities of individual yearlings during a sales preparation, a group of around 600 yearlings were followed through their sales preparations for the 2009 Karaka yearling sales. Eighteen farms recorded the activities of approximately 320 yearlings each day, in terms of the time spent exercising, the type of exercise and how long they spent in the paddock. The farms also noted any health problems and reasons why yearlings were not being exercised. Not all the yearlings were exercised: exercise data were recorded for 283 horses during the sales preparation. Forty-five percent of the yearlings studied were catalogued for the Premier sale, followed by the Select (40%) and Festival sales (13%).

Three types of exercise were performed during the preparations: hand walking, walking on a mechanical walker, and lunging exercise. On average, colts did more exercise than fillies (475 vs 275 minutes median total exercise), and more exercise was done in October and December, compared with the other months of the preparation. On some farms, the amount of exercise given to each yearling varied from 0-25 minutes. Changes to an exercise programme, resulting in more or less exercise, were due to yearlings being ill disciplined, bored or overweight.

The most common health problems recorded were lameness and accidental injury (Figure 1). These conditions often resulted in changes to the exercise programme by either reducing the amount of daily exercise or stopping exercise altogether. The most common reasons (35%) for lameness were “swollen joints” or “swollen tendons”. Overall, the results showed that exercise varied for individual horses, across and between stud farms. The results of this study will be combined with the training information of these yearlings as 2-year-olds, to see if their exercise programmes during sales preparation are related to how well they train and race in the future.

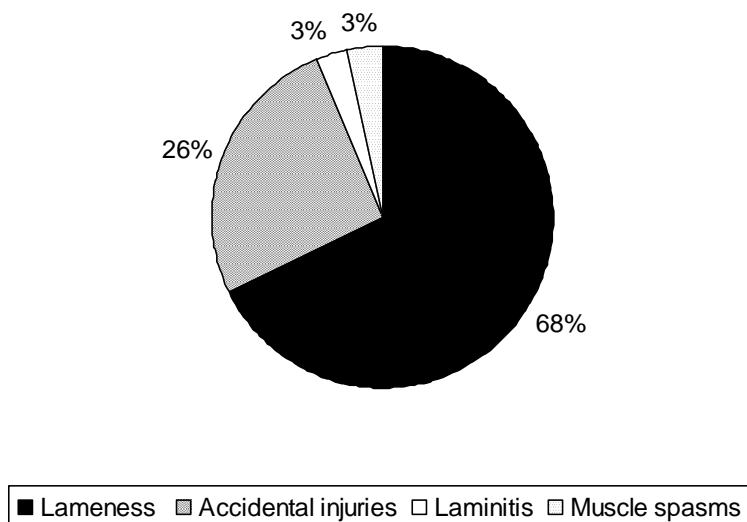


Figure 1: Yearling health problems occurring during a sales preparation