

the quarterly journal of wholistic equine care

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NASC: Restoring Confidence in Purchasing Animal Supplements

by Jessica Lynn
with Bill Bookout, NASC President

In this past month, I visited two of my local feed stores. At one of them, as I stood at the cash register to pay for my hay and supplies, I gazed upon shelves lined with all kinds of supplements and various products being marketed for all kinds of disorders along with the customary horse treats, shampoos and topical ointments.

The lady ahead of me in line was looking for a joint supplement for her horse. The store employee was showing her a selection of products from liquids to powders to herbal blends, all of which seemed to be making claims about joint health, joint support, or being anti-arthritis or anti-inflammatory.

I wondered if this woman knew that products could be pulled from the shelves by the state department of agriculture inspectors, at



Pure MSM powder. Many ingredients - including glucosamine, MSM, Vitamin C and more - may be in your animal's supplements now, but how would you feel if they were no longer available for purchase in your horse's or pet's supplements?

any time, for making unsubstantiated claims and also for containing ingredients not approved for animal supplements.

There is a national/international non-profit group, which just so happens to be in my neighborhood of Valley Center, California whose goal is to promote the health and well-being of animals not intended for human consumption who are given animal health supplements by their owners, and to protect and enhance the integrity of the animal health product industry. It is the National Animal Supplement Council (NASC), a non-profit trade organization. NASC not only collects a list of ingredients from each of its members, they keep that information in their data base in case of an adverse reporting event. NASC also collects, as well as monitors, clinical data and scientific evidence, and ensures that their member's products contain what they say they do by the member agreeing to independent spot testing of their products. As a member, a company also has to adhere to Best Manufacturing Practices (BMPs) and their facility is inspected to assure these are being met!

There are many ingredients - including herbs, glucosamine, MSM, and more - that may be unapproved by many state agriculture departments, and technically should not be allowed in animal supplements. Nor would we know from where the ingredients are being purchased, except that NASC members must purchase from pre-approved suppliers so that their products will be safe - so we can avoid another melamine scare, for example.

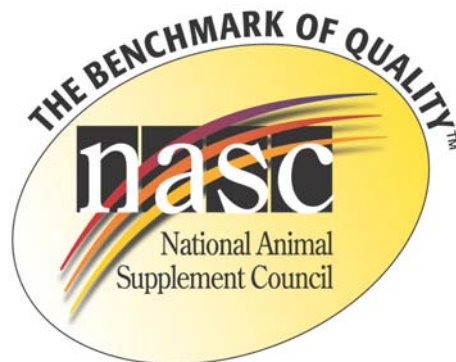
The NASC seal on products, websites, and elsewhere provides a higher degree of quality assurance to consumers, including knowing that what the manufacturer says is in the product is in fact contained in the product, in the amounts shown in their guaranteed analysis on their label!

On numerous occasions over the years I've contacted Bill Bookout, the founder and president of the NASC, for his advice. The following are responses to some questions that you too may want to know when considering a certain supplement for your horse, dog or cat.

Jessica: Bill, why was the NASC formed?

Bill: NASC was formed to represent the interests of suppliers, veterinarians, consumers, pet owners, horse owners, retailers, tack stores and distributors to work cooperatively with the regulators to ensure the continued availability of products that contribute to the health and well-being of companion animals and horses.

The NASC seal on products, websites, and elsewhere provides a higher degree of quality assurance to consumers. NASC strives to ensure the continued availability of products that contribute to the health and well-being of companion animals and horses.



When no one else in the industry took action, our members did, on behalf of these animals, and because of our efforts many of these products are available to them today. Ultimately, the collective actions of our members will benefit everyone in the industry.

NASC was the first to initiate a third-party quality assurance program for the animal health supplement industry with its NASC Quality Seal Program. The association works with the Association of American Feed Control Officials, State Regulatory Agencies, Congress, and the Food and Drug Administration Center for Veterinary Medicine to identify responsible labeling criteria for animal health supplements and maintain the availability of these products at retail.

Jessica: Who regulates supplements?

Bill: Supplements marketed for animal use that are similar to human dietary supplements have only two legal categories: animal feed or animal drugs. Therefore, even common ingredients like glucosamine and chondroitin used for joint health are not FDA-approved for use in animal feed products and may be subject to regulatory action, making them unavailable to consumers at retail. Regulation of dietary supplements for companion animals, such as dogs, cats and horses, was not addressed in the Dietary Supplement Health Education Act (DSHEA) passed by the US

Congress in 1994. Ultimately these products are regulated by the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine, however they may also fall under state regulation depending on the type of products and species for which the product is marketed.

NASC members that display the NASC Seal are required to undergo a rigorous independent audit of their facilities. Upon completion of this audit, members are then able to display the NASC Seal of Quality to show consumers they are committed to the highest current standards of quality in the industry today.

Such an environment of safety, accuracy and quality serves the interests of NASC's members by ensuring that ethical manufacturing and labeling practices are complied with throughout the industry.

Jessica: Who regulates ingredients?

Bill: Ingredients may be subjected to the same regulation as products, however it is typically up to the company that markets the products to properly qualify their suppliers. Supply chain management is a focus for NASC.

Jessica: How do we know that what is on the label is actually in the product we purchase in the amount that it says?

Bill: People have to understand that testing each and every ingredient in any product, human or animal, to ensure they meet label claim, is prohibitively expensive. Simply stated, the consumer wants a quality product and one they can have confidence meets label claim, however they are unwilling to pay the substantial cost increase for 100% testing. NASC addresses this issue through a total quality management approach by considering every step on the manufacturing process beginning with quality ingredients from verified Raw Material Suppliers. A company cannot produce a good quality finished product without starting with quality raw materials. Then through following written Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) the exact same production process can be repeated consistently when done correctly producing consistent outcomes. This is referred to as process control; Current Good Manufacturing Practices, or cGMPs. Then by applying finished goods testing for ingredients and also random product testing, consumers can have a greater degree of confidence that not only do the products contain what they are represented to contain on the label, the company will also operate responsibly by evaluating good quality suppliers and implementing quality process control throughout the entire supply chain.

Jessica: Are horse treats that contain herbs or herbal blends subject to the same regulations as supplements?



Wild dandelion (left), vitamin C powder (in bowl) and nettle (right): In some states, even weeds that naturally grow in our fields or gardens may be unapproved feed ingredients when added to products as a supplement.



Left to right: Chamomile, calendula and yarrow flowers: examples of all natural plant ingredients that horses may find in a pasture or garden, yet may not be approved by some states, under current regulations, if purchased and fed as a "supplement".

Bill: According to state and federal law, it is the intended use of the product that causes the product to be considered a food/feed (a nutritional product) or a drug (which may support healthy joint function, for example). However, products that are labeled as Biscuits, Treats or Snacks fall under a category defined in the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) Official Publication, causing them to be regulated as animal feed by those states following AAFCO recommendation. Therefore, treats would be required to contain ingredients approved for use in animal feed and also be included for their approved purpose.

Jessica: Can we trust the product labels and claims being made about a certain product?

Bill: If a product is not properly labeled then state officials can take it off the shelf *immediately*. We have drastically reduced the incidences of stop-sales for retailers because our members follow strict labeling and claims guidelines for both feed products and animal health supplements, and proactively register them with the regulatory agencies that have authority over these products.

Jessica: What about claims that are made on labels, such as for joint products - can we believe or trust them?

Bill: There are two things that are always true - products that make claims that sound too good to be true probably are, and cheap products are usually cheap for a reason. So generally if the consumer sees a product that references a disease like arthritis or even an abbreviation like OCD, they know the company is acting irresponsibly and breaking the law. Likewise if you see a product that looks identical to another or very similar in terms of the contents, and one product costs significantly less, this should be a red flag as well.

Conclusion:

First and foremost, NASC is an advocacy group with the following objectives: The organization wants to help ensure the continued availability of supplements for animals, provided from responsible companies. This is not to say that the organization is perfect. Their systems can be improved; in fact they embrace the concept of continuous improvement. However when an owner selects a product that displays the NASC Quality Seal it does mean two things: first the company has passed an independent quality audit and has demonstrated they meet specific standards for product quality, continued product vigilance and responsible conduct. Second, it means that the company is contributing to a goal greater than the company itself, which is helping ensure these products will continue to be available to animal owners nationally because in 2001 we came very close to most of the products our animals depend on being removed from the marketplace.

I know that since I became aware of NASC, I look for the NASC Quality Seal on products that I intend to purchase, for not only my horses but cats and dogs as well. I have gone to their website, www.animalsupplements.org, on numerous occasions to check on their members before I have purchased a horse product as well. This year our company will also be joining NASC.




Left to right: White willow bark, rose hips, milk thistle. All natural ancient herbal remedies, found in nature and used by our horses, are great - but if sold as equine "supplements" these may not be approved for use.

How You Can Help

If you use health supplements for your companion animals and believe in your right to have access to these products, NASC needs your help. The availability of health supplements for pets and horses - closely resembling human dietary supplements, with ingredients like glucosamine, MSM, herbs and antioxidants - is at risk.

You can sign up for a free Animal Friends Membership wherein you would receive newsletters and requests for help, from time to time, sometimes in the form of letter writing for your state or even on a federal level. We all need to be proactive so that our horses, dogs and cats can continue to benefit from all natural supplements and ingredients.

You can support NASC best by supporting its members, purchasing their products online, at feed stores or big box pet retailers. You can find those members by the NASC Seal on their packaging or they are listed as a member on the NASC website (<http://nasc.cc/index.php> - go to Members section).

NASC is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and enhancing the health of companion animals and horses throughout the United States. NASC actively promotes industry support from key stakeholders including regulators, legislators, media and consumers. There is strength in numbers and you will make a difference. 

About Bill Bookout:

Mr. William Bookout, Chairman and President of NASC Registered Lobbyist to US Congress, representing the animal health and nutritional supplement industries, represents over 25 years of experience as a business executive and entrepreneur, demonstrating a proven track record for success in both the human and animal healthcare industries. In 2001, Mr. Bookout established the NASC, a non-profit trade association. Mr. Bookout currently serves as the NASC Chairman of the Board, representing 90% of the \$1.4 billion animal nutrition and health supplement industries. www.animalsupplements.org

About Jessica Lynn:

Jessica Lynn is a writer and the owner of Earth Song Ranch, a licensed natural feed additive and supplement distributor based in southern California. She has been involved in alternative health care, homeopathy and nutrition for almost 45 years and uses it for her family, horses, border collies and cats. She personally formulates all Earth Song Ranch feed additives and nutritional products. Jessica@earthsongranch.com
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