



Anne Rodiek is a natural with horses. Here, on the University Farm, she pampers a baby colt. At home, she's attentive to the needs of her five American Saddlebred horses.



When it comes to exploring the endless possibilities here on campus, check out the action with the baby colts and yearlings on the 1,083-acre University Farm. Walking past the stalls near the Judging Pavilion, you'll see horses frolicking and mares tending their young. This care-free atmosphere prevails at the rodeo arena, where students and professors ride their horses in an open field against a backdrop of the beautiful Sierra Nevada.

In sharp contrast, a Chicago suburb was where animal sciences professor Anne Rodiek became enamored of these high-spirited, long-maned animals. As a teenager, she frequented the local stables and then followed her heart by pursuing three degrees in animal science.

"One of my college professors was very influential," Rodiek explains. "He encouraged me by telling me that there were career opportunities with horses and that I should do the things I like instead of the things I'm supposed to do."

Today, Rodiek enlightens undergraduate students in the art and science of horse production and works with graduate students on research projects in horse nutrition and exercise physiology.

"We're continuing our research on how nutrition affects athletic performance," she says.

"In one study, we fed horses different amounts and different types of feed. Then, we took blood samples from them every 15 minutes for five hours, so we could study the changes in their blood glucose. Glucose is an energy source used to fuel muscle contraction for work or athletics. By monitoring blood

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glucose, we can get an idea of how much glucose is put into the blood from various feeds and how much is taken from the blood by the working muscles.

"We got started with this work because people who have racehorses or show horses have all kinds of pet theories about what one should give horses right before they go to the track or into the ring to help make them win. We're trying to see what different feeds can do and will continue with this research to see what kinds of feeds we should give horses for different kinds of exercise."

Every fall, Rodiek teaches an introductory course on horse production where students receive hands-on, practical experience with baby colts. Then in the spring, these same students enroll in an advanced horse management course that stresses the basics of nutrition, breeding systems and exercise physiology.

"Like right now," says the professor, referring to her fall semester class, "these students started with baby colts that were not weaned from their mothers. These babies were untouched by human hands and were totally wild. The students caught them and haltered them.

"I don't know who got bruised and banged up more — the students or the horses. But now the horses have been weaned, and the students lead the horses around and they'll stand tied. They're little gentlemen instead of wild monsters, so the students are going to show these baby colts at the Little Grand National as a chance to show off what they've done."

While Anne Rodiek is a strong advocate of giving her students that "hands-on" experience, she can't help but be concerned about what takes place in her labs.

"I'll go out there and say, 'Here are the halters; there are the colts. Go for it.' And then I watch them and think, 'Well, maybe I ought to be teaching them this or that.' But I believe they learn more from figuring it out themselves than if I protected them. When I was here the first year, my heart was in my mouth all the time. Every time I'd see a student do something, I'd run in there and say, 'No, you're going to get hurt.' Now, I'm better about just waiting it out and seeing what happens. It's a lot of fun. The students learn, and we have a good time."