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The basic common sense rule is that if the horse is eating something unusual then it is looking for something. Usually this is seen to be a lack of a trace element or mineral or whatever and usually this is cured by providing a salt lick made with raw salt and whatever else, dolomite, molasses etc. usually the sort of thing which is found in the paddock blocks.

You have done all that and the horse still goes looking for dirt.

A second reason a horse may continue with a behavior which does not involve a physical need is that it is a stress relieving habit like wind sucking or chewing your nails. Muzzling the horse unfortunately just adds to the buildup of nervous energy which the animal is trying to dissipate.

I am not all that sure providing Canberra dirt will make much difference but it should be easy enough to check on whether the horse does the same thing in other areas closer to you or are there other reasons for sending her to Canberra?

The other point you make is about the health of the filly which seems to be fine. Healthy, good coat etc. but you don't make any comment about her disposition. Is she a nervy or a fearful type.?

My guess from here is that she is homesick in some sort of way. I would imagine that the dirt in San Antonio could be described as clay/sand/gravel and it would certainly be geologically "old soil" in the same way as yours is.

On the assumption that it is primarily a nervous system thing I would suggest that you considered these sorts of treatments which we can do herbally.

There have been a couple of articles I have written in Hoof Beats which talk a lot about horses nervous systems and gives you some advice's as to how to "do it yourself". Alternatively, I could send out a basic Nervous Tonic which is not expensive and maybe would be a good place to start maybe in conjunction with Chamomile tea and Kelp. (I can provide bulk Chamomile)

I would stop muzzling her and put her with the other horse you got from the same place. I would also stop spending money on tests and I admire your Vet not leading you down a track of more and more tests.

After a simple start like this if we still were not making progress I would maybe get you to send a hair sample and see if we can pick something up through this.

Remember all the time; the dirt will not hurt her, she is healthy and well and that is all you really need to worry about. When she has her own foals and is rearing them it is highly likely that she will get her mind into a different gear and if the problem is of nervous system origin it is likely to break at that time also.

Proceed a step at a time and let me know along the way what you notice. If all else fails very much later I could consider using some more complex treatments to re-balance the whole metabolism but I wouldn't do that as a first step at all.

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The second horse should respond to our Brood Mare Mix which is to boost and balance our normal hormone levels in preparation and in support of breeding. Again there could be nervous system involvement but my approach for this one would be to work on the hormones first.

I have included a copy of my product brochure and the latest newsletter in an envelope which accompanies the original of this fax and which will leave by post today.

Cheers

Robert.