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|  | My name is Nathalie and I lived in Belgium until June 1997.  Horses have always been my favorite animals. For 5 years I have been  horseback riding and owned my own white horse, called Early Morning. We were an unseparable team that participated at many jumping competitions with great success. Our lives had to separate when my family took the decision of moving to the U.S., but many extraordinary memories will always remain in my mind.  As students of Amador Valley High School in Pleasanton, we, Saki  and Nathalie, are conducting a research project for an AP Biology class. With an equestrian background from Belgium, we were curious to find out how different horse owners fed their horses compared with owners in Belgium . Therefore, we thought that it would be a good opportunity to research the diet of the horses in the area of Pleasanton and Livermore.  In Belgium, the diet of a horse mainly consists of grass and/or  grass hay. With a pasture of good quality, 2 acres of land can sustain the full diet of a horse, considering that grass hay must be added in the winter time when the grass growth is minimized. Of course, the diet of a horse differs accordingly to the horse's activity, size and other personal features. Working horses need more energy than non-working horses to satisfy their nutritional needs, which is often added in the form of supplementary grains. A special mixture of corn, oats, barley , grass cubes and vitamins is a very popular supplement in Belgium. Is this Belgian horse's diet, with grass and/or grass hay as the main component, similar to the diet of a horse in California? Lets find out and use this opportunity to research the ideal diet in California!  Hello! My name is Saki Takasu, and Nathalie and I are partners in this project. We were both new kids on the block (I'm from Illinois), so we decided to get together and construct a project pertaining to what we both thought would be interesting, horses! I am not as familiar with horses as Nathalie is (who even had her own horse in Belgium!), but it was a pleasure working with her and learning about such tender animals. There was much adventure and new inspirations during the project, and now we know so much about the diet of horses and the grass in the Pleasanton-Livermore area.  Our curiosity took us to the next step, to the library. We actually found that the National Research Council had already made a nation-wide nutrition table for horses. However, we thought that it would be interesting to construct a new table based on local data. We also wondered how a perfect diet could be obtained. We already had a foresight that there could be no such thing as a perfect diet for every horse, but we were determined to prove that grass, a product of nature, could provide a better diet than an artificial diet.  As Nathalie stated before, horses in Belgium were sufficed with luscious grass as their main course. Could it be the same for Northern Californian horses? The adventure begins here; we constructed a compact survey that would provide us with concise information from stable owners about the diet of their horses. Then we also wanted to see it with our own eyes, so we set up some criteria for good nutritious grass and bad nutrient-deficient grass. We also thought that observation would be necessary for hay and grains/supplements.  We found the data overwhelming, but we were able to observe the reasons why the diet of Northern Californian horses were based more on hay. There were also new products out in the market, that really seems to be popular (and not just a scam) and be favored by many horse owners. It seemed unfair to visit during the El Nino time (and yes, it did affect our project), but we also saw it as a test in how the hay and the supplements were stored. |

*This Web Site is Best viewed with 256 or more colors.*

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