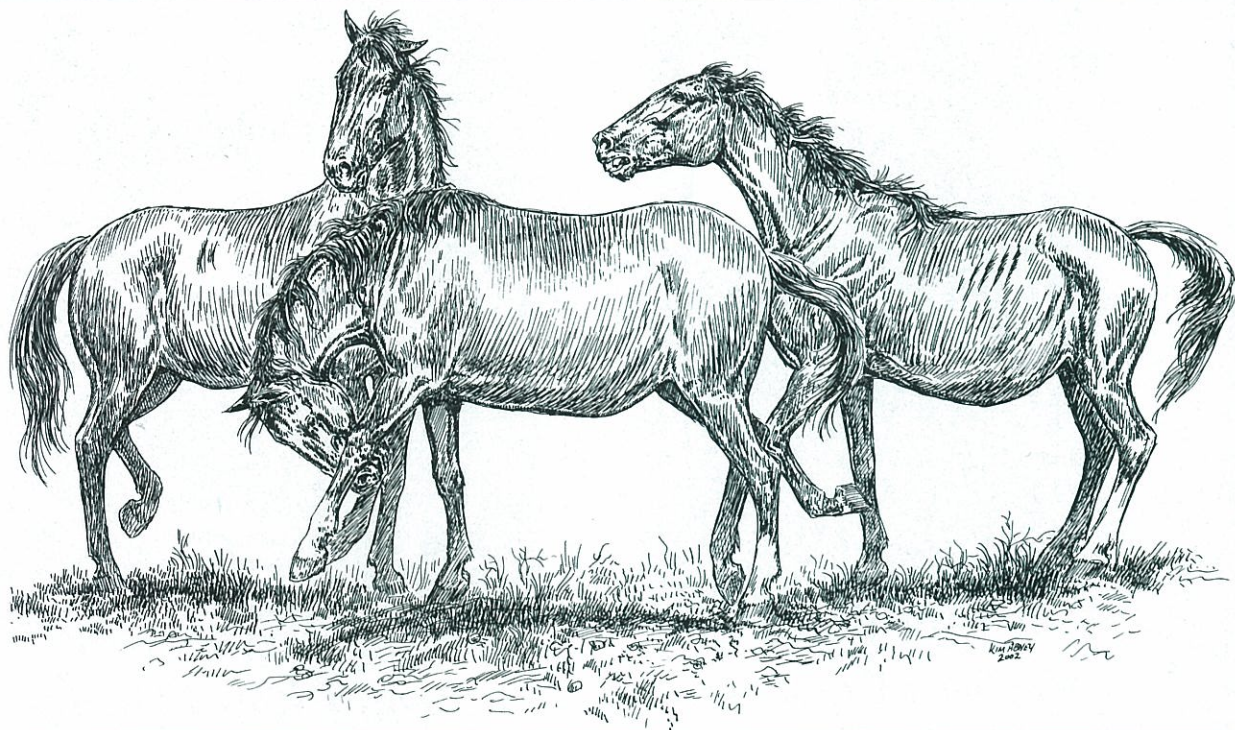


Feeding for two



Last spring, when new mares owners discovered their mare was pregnant, the first question they asked was "how much extra feed should I feed her?" For the broodmare that was in good shape, the answer was that she did not need any additional feed until the last 90 days of her pregnancy.

Nature's program for survival of the next generation makes it easy for most mares grazing on good pasture through the last summer and early fall months to gain a little weight. This weight, in the form of fat, prepares the broodmare for the leaner, colder months of winter.

In an effort to mimic the nature rhythm of the horse, it is our recommendation that it is desirable to see just the imprint of one rib of the broodmare up to the last 90 days of pregnancy. Obviously, the individuality of each broodmare and the conditions under which she lives will determine the amount of feed that is necessary to maintain her in this condition.

However, the last 90 days of pregnancy is a different story. During this time, the unborn foal is going to gain 90% of its birth weight. Nutritionally, this interprets into a demand for protein. In order to provide the proper nutrients to the foal, it is necessary to supplement the

mare's diet with an additional half pound of quality protein a day and provide a good source of vitamins and minerals.

For the broodmare in good shape, these needs can be met by feeding 3 to 5 additional pounds a day of a high quality grain ration. This additional feed should also provide the mare with enough energy to lay down a small reserve of fat that will cause the imprint of that last rib to disappear.

Unfortunately, many mares do not enter the last trimester in perfect shape. Some are too fat while others are too skinny.

Feeding additional feed to the fat mare increases the risk that the mare will become obese. Obese mares tend to have smaller foals and more trouble foaling.

One solution for these mares is to top-dress their normal ration with one half cup of soybean meal a day. This will provide the protein necessary for the development of the foal with a minimum of calories.

Broodmares entering late pregnancy with one or two ribs showing may actually be too thin. These mares are at risk of producing weak foals and having reduced milk production.

This condition is often times produced

by naive horsemen who mistake a big belly for a fat mare. After foaling these mares almost immediately look a hundred or more pounds under weight. Shocked at the condition of their mare, the immediate response is to increase the mare's grain ration.

Don't do it! Not only will this increase the chance of colic or foal founder but the energy fed at this time is used mainly for milk production instead of increasing body fat. Also this increase in milk production may cause the foal to scour, especially when the mare has her foal heat or estrus cycle.

Any increase in nutrition after foaling should occur gradually and should not begin until after foal heat.

To avoid this game of nutritional catch-up after foaling, it is critical that underweight broodmares be fed a diet that will replenish their fat stores during the last 90 days. This will provide their foal with proper nutrients and prepare the mare for proper milk production during early lactation.

— Dr. Jim and Lynda McColl

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