

Raising Baby

The major challenge in raising outstanding foals is to provide the correct nutrition. There is a wide range of management practices designed to address this problem. Many farms creep feed foals. Other places manage by pasturing nursing mares without additional supplementation. The foal gets mare's milk and whatever forage sustains the mare.

There is no one best system that works in every situation. Quality of pasture and stocking rate are just some of the conditions that influence the decision a breeder must make in order to provide the best nutritional environment for his foals.

This was graphically pointed out to us several years ago while presenting a summary of some research we were doing managing foals weaned at eight week of age. After explaining the growth parameters that were measured in the study, Jim stated that under intense management we could grow eight week old foals off as well as those left on their mothers in the pasture.

An elderly gentleman in the audience was noticeably disturbed by this concept. Politely, he waited until Jim finished and asked for questions. Acknowledged, Mr. Gentry rose to deliver his comment.

"I don't believe you should be treating these foals like bottle-fed babies. I am the manager of The Meadows and I was responsible for the raising of Secretariat. All I did was leave him on his mother in a good field of clover and grass. He turned out pretty good!"

Hard to argue against success, Jim pointed out that not everyone has a good field of clover or a mare like *Somethingroyal* (*Secretariat's* dam). The point of the presentation was that each individual operation must use a management technique which will optimize the growth and development of its weanlings. The purpose of the study was to identify the nutritional needs of young horses - not to recommend the weaning



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of eight week old foals.

Research in this area has continued over the years. By using this information, breeders can determine if their foal management system is up to speed.

The critical values of rapidly growing six month old foals that will mature at around a thousand pounds are as follows:

The foal needs at least 7500 kilocalories of energy per day

The diet should include 900 grams of protein; 15 grams of which should be lysine or 0.4% lysine

Calculation of the values being fed against the optimum quantities needed allows breeders to assess the quality of their feeding regimen.

But the final conclusion about the success of your program must come from a daily evaluation. Each foal is an individual and the requirements are calculated from the average.

So take time each day to level a critical eye at your young horses. Some of the questions that need to be answered over and over again are:

Is the mother milking enough?

Sucklings on good milking Moms should be milk-fat. If the foal is too slim, creeping the foal might be a good option.

Is the diet of both the mare and/or the foal adequate?

Inadequate broodmare nutrition is the biggest cause of poor milking ability. By the sixth week of a foal's life, his dam needs 32,000 calories a day to produce his daily ration of milk.

Does your horse ration need a better mineral balance - a higher quality protein - or more energy per pound?

Without the proper balance of minerals, protein and energy in the diet, the milking mare will rob the necessary nutrients from her own body. This is why so many broodmares look "pulled down" while they are milking.

Is the pasture forage adequate to

provide this mare with the energy to sustain heavy milk production or has the summer drought and over matured plants made supplementation necessary?

It is extremely difficult for any mare to nurse a foal strictly on a pasture diet. This is even more true as high temperatures and low rain dry out the grasses. The pasture might look good to the untrained eye but the nutrients in the grass are rapidly disappearing. Additional feed may be necessary to maintain the condition of the broodmare and her foal.

Does the foal need weaning and started on a more constant solid diet?

Weaning is not only about diet but also mental development. There are many things to consider before deciding to remove the foal from its dam. Next month, we will explore some of this considerations to help you wrestle with this question.

-Dr. Jim and Lynda McCall

For more information, visit the McCalls at their web site: www.the-old-place.com