

FEEDING BROODMARES

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Feeding the mare before conception

What can you do from the nutritional point of view to increase the chances of efficient conception and the birth of a fit and healthy foal?

At least six months before sending a mare to stud check her condition and adjust her feed intake accordingly. Slim is out! Researchers have now concluded that at conception mares should be well-furnished, neither fat nor thin. However, do not try to reduce the weight of fat mares in the six weeks prior to covering as this may reduce fertility.

During the three months prior to conception make sure that your mare has an adequate intake of vitamins, minerals and trace elements as many of these influence fertility.

The ideal way to do this is by providing a suitable feed balancer which incorporates a comprehensive range of micronutrients including vitamin E and selenium, vitamin A, folic acid and chelated minerals. For example a barren 15.2hh middleweight mare at grass could be given 500 grams of TopSpec Comprehensive Feed Balancer per day.

If a mare is on a rising plane of nutrition (gaining weight) when she is covered she is more likely to hold to service. This is sometimes difficult to achieve with milky mares but it is worthwhile trying as it does increase fertility. Losing weight whilst being covered causes a drop in conception rates, so if your mare is fat at covering aim to hold her weight until she is three months in-foal.

If you feel your mare is likely to be stressed during covering then using yeast products can help to minimise the effects of stress. TopSpec Comprehensive/TopSpec Stud/TopSpec Stud Lite Feed Balancers all contain high levels of a pure, protected yeast.

Feeding in-foal mares

Early gestation

If you have a mare without a foal at foot do not start to increase her feed intake immediately she gets in foal. During the first eight months of pregnancy the foetal demands for nutrients are so low



that you can continue to feed a mare the same amount of energy (calories) and protein as though she were not in foal, simply adjusting feed intake to keep her in good condition. By the end of this time the foal will only have reached about 40% of its eventual birth weight.

In the summer excellent mixed grazing will meet all the energy and protein requirements of most in-foal mares. However recent research has shown that optimum micronutrient supply is essential for correct organ development, even in the early stages of foetal growth. For mares in good or even slightly overweight condition TopSpec Stud Lite Feed Balancer is ideal. For underweight mares TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer should be used.

Naturally, a mare with a foal at foot should be fed for lactation, which would usually be TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer.

Late gestation

During the last three months of pregnancy the foal will gain 60% of its final birth weight therefore the mare's feed requirements increase quite sharply. In order for the foetus to reach its maximum potential, and to keep herself in good condition, the mare will need increased supplies of energy (calories), protein, calcium, phosphorus, vitamins and trace elements. The proportion of these ingredients must change so that energy intake is increased less than protein, vitamin and mineral intake. This change in proportion needs to be even greater for mares that are good-doers (e.g. by using TopSpec Stud Lite Feed Balancer) so that they do not become overweight.

In order to meet these increased requirements, whilst her gut capacity is being reduced by the growing foetus, a top specification feed balancer is enormously helpful. For example a 16.1hh retired eventer might be fed ad-lib haylage plus a daily ration of 1kg TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer plus 600 grams TopChop Alfalfa (unmolassed) and 2kg TopSpec CoolCondition Cubes or TopSpec UlsaKind Cubes or TopSpec Super Conditioning Flakes, divided into two feeds.

Feeding trace elements in late pregnancy is particularly important in circumstances where the lactating mare and young foal are going to be turned out to grass with no supplementary feed.

Feeding the mare correctly will not only help the foal directly but also indirectly through improved colostrum and milk. The colostrum of mares fed TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer has been shown to contain higher levels of antibodies than mares fed a commercial stud mix.

Foaling early in the year

A mare foaling early in the year will need to be fed good quality forage plus concentrates, as hay alone is insufficient. Traditionally concentrates would gradually be increased until the mare was being fed a forage to concentrate ratio of 60:40 using a good, 16% protein, stud ration.

The advent of top specification feed balancers and improved forages has offered owners a better approach to feeding mares, and many owners now prefer to use these products to arrive at a higher forage to concentrate ratio. This has many benefits for mares' digestive systems, and is rightly considered a more natural way of feeding. For example a 16.2hh IDxTB mare might now receive ad-lib good quality forage plus a daily ration of 1.2kg of



TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer, 600g of TopChop Alfalfa and 1kg of TopSpec CoolCondition Cubes, divided into two feeds. This gives a forage to concentrate ratio of 80:20.

Foaling from May

Mares foaling in late spring/early summer will have most of their late pregnancy requirements for energy and protein met by grass. Spring grass will provide plenty of protein and energy but if grazing conditions are less than perfect continue to feed a conditioning feed balancer e.g. TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer. However, a good-doer, such as a Dartmoor mare deliberately on moderate grazing to limit calorie intake, could be given 600 grams TopSpec Stud Lite Feed Balancer daily in the field to ensure her micronutrient intake was optimised. Feeding sufficient compounds in this situation to ensure adequate micronutrient intake can result in an over fat mare and could lead to problems such as laminitis.

Feeding close to foaling

It can be beneficial to feed yeast products for at least ten days before and after foaling to help counteract stress. Mares can make fools of mere humans when it comes to estimating foaling dates but do not worry if foaling is delayed as yeast products can be fed permanently, usually to advantage, but definitely without detriment. TopSpec Stud and Stud Lite Feed Balancers contain a pure, protected yeast that will be particularly helpful at stressful times.

After foaling, feed your mare's normal feed at normal times. Make the feed damper than usual for a couple of days. Don't make drastic changes to the ration immediately after foaling, the traditional practise of giving a bran mash can prejudice calcium absorption and unsettle the hindgut microflora at a critical time.

Finally, remember that all feeds should be clean, dust and mould free. Mycotoxins produced by mould can cause a mare to become infertile or to abort. Never hesitate to throw feed away if you have any doubts about its quality.

Feeding the mare during lactation

For those of us who are viewed by the rest of the world as 'horse mad,' few things in life are more enchanting than a young foal. We can spend precious time just watching mares and foals happily grazing in the fields. But is the grass in those fields providing the mares with all the nutrients they need?

Mares produce up to 3% of their body weight as milk per day, for example a small pony mare can produce up to 12 litres of milk daily. This is very demanding nutritionally and has been compared to running in a race. Foals double their birth weight by one month of age and treble it by three months of age, in other words they are going through the fastest period of growth in their life. Most of the nutrients for this growth come from the mare's milk. If the mare is in good condition at the start of lactation, good spring and early summer grazing will provide her with all the protein and energy she needs to produce this milk. However quality bloodstock will benefit from supplementary micronutrient supply.

During lactation optimising protein content in the diet will improve milk yield and so foal growth rates, therefore the mare will benefit from TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer. The protein needs to be high quality, rich in amino acids. If needed extra calories should be provided, perhaps in the form of TopSpec CoolCondition Cubes or TopSpec UlsaKind Cubes or TopSpec Super Conditioning Flakes.

Clearly mares foaling early in the season, before grass growth is established, will need to be fed well to support lactation. Good

quality forage plus TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer will provide the basis of a good ration. To maintain your mare in good condition this should be topped up with extra calories perhaps in the form of TopSpec CoolCondition Cubes or TopSpec UlsaKind Cubes or TopSpec Super Conditioning Flakes. Chopped alfalfa e.g. TopChop Alfalfa provides a highly bio-available source of calcium at a high percentage (1.7%) for lactating mares.

Remember that lactating mares needs lots of fresh clean water; for example a TB mare will need about 50 litres of water daily.

Weaning

Three to four weeks before weaning start to reduce the mare's feed, if she has been getting any, so that at weaning she is receiving no concentrates. This will relieve pressure on her udder. If her condition needs building she can resume concentrate feeding once she has dried off.

Weaning should be gradual and preferably in pairs. Abrupt weaning is more stressful. The best method that I have found is to put two foals in the centre stable of a block of three, with viewing grills through to the two outer stables. Put one mare in each of the two side stables and weaning becomes a stress-free zone! If you take the mares away about a week later both they and the foals will usually be totally unconcerned.



Products made by TopSpec Equine that are suitable for feeding to broodmares and foals: -



TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer

is a top specification feed balancer specifically designed for broodmares and youngstock. It has an unparalleled specification of protein, vitamins, minerals, trace-elements and yeast products. Ideal for foals from three weeks of age. Recommended for thoroughbreds and all quality bloodstock.



TopSpec Stud Lite Feed Balancer

provides all of the benefits of TopSpec Stud Feed Balancer but on a low calorie, low protein base, making it ideal for youngstock and broodmares that are good-doers.



TopSpec Comprehensive Feed Balancer

promotes topline and muscle development. It contains a broad-spectrum supplement and many specialised supplements including a hoof supplement, antioxidants and digestive aids.



TopSpec Super Conditioning Flakes

are exceptionally conditioning. The cooked muesli is naturally rich in oil and 25% more conditioning than traditional mixes or cooked barley.



TopSpec CoolCondition Cubes

promote condition and topline but do not promote excitable behaviour.



TopSpec UlsaKind Cubes

promote condition whilst helping to maintain the integrity of the stomach lining from acid attack.



TopSpec TopChop Alfalfa

is an unmolassed, chopped British alfalfa chop, dressed with a light coating of linseed oil and real mint. High in bio-available calcium.



For free nutritional advice and further information on TopSpec products please contact the **TopSpec Multiple Award-Winning-Helpline**

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