

Ready For Baby

New to the breeding scene? The second installment of a three-part series helps you prepare for your foal's impending arrival.

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Last month, the *Paint Horse Journal* relayed tips to navigate your mare's first and second trimester from APHA breeder Ann Stockstill of Winona, Texas, and equine reproduction specialist Kurt Harris, D.V.M., of Whitesboro, Texas. In part two of this three-part series for new breeders, the *PHJ* guides you through your mare's third trimester leading up to your Paint foal's birth. Read on for invaluable information about nutrition, veterinary care and how to put together your mare's foaling kit.

• What's Going On Inside •

The final trimester is a period of rapid growth for the fetus, Harris says. Between day 240 and day 270, the fetus grows three inches and gains 40 pounds. At 270 days, it is covered in hair and is about the size of a German Shepherd, measuring about 27 inches long and weighing 70–80 pounds.

At 320 days, the mare is ready to foal, though gestation could range from 320 to 365 days. The fetus is fully formed by 320 days. Its lungs are developed, its bones can support weight, and its hair has coarsened.

"The majority of the foal's growth occurs in the final trimester," Harris said. "The long bones do a lot of their growing and development at that stage."



• Third Trimester Nutrition •

Stockstill doesn't alter her pregnant mare's diet drastically as the third trimester progresses. By this point, she's already provided her mares with feed that includes up to 14 percent protein, suitable caloric content and up to 6 percent fat to support a growing fetus.

If you haven't already switched to a balanced ration ideal for pregnant mares, Harris says you should do so by the third trimester because the mare will experience the greatest stress from the rapidly growing foal during those months.

If you are already feeding the correct diet for your mare, Harris recommends increasing her caloric intake by increasing the amount of roughage or grain she consumes.

"If you don't compensate for those extra energy needs for the developing foal, that foal will draw from the mare at all costs, to her detriment," Harris said. "You should increase the caloric content by increasing the grain or hay fed by 25 to 30 percent in the last trimester. If you start feeding more calories earlier in the pregnancy, you will make the mare fat."

Equally as important, vitamins and minerals fed to a gestating mare must provide calcium, phosphorus and selenium in the proper proportions. Many feeds designed specifically for pregnant mares include these vitamins and minerals, but Stockstill recommends consulting your veterinarian for advice specific to your area.

Harris says the calcium and phosphorus ratio is crucial to preventing developmental diseases.

"The balance between calcium and phosphorus needs to be 1.1:1 percent," Harris said.

Foaling Kit



Stockstill keeps a well-supplied foaling kit close at hand as her mares approach their due dates. Collected in a clean bucket, the items are ready for use and stored in her tack room, located near the stalls where her mares will foal. A few items are stored in the barn's refrigerator.

Stockstill has the following list taped to her refrigerator as a reminder. Consider including the items below in your own foaling kit:

- **Flashlight and Batteries**—many mares foal in the evening or early in the morning, so a working flashlight provides light.
- **Plastic Bag**—you'll want to keep the placenta to show your veterinarian. Examine the placenta to make sure it's intact with no holes or missing pieces that could still be in the mare, leading to an infection. Then, place it in the bag for your veterinarian.
- **String**—Stockstill uses string to tie off the foal's umbilical cord if

it doesn't break on its own or to tie placenta to itself if the mare doesn't discharge it right away.

- **Scissors**—Use these to cut string, suture material or the foal's embryonic sac, if necessary.
- **7 Percent Iodine and a Film Canister**—Use this to dip your foal's umbilical cord stump. You can also use Betadine.
- **Mild Soap and Warm Water or Betadine**—wash your mare's vulva and udders prior to foaling to prevent infection.
- **Dry Washcloths and Towels**—to dry mare and foal if needed.
- **Frozen Colostrum**—good to give foal if your mare doesn't produce adequate colostrum.
- **Plastic Gloves**—to keep your hands clean.
- **Vetrap**—for wrapping your mare's tail prior to foaling.
- **Notepad and Pencils**—useful to record information during foaling, such as times and your mare's behavior.

• Pre-Natal Vet Care •

You've probably already established a relationship with a veterinarian well versed in reproduction. If you haven't already done so, schedule the following vaccinations during the last trimester: tetanus, Eastern and Western Encephalomyelitis, Influenza, inactive EHV-1/EHV-4 and West Nile Virus. Also consider a rabies vaccination.

"I get my vaccinations done between four and six weeks prior to foaling," Stockstill said. "Talk to your vet to see if they recommend any additional vaccinations for your area."

Harris says this final round of vaccinations is crucial to allow the mare to develop important antibodies in her colostrum for the foal to consume in the first 12–24 hours of its life.

"Foals don't get any antibodies from the mare through the placenta," Harris said. "Every chance they have at developing immunity during those first few months comes from the antibodies in the mare's colostrum."

Choose a deworming program safe for pregnant mares and maintain your dosing in the months leading up to your foal's

- **Two Enemas**—Stockstill administers an enema if the foal doesn't pass meconium, or the plug of initial feces. Consult your veterinarian prior to using an enema.
- **Vaseline**—useful if you need to lubricate your hands.
- **Twitch**—to restrain the mare if she rejects or attacks the foal.
- **Halter and lead ropes**—to move, tie or restrain the mare, if necessary.
- **Watch**—to keep track of time.
- **Paper Towels**—for miscellaneous cleaning.
- **Cordless or Cell Phone**—keep a phone with you in case you need to call the vet in an emergency without having to leave your mare.

"It is always best to consult your veterinarian about enemas, iodine solutions for the navel, tetanus shots and how to prevent infections in both the mare and foal," Stockstill said.

Meet the Experts



Ann Stockstill has owned and bred horses since 1992, and she's had Paints for nearly as long. The Winona, Texas, resident now owns more than 100 Paints and produces an average of 30 foals each year at her farm, Coyote Creek Ranch. Her tobiano stallions include Summerschicobandito and Chicos Bandelero.

Dr. Kurt Harris, D.V.M., is an equine veterinarian with more than 25 years of experience. He works at JEH Equine Reproductive Specialists in Whitesboro, Texas, where the clinic uses the latest technology to serve mares and stallions with reproductive challenges.



• Preparing the Mare Motel •

Depending on your setup, your mare could be a pasture-dweller or a stall queen. Stockstill keeps her mares in several large pastures for most of their gestation before moving them to prepared stalls for foaling.

"If I have a lot of pregnant mares, I'll leave them in a close pasture to foal," Stockstill said. "But for convenience sake—and especially when I only have a few pregnant mares—I move them to the stalls just prior to birth."

Be sure the stall you choose for your mare is large enough for her to lie down without getting stuck against a wall. Stockstill uses stalls measuring about 18 feet by 18 feet. Avoid wide-mesh stall walls, and go over the perimeter of the stall to make sure there are no sharp edges. Stockstill layers a base of wood shavings with a top layer of straw in her foaling stalls.

"I like having the shavings to help absorb fluids when the mare's water breaks," Stockstill said. "The straw on top helps provide the foal with a fairly dry, soft surface to arrive on. I replace the straw and shavings as I remove the soiled bedding, but I start using more shavings as the foal gets older. However, I like to use shavings with little or no sawdust that could get into the foal's nose and cause respiratory problems."

Next month, the *PHJ* walks you through the birth of a foal and what to expect during the newborn's first week of life. [PHJ]



Abigail Boatwright is a special contributor for the *Paint Horse Journal*. To comment on this article, email feedback@apha.com. Stay tuned for part three of this series in the December issue.

birth, Stockstill says. She deworms every three months, and continues this program throughout the mare's pregnancy and beyond.

Harris advises against the common practice of deworming just prior to foaling, unless your farm has had infestations of thread worms. Deworming that close to delivery could cause colic in the mare, which would be detrimental to labor. He recommends waiting about five days for the mare to recover from the stress of delivering before deworming her.

"I don't have very many farms that have a problem with thread worms," Harris said. "Worming a mare in the first 24 hours after foaling is when you'd need to address that problem. But I don't like to do that unless I see a lot of foal diarrhea on that farm because it could add complications to the mare's recovery."