

Weaning foals requires patience, care

NEWARK, Del. — Foals are usually weaned when they're about six months old. "By now, most of this year's foals are mature enough to thrive on a normal diet and no longer require their mother's milk," says University of Delaware extension horse specialist Dr. C. M. Reitnour. "A weak or sick foal should not be weaned, however, until it has completely recovered. Weaning almost always places a stress on a foal's system, causing a temporary setback in growth."

By the time a foal is six months old, the mare has probably already begun to wean it herself, the specialist says. She shows less interest in suckling and walks away from it. A producer with only one or two mares may find it easier to wait until this happens.

"On the other hand, if you have a late foal (born in June or July) and want to breed the mare again, you may need to wean it early, since a nursing mare sometimes has trouble settling or becoming pregnant again," Reitnour says. It also may be advisable to completely wean a foal somewhat early if its dam isn't producing much milk.

There are two generally ac-

cepted methods of weaning. A foal may be kept in a stall of its own for a day or two after removing the mare to a distant part of the farm. Once accustomed to the separation, it can be moved to a pasture with other weanlings.

When a large herd of mares and foals is involved, individual mares may be removed one by one until only the foals are left. "This approach has been very successful in large operations and appears to cause the least disturbance to the foal," Reitnour says. "The new weaning usually remains quiet and content with its herd mates."

Ideally, he says, a mare and foal that are separated should be out of sight and hearing of each other to minimize their distress. However, the older the foal, the less this will be a problem.

In the pasture or corral it's very important to have a good, solid fence between mare and foal, Reitnour says. He recommends either 50-inch-high woven steel wire, board, or post-and-rail fencing. Be sure there are no broken rails or boards, and NO BARBED WIRE on which the animals could injure themselves as they try to reach each other.

If a foal is confined in a stall,

check for sharp objects, such as protruding nails or hooks which could injure it. Remove buckets and feed tubs until the animal has settled down so it can't catch a leg in one," the specialist says. "But feed and water it as soon as it becomes quiet—probably within half a day."

In the pasture, a foal will exercise. But if it is confined in a stall for a few days, lead it out once a day and hand exercise it for half

an hour to keep it from becoming jumpy. This will reduce the chance that the animal will run wild and hurt itself when finally turned out.

A young horse needs adequate protein for proper growth, Reitnour stresses. A weaning should receive approximately 16 percent protein in a highly digestible grain ration plus good quality hay if the pasture is in poor condition. A foal

will eat approximately 2.25 to 3 percent of its body weight per day in hay and grain. This means a 600-pound weanling will need between 13 and 18 pounds of total feed per day.

"Observe the foal after weaning," Reitnour advises. "Watch closely for signs of illness. And worm it every six to eight weeks to control internal parasites."

USDA gives country ham producers extension on trichina regulations

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture will allow some producers of dry-cured and country ham to continue using traditional, but not specifically approved, methods for trichina destruction while research determines effective new methods, according to Donald L. Houston, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Health Inspection Service.

"USDA has learned that many small firms producing dry-cured or country hams use traditional procedures that are believed to

destroy trichina parasites but will not meet USDA requirements," Houston said. "Firms wishing to continue using such procedures past August 6, when revised regulations become effective, must submit a description of their processes to USDA by that date. The extension does not apply to firms already using procedures that will comply with the regulations as revised."

USDA has received no reports of trichinosis occurring from ingestion of any dry-cured or country hams, Houston said. But

because these and other ready-to-eat pork products are not always well-cooked before they are eaten, USDA required meat plants to heat, freeze or cure and dry these products under time, temperature and other specified conditions known to be effective in destroying trichina parasites that may be present. One method is now approved for dry-cured or country hams, and a second will be added by the updated rules for processing pork that become effective in August.

Research will be conducted between now and December 31, 1986.

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