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Newfoundland Pony Society:

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For more information, please contact your Regional Veterinarian, the Newfoundland Pony Society or the Animal Health Division.

Other information pamphlets are available online from the Department of Natural Resources at:

www.nr.gov.nl.ca/agric/

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Reproduction of the Newfoundland Pony: Breeding and Broodmare Management



Introduction

There are currently less than 400 registered Newfoundland Ponies. To ensure the survival of this heritage breed, it is essential that we optimize the health and survival of all Newfoundland Pony foals. Owners of breeding mares should become familiar with all aspects of equine reproduction. This pamphlet is one of a series on reproduction in the Newfoundland Pony and deals with the breeding and care of mares.

The Estrous Cycle

Puberty in the mare occurs as early as one year old but usually around 18 months of age. However, it is advisable that mares not be bred until at least 3 years of age to allow them to mature and grow normally.

The estrous cycle (heat cycle) in the mare lasts 20 -22 days. Estrus (heat), or the period during which a mare can be bred, lasts on average 5 -7 days but can be as short as 2-3 days in some mares and as long as 8-10 days in others. Mares begin to cycle in early spring in response to increasing day length, and stop cycling in late fall in response to decreasing day length.

The optimal time to breed a mare is late spring; the estrous cycles are regular by this time, and the foal will be born when weather conditions are favorable, approximately 11 months later (gestation period on average 335-340 days).

Breeding

The mare should be teased daily to determine the first day of estrus. Teasing involves allowing contact with a stallion over a stall door or on opposite sides of an enclosed paddock. Allow head to head contact first, then allow stallion to smell the perineal area. Signs that the mare is receptive or in estrus include squatting and urinating, raising the tail and winking the vulva. Negative reactions include biting, kicking, pinning the ears back and swishing the tail.

When the first day of estrus is determined, breeding can begin. Mares should be bred once every 2 days beginning on day 2-3 of estrus and ending when the mare is no longer receptive to the stallion. Methods of breeding horses include natural breeding (either pasture breeding or hand breeding) or artificial insemination (AI). Advantages of AI include the reduction of breeding injuries and the possibility of greater disease control. AI also allows for the transport of collected semen rather than mares and/or stallions. The equipment and facilities necessary for semen collection are costly and, at this time, the size of the Newfoundland Pony registry might not warrant it.

Pasture breeding is merely turning stallion and mare out in a pasture together. The risk of injury to mare or stallion is greatest with this method. Hand breeding involves leading the stallion to the mare on a lead line and allowing the stallion to mount and service the mare. This method reduces the chance of injury to the stallion and mare but care should be taken with handler safety.

Strict attention to hygiene can significantly reduce disease transmission during breeding. The mare's perineal area can be cleaned and rinsed thoroughly. Also, the mare's tail can be wrapped to avoid lacerations from the tail hairs during breeding.

Broodmare Care

Ideally 70-80% of mares bred should produce a live foal. To achieve this goal, efficient breeding techniques and sound broodmare management are extremely important. Following are guidelines for the care of breeding mares.

Nutrition

Broodmares should be in good body condition before breeding. If the mare is either over or under condition, this should be corrected before breeding. A mare in good body condition has better conception rates and less risk of complications with pregnancy and foaling. Nutritional requirements for the pregnant mare increase only in the last trimester (last third of pregnancy). At this time, mares should be placed on a gradually increasing plane of nutrition. To avoid feeding uncomfortable bulky meals late in pregnancy, the frequency of feedings and the quality of the feed can be increased.

Parasite Control

Broodmares should be dewormed every 2 months during pregnancy with a product approved for use in pregnancy. This program should include a deworming 1-2 months before and 2-5 days following foaling. This will reduce the worm burden carried by both mare and foal.

Vaccinations

Vaccinating the mare 1-2 months prior to foaling for influenza and tetanus will ensure a high level of antibodies in the colostrum, or first milk. Equine viral rhinopneumonitis (EVR) is a disease which commonly causes respiratory problems. In pregnant mares, EVR can cause abortions in the last trimester and the death of foals within a few days of birth. Vaccination of mares against EVR is recommended at 3, 5, 7 and 9 months of gestation.

Exercise

Mares should be turned out daily throughout pregnancy. Exercise will maintain muscle tone, stimulate appetite and prevent constipation. As the foaling date approaches, the mare should be observed while turned out to avoid injuries.

More Information

Further information can be obtained from the second (Foaling) and the third (Care of the Newborn Foal and Postpartum Mare) pamphlets; from the many magazines and books on horse care, from your Regional Veterinarian and from knowledgeable horse people in your area.