

## Fall reproduction

Breeding season may have officially ended for some July 15th but reproductive management is a continual process. In humans, once the doctor's test confirms a pregnancy, the trips to his or her office and pre-partum monitoring of the pregnancy continues until birth.

In broodmares, it is just as important to have information about how the pregnancy is proceeding. It seems like every year we hear some version of the following story:

A local breeder had several broodmares that were bred in April and May. The mares were pronounced "safe in foal" in June and turned out for the duration of their pregnancies. In February, the owners began to anxiously anticipate the new arrivals, but by March, the mares showed no signs of udder development.

Still, the mares looked big in foal and so the owners waited. And waited. And waited! Finally, they called a vet out and had the mares checked. All the mares had lost their foals and their big bellies were just the result of constant food consumption.

By this time, breeding season was half over and no one knew what had caused the abortions, or when they had occurred.

If periodic pregnancy checks are carried out, some of these problems could have been addressed in a more timely fashion. Plus, management decisions can be made based on that information.

Checking your broodmares in the early fall around the first of October will not prevent abortions but it will allow you to determine the appropriate nutritional management system for the mare throughout the winter.

Pinpointing the approximate time of an abortion may also help to determine the cause. There are several causes of fetal death that are related to specific time periods of the pregnancy.

For example, abortions occurring around 100 days into the pregnancy commonly indicate an unhealthy fetus. Around 100 days, the fetus must take over the job of maintaining the preg-

nancy. Most of the time, the torch cannot be passed on to an abnormal fetus and the pregnancy is terminated.

Between 100 - 200 days, placentitis (an infection of the placenta) is a major culprit. Rhinopneumonitis (a viral infection) is suspected in abortions occurring between the sixth and ninth months while late gestation abortions may be caused by endophyte poisoning such as fescue poisoning.

Knowing the appropriate time that your mare "slipped" may help your vet identify the problem and help you to develop a program to guard against its recurrence.

An early fall pregnancy exam also allows for a management decision about the economic value of wintering a barren mare who will not provide a marketable product for another 24 months. A quick analysis of the money involved versus the anticipated price the foal might bring will stimulate this decision-making process.

The second time pregnancy exams are beneficial is immediately prior to breeding season. Abortions can happen between early fall and the late winter. By identifying mares that have "slipped," you can get an early start on any treatments that are necessary to get them reproductively sound. Hopefully, this will allow them to get back in foal quickly for an early baby the following year.

This late-winter pregnancy exam is easily accomplished through rectal palpation. Don't let Mother Nature fool you. Lots of open mares "look" pregnant. They have big bellies and are so fat that their udders appear to be growing in size.

This late pregnancy check can also prevent unnecessary nights spent in the barn waiting for a chubby barren mare to foal.

Fore warned is fore armed.

— Dr. Jim and Lynda McCall

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