

## Creep Feeding Foals

The young foal must depend on his dam's milk for the first weeks of his life. Unless milk intake is supplemented with grain, his growth rate is not likely to reach its potential. Breeders, however, seldom emphasize selecting mares on their milking ability. As a result a large number of mares who have excellent conformation and/or performance ability are actually terrible mothers, simply because they have no milking ability. Many owners get around this problem by supplying the nutrients to the foal and simply allowing the mare to supply company. Of course, this further compounds the problem with the next generation because again mares have not been selected for their milking ability.

Even mares that are excellent milkers are not going to supply the total nutrients the foal requires for maximum growth. The figures below, taken from data reported by Dr. E. A. Ott of the University of Florida, indicate the great void between the foal's requirements for maximum growth and those nutrients supplied by the mare's milk. Also, as the mare's milk production decreases after the second or third month, the foal becomes larger, and the difference in requirement and supplies becomes even greater. Some of this difference can be delayed by feeding the mare very heavy rations to allow her to use as much as possible for milk production.

The logical way to meet the foal's needs is to provide a high quality grain ration by creep feeding without interference by the mare. Arrange creep feeders so that the foal can enter but the mare cannot. It is simple to build a small pen in a fence corner or under a shade tree and place the foal's feeder inside the pen. If the feeder is in an area where the mare tends to loaf, then the foal is going to spend much more time in the feeder.

Normally the foal will start nibbling a little grain at 1 to 3 weeks of age and will be eating one-half pound per 100 pounds of body weight at 6 weeks. Rations should be of high quality grain and be fairly concentrated. The National Research Council recommends an 18-percent protein ration of fairly high quality for young foals. Protein quality is the balance of amino acids. High quality proteins are supplied by animal products, particularly milk.

Depending on how many foals are being creep fed, the choice of rations can be made. If only one or two foals are being fed, it's probably simpler to home-mix a ration, such as 50 percent crimped oats, 25 percent cracked corn, and 25 percent soybean meal. A little dry molasses will improve the palatability and by top-dressing with a vitamin-mineral supplement the nutrition is much improved. Another good home-made mix is one which contains 80 percent of a commercial sweet feed fairly high in grain content and 20 percent soybean meal. On the other hand, if the horseman is feeding 10 to 25 or more foals, he/she may want to mix larger quantities of a similar ration. At that point he/she may want to put together a complete ration.

A number of management techniques can enhance the results of creep feeding. The foals will spend more time in the feeder if the mares are loafing nearby. And, if the feed is fresh, the foals tend to eat more. It is wise to replace the feed every 2 to 3 days, and, if the trough is covered, then the feed will remain fresh longer.

What is the rate of gain desired for foals? Additional research information is needed to determine this optimal rate for greatest productivity. Some horse-men feel that a foal gaining too fast may be more

likely to become unsound. However, if the horses are to be worked hard as 2- to 3-year-olds, a reasonable rate of gain during the suckling period is essential. There is some evidence that it is safe to allow foals to develop as fast as possible as long as they do not become overly fat.

Creep feeding does improve their growth, especially if poor milking mares are involved. It allows the foals to develop as quickly as possible so that, if they are to compete at a young age, they will have as much advantage as possible. It does create a few additional management problems to keep the foals on feed and the mares in good shape for the rebreeding process.

## SAMPLE CREEP RATIONS

### A

41% Cracked Corn  
22% Crimped Oats  
31% Soybean Oil Meal  
3% Molasses  
1% Dicalcium Phosphate  
1% Ground Limestone  
1% Trace Mineralized Salt

### B

50% Crimped Oats  
25% Cracked Corn  
25% Soybean Meal  
+ Free-Choice Minerals

### C

80% Commercial "Sweet Feed" (12% Protein)  
20% Soybean Meal

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