

Extension Notes

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

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Weaning Foals

Weaning time can be stressful for both horses and breeders. Regardless, it is a natural and necessary process to separate foals from mares. Plan ahead to help make weaning time as smooth as possible.

When you create a plan make sure to include when you will start weaning and whether or not you'll use total or partial separation. Factors affecting your decision may include personal preferences, available facilities and the number of horses.

Foals generally are ready to wean at four to six months of age. The mare's milk production begins to decline by the time a foal is three months old. By the time the foal reaches six months, the mare is not providing much nutrition, and she needs time to prepare for the next foal.

Research has shown that feeding foals a creep ration before separation reduces stress and may help lower the post-weaning growth slump. To prepare the foal for weaning, start offering a commercial foal ration at least three to four weeks before you plan to wean to give the foal time to get used to the new feed. You can start earlier if you have creep feeding facilities. Be sure to use a foal ration, not just something the foal has to share from his mother. Offer the foal ration at the rate of one pound of feed per month of age. For three-month-old foals, you may want to start at one-half pound per day and gradually increase until feeding one pound per month of age.

Also, move the mare and foal to the area where you plan to wean the foal, so it has time to become used to the new surroundings. With total separation, you completely remove the mare so the foal has no contact with her and cannot see or smell her. You might move the dam to the other side of the farm. If you choose partial separation, the foal can see and perhaps touch the dam, but cannot nurse. You may want to keep the foal across the fence from its dam for about a week and then move the mare further away. Regardless of which separation method you use, it is important to have safe, well-constructed facilities.

After weaning, feed a ration of good-quality hay and the same grain mixture you used prior to weaning. You will need to control feed intake to manage growth rate and reduce problems associated with bone development.

In addition to proper feeding, the young horses need ample free exercise. Research shows that exercise strengthens bones, increases cortical thickness and helps create a more durable athlete.

Weaning is a stressful time, so pay special attention to foals during the first 10 to 14 days to be sure they make this transition as easily as possible.

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Upcoming Events:

- **Farmer's Markets Open** – Saturday, June 15th @ 8:00 AM at the Olive Hill Market (Save-a-Lot Parking Lot) and @ 9:00 AM at the Grayson Market (Shed behind the Extension Office)
- **Ag Development Board Meeting** – Monday, June 24th @ 6:00 PM – Extension Office