

Your seven-page guide to foaling

FOALING FEATURE

Foaling season at Oghill House Stud

Oghill House Stud foal around 100 mares each season, Joseph Burke spoke to John Hyland, who oversees the foaling unit each season, about the lead up to foaling, the process itself and aftercare

OGHILL House Stud is a 300-acre farm nestled between Kildangan Stud and the Irish National Stud. It is run by Pat, Hugh and John Hyland. Oghill Stud foals around 100 mares per season between their own private mares, those belonging to clients and visiting mares. Joseph Burke spoke to John Hyland, who oversees the foaling unit each season, about the lead up to foaling, the process itself and aftercare.

DEALING WITH EMERGENCIES

It is critical to check the foal's presentation at birth, to do this we slip a hand in to check that the head is coming with a front leg either side. It is very important to clarify, without doubt, that it is in fact the front legs that are either side of the head and not one front and one hind leg.

Should the foal not be presenting properly we help the process by manoeuvring the foal into the correct position. When realigning the foal into the correct position, it is important to do so whilst the mare is standing. To manoeuvre the foal whilst the mare is standing makes things much easier on the mare as it places less pressure on her internal organs, it also makes it more straightforward for us to get the foal into the correct position.

If after five minutes we cannot get the foal into the correct position we place the veterinary hospital on call and we have the mare on site within five to seven minutes. We are extremely lucky that we are located so close to the excellent Troytown/Grey Abbey practice in Kildare.

BIRTH

Once the foal is presenting correctly, we step out and allow the mare to go



Peter Moloney

The morning after foaling, the mare and foal are turned out. This is a nice introduction for the foal and a little exercise also helps the mare expel any other retained fluids associated with the foaling process

through the motions of foaling, interfering as little as possible from then onwards. She could lay down and get up again three, four or even five times in some cases as she gets the foal, and herself, into a comfortable position for the birth. Once she begins to push vigorously, we will lend a hand, gently help her to get the foal out, should she need it. It's important only to pull on her contractions i.e. when she is pushing, and one leg at a time to prevent the foal getting stuck at the shoulders.

Once the foal is out, we clear its nostrils and airways immediately. We leave the umbilical cord attached as long as possible as it still pumps plenty of blood into the foal and gives the youngster the best chance. We again take a step back in order to give the mare and foal time to bond with each other.

COLOSTRUM TESTING

When the cord does break, we return to the stable, hold the cord close to the navel in order to stem the bleeding and we apply some iodine solution (2%, any higher will burn the navel).

We find most foals get to their feet between 10 and 20 minutes after foaling and they should ideally be sucking

within an hour. It is critical that they ingest quality colostrum as soon as possible. We test the mare's colostrum with a refractometer and a reading of 22% is perfectly acceptable.

If a mare produces colostrum measuring 27-28%, that is the equivalent of gold dust in our world, so assuming she has a sufficient amount in her udder, we extract the excess colostrum and freeze it for a time when we might require it in the future. We usually extract 100mls and it is important to remember that, once defrosted, you should use it all up (never freeze it again). In the event that a subsequent mare's colostrum is not of sufficient quality, we can then give her foal 25-30mls of the defrosted colostrum at a time. If we go this route, we then let the foal sleep for an hour or so before repeating again, as required.

HELPING THE FOAL

We give every foal an enema about 5-10 minutes after it is born, as a precaution, in order to avoid meconium retention. Out vets supply these and we simply dip the enema in lukewarm water before administering, being careful to ensure there is no air in the bottle.

After an hour passes, we apply some silver spray to the foal's navel area. The navel is the weakest point of defence in the new born foal and therefore the obvious danger area when it comes to contracting infection. We find the silver spray has served us well down through the years in preventing joint-ill et cetera.

MARE AFTER-CARE

Whilst the foal is the focus of attention, it's crucial not to forget the mare. We offer her a warm beet pulp or barley mash as she will have an emptiness/hollowness inside her after foaling and this mash helps her feel strong enough to get back to her feet again. When she does get back up, we tie up the placenta which is hanging from her vulva, so as to avoid her standing on it and tearing it. Tying it up also helps her expel the

full placenta as gravity takes a hold and does its job naturally.

Once the placenta is fully expelled, it is important to remove it and lay it out on a large, clean piece of plastic in order to establish that it is completely intact. Should there be any tiny piece of placenta missing, the mare must be seen by the vet as soon as possible in order to flush the rouge piece out of her system, or she will suffer numerous unwanted complications.

VET CHECK

When the vet arrives the following morning we will get each new born foal checked over just to ensure everything is normal and then the foal will have its first run out in a small paddock. This is a nice introduction for the foal (a large paddock would tire it out) and a little exercise also helps the mare expel any other retained fluids associated with the foaling process.

We constantly monitor the temperature of new born foals as an elevated temperature will alert us to any internal infection.

Barren or maiden mares will have their CEM, EVA, EIA's etc. taken in January but the new mother will have her samples taken the morning after foaling in preparation for her next pregnancy and the process starts all over again.

Our farrier Liam O'Donovan, is an excellent judge of conformation and he will take a first look at the foals from the age of two weeks and continuously monitor them every couple of weeks thereafter.

FOALING KIT

Enemas; Scissors; Scalpel; Large disposable veterinary gloves; Oxygen; Ropes; Iodine solution (2%); Syringe; Lubricant; Clean tail bandages; Refractometer; Silver Spray; Bute (for extreme cases if mare has painful foaling); Sedalin (again, rarely used but useful to have on hand)



Prefoaling

The majority of our mares winter out in small groups.

Around four weeks from their due date, we start to look for signs of the mares springing. Mares predominately foal at night and hence we begin to bring them in at dusk from four weeks out.

About three weeks from her due date we check the mare to establish whether she has been stitched (caslicks) or not. If she has, the mare will go on the list for the vet the following day, so as her stitches can be removed and she can be opened up in preparation for foaling.

Every farm will have their own way of dealing with foaling mares. We rate them between one and five. Mares rated five have started to wax up, are lax behind with their vulva having dropped in preparation for foaling.

Foaling

The majority of mares foal at night, we have an excellent night watch person, Hannah, who quietly checks the mares from 10pm to 6am without disturbing them. Hannah alerts us as soon as any mare begins to sweat up or display any other signs that foaling may be imminent.



Emma Jackson at Dublin



47€

Lasts on average 6 weeks

Sometimes you get what you pay for... Sometimes you get more

36€



Lasts on average 3/4 weeks



Notalot, Supreme Champion Youngstock at the Royal Dublin Show 2015



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