



THE TRUE COSTS OF HAVING YOUR MARE BRED

Chance Marshall

Newborn foals can be exciting, fun, and enjoyable. Perhaps seeing these new additions frolicking in pastures has made you consider breeding your own mare.

You may have a beautiful mare you have competed on, worked cattle with, or a trusty mountain horse and want another one like her. There are plenty of motivations for breeding a mare. Make no mistake, though, there are many factors to consider before diving into the breeding process.

Does Breeding My Mare Make Sense?

Determine if the mare is a good breeding candidate. Some major considerations are: physical conformation, disposition, and age. While no horse is perfect, a breeder should be mindful of their mare's faults and weaknesses.

There's no use in breeding mares with poor conformation and a bad attitude – you'll get more horses with poor confirmation and a bad attitude. Also, breeding mares older than 15 is more of a gamble because they are less likely to become pregnant.

Ask yourself, "Will I be able to provide a clean and protected environment for the foaling process? Where will they live? Will the mare and foal have room for exercise?" Exercise is vital to foal development and decreasing foaling difficulty.

Then, determine if you will have extra money to fund the project and the ability to commit the necessary time for the next several years.

Do the Costs Fit My Budget?

The one-time stud fee represents only a portion of the overall costs but is likely the most apparent. Prices

range anywhere from \$250-\$5,000-plus and are dependent on the breed, age, and performance records of the stallion. Investing in the best sire genetics feasible for your budget is imperative. If planning to cut corners with the stud fee, rethink if having your mare bred is right for you. To quote an old thoroughbred breeder's mantra, "Breed the best you have with the best that you can afford."

Regardless of whether you choose artificial insemination (AI) or "live cover," you will be responsible for a booking fee (ranging from \$100-\$800) to reserve your spot in line for the stallion's services in the upcoming breeding season (usually deducted from the stud fee).

Veterinarian Costs

You, your mare, and your check-book will become very familiar with a



reliable veterinarian. Here are additional costs:

- Prior to insemination, your mare must be current on all vaccinations (\$0-\$50), and it is recommended she have a reproductive tract exam and uterine culture done to confirm health (~\$200).
- A good reproductive veterinarian will need to closely monitor your mare's ovarian cycle via ultrasound (\$70-\$100 per visit) for a number of days prior to AI. This is absolutely necessary to determine when to have the semen collected (\$100-\$150), shipped overnight (\$75-\$200 depending on destination), and plan the most effective time to inseminate (\$50).
- Decide whether you want the vet to come to you (\$200-\$250 per farm/ranch visit) or whether you are willing to pay board at their clinic (roughly \$25 per day for up to two weeks depending on how quickly she ovulates).
- Any hormones used in the process of getting your mare to cycle should be considered (\$100-\$150).

- At least one to two visits to the vet as soon as 30 days following breeding and in later pregnancy is necessary to confirm via ultrasound a successful and ongoing pregnancy (\$70 - \$100 per visit).

A high plane of nutrition is essential for the mare's ability to foal without difficulty and for the developing fetus. As the fetus grows during late gestation, the mare's nutrient demands will increase, and she will consume more hay than normal, thus increasing her feed costs. Also, during pregnancy, hooves tend to grow extra fast, and, due to the added weight of pregnancy, hoof care is important to avoid lameness (\$40 trim every eight weeks).

If all goes according to plan, in 340 days (11 months) the new foal will be born. Following delivery, your veterinarian should perform a wellness exam on the mare and the foal to ensure they are in good shape. Even if both appear healthy, it is important to confirm the mare was able to pass the placenta, the foal is adequately nursing, and to ensure the foal doesn't show any signs of limb abnormalities or infections.

Another relatively common and potentially life-threatening complication following parturition is "broodmare colic." With the uterine contractions and sudden internal absence of the foal, torsion of the mare's colon and intestine is possible. Monitor mares for colic symptoms following foaling. Any of these complications have the potential to significantly increase the costs of your breeding venture.

Besides the foaling process, there are a few additional costs to consider. During gestation at months 5, 7, and 9, it is strongly recommended mares receive a dose of a Pneumobort HSV-1 booster vaccine. This vaccine boosts the mare's immune system and helps prevent rhinoneumonitis, which can lead to abortion. If the foal is a colt, he will probably be gelded, ideally within the first year of his life (\$300). It is also a common practice to vaccinate the foal at 3 months of age (\$100 for miscellaneous vaccines). If you plan to register the foal with a breed association such as the American Quarter Horse Association, those costs should be included as well (\$50-\$150).

The Bottom Line

Having a mare bred requires serious investment of money, time, and mental toughness. If considering breeding your mare, make the responsible decision of whether your mare is a suitable candidate and if you have the disposable income and time to do it right. On the other hand, if you believe your mare is a good breeding candidate and you are prepared for the challenge, then I truly wish you luck, enjoyment, and success!

Chance Marshall has the information horsepower to offer equine advice. He is a University of Wyoming Extension educator based in Campbell County but also serves Crook, Johnson, Sheridan, and Weston counties. He can be contacted at (307) 686-7281 or at clm10@ccgov.net.