

## **Best practise for the use of foster mares in New Zealand.**

Rochelle Kerr B V Sc. B Ag Sci. Dip Ag Sci.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to suggest guidelines for the use of foster mares in the NZ thoroughbred Industry.

### **Definitions**

*Foster mare:* A mare which has given birth to a foal that has since died, is used to provide milk and to care for another foal which does not have its own mother.

*Foster foal:* A foal that does not have a mother to provide milk and maternal care.

### **Background**

The use of foster mares to raise orphaned foals is a common practise utilised by horse breeders in New Zealand. Most horse breeders use the Foster Foal service because of an unfortunate incident resulting in the death or incapacitation of a mare at or shortly after foaling.

The Waikato branch of the New Zealand Thoroughbred Breeders Association set up the Foster Foal service to assist breeders in finding a suitable foster mare. All interested parties receive a text phone message when a mare is required.

The Waikato Branch of the New Zealand Thoroughbred Breeders Association is a non- profit organisation whose role in providing this service is only as a facilitator. Please contact Alex, the facilitator for this service at [alex@platinumperformance.co.nz](mailto:alex@platinumperformance.co.nz) but it must be emphasised that the NZTBA, its Branches and its Members take no responsibility for issues that arise beyond initial introductions of potential interested parties.

The process works best if all parties are aware of the necessary procedures required from the minute the mare loses her foal to the eventual joining up of the foster mare with the orphaned foal. Suitability of the mare for fostering and the management of the foal and mare prior to fostering are outlined on the website along with guidelines for the fostering procedure. It is vitally important that all the appropriate paper work and records are filled out with all necessary details. The mare/foal owner or agent, or the veterinary practice needs to communicate directly with the other owner or agent, and the onus for regularly monitoring the surrogate mare and the orphaned foal remains with the owner of the foal requesting the services of the program.

### **Appropriate uses of foster mares**

It is considered appropriate to use a foster mare in circumstances where:

- A mares has died during or soon after giving birth
- A mare that has suffered an injury or illness and cannot adequately look after their foal
- A mare having undergone an extensive veterinary procedure such as colic surgery that cannot cope with nursing a foal

### **Inappropriate uses of foster mares**

It is considered NOT appropriate to use a foster mare in circumstances where:

- A mare will not conceive while nursing a foal
- The owner of a performance mare wishes the mare to return to or remain in competition
- A mare demonstrates a compulsive disorder such as oral windsucking and the owner does not want to risk the foal developing the habit
- An old mare cannot raise a foal to optimum levels
- The mare is to travel overseas for breeding or for other reasons and the owner wishes to manage the foal at home.

## Guidelines

The following suggested guidelines are applicable to all breeders of horses who may require the use of a foster mother for a very young foal. The aim of these guidelines is to ensure the welfare and treatment for all participants in this process, namely the foster mare and the orphaned foal.

1. It is unacceptable to euthanize a foal so that its mother can be used to foster another foal that is perceived to be more valuable.
2. The health, welfare and respectful management and treatment of the animal must remain a priority.
3. The best possible veterinary care to maintain the quality of animal health and welfare must be provided.
4. Ready access to appropriate food and water for a lactating mare and young rapidly growing foal is mandatory.
5. Freedom of movement to exercise, stand, stretch and lie down must be provided.
6. Accommodation which does not cause harm and provides protection from the elements must be provided.
7. Regular hoof and dental care must be provided.
8. Regular parasite control measures must be maintained.
9. Rapid identification and treatment of illness or any injury the foster mare may suffer should occur and the owner must be immediately informed and kept up to date with treatment progress.
10. Any transportation undertaken by the mare or/and foal must be in accordance with the guidance laid out in the code for the Transport of Animals in New Zealand <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/files/regs/animal-welfare/req/codes/transport-within-nz/transport-code-of-welfare.pdf>.
11. In the event that euthanasia is deemed to be the only course of action, every attempt must be made to first contact the owner. The procedure must be performed humanely by a Veterinarian who may also authorise the humane destruction if the owner can not be contacted.
12. It is recommended that foster mares and foals are insured.
13. The broodmare owner should be communicated with in respect to getting the mare back in foal. This should be done diligently and to the owners wishes.
14. Body condition of the mare or foal should be monitored and conveyed to the owner regularly (photos are good *aide memoirs* between visits).
15. Date for returning the mare should be arranged in advance. The foal should be weaned prior to this if possible and the mare monitored for mastitis before she is sent home.
16. To encourage people to lend their mares for fostering, it is important that they are well looked after and returned home in the same or better condition than they were first taken; feet trimmed, dewormed, groomed and well presented,, in foal if requested, and in good body condition.

The success of this service depends on cooperation between the veterinary practice, the owner of the orphaned foal and the owner of the foster broodmare.

