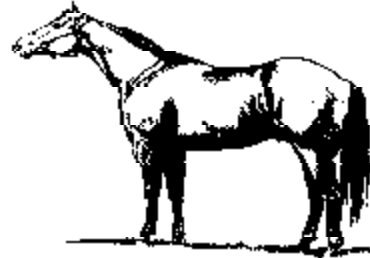


Animal Science Horse Information Series

**Phone: 865-974-7294
Fax: 865-974-7297
<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/ansci>**



SELECTING THE RIGHT BROODMARES

**Dr. Frederick Harper
Extension Horse Specialist
Animal Science Department
University of Tennessee**

Decisions, decisions, decisions! What will we wear today? Where and what will we eat for lunch? We are constantly having to make choices from a large number of options.

With the current good horse market, some individuals are contemplating going into the horse breeding business or expanding the number of broodmares they currently own.

Selection of broodmares is a critical step if one is to become a successful horse breeder. While many mares will have a nice foal, the number of mares that produce a top-quality profitable foal is more limited.

Breeders need to have a thorough understanding of what they want to accomplish in the horse industry. If goals are too numerous and varied, it will be virtually impossible to establish a successful horse breeding business.

The more goals one has, the less emphasis and selection pressure that can be placed on each. Specific and well-defined goals aid one in selecting mare(s) that fit one's objectives.

Selection of broodmares needs to be based on genetic principles that are specific, well-defined and achievable. One does not use draft mares to produce race or cutting champions.

The most significant aids to selection of broodmares are items that can be observed, measured and evaluated.

A broodmare's performance record is most important. Has the mare successfully performed in events or activities that match your goals?

If you want to raise foals to compete in a specific type performance, the mare should have been shown successfully in those events. Performance ability is rather highly heritable. So, it is genetically transmitted from one generation to the next. Management factors, such as training or good nutrition, are not passed on to the next generation.

Conformation is also important since horses are athletic animals. Horses must stay sound if they are to perform successfully. Mares must have good skeletal conformation, especially feet and legs. Too often, individuals over-emphasize less important conformation traits, such as a pretty head or color, rather than soundness.

Poor conformation can result in unsoundnesses and impede performing certain actions. The more strenuous and difficult an action is, the more important conformation becomes.

If a mare has foals old enough, they should have performed well in selected events. By the time a mare has two or three foals old enough to perform, she may be 10 to 12 years old. Once mares get to be 16 years old or older, they are less likely to have foals every year.

Older mares, even if they have had several successful performing foals, may not be a good investment. This is a reason to use a younger mare's performance record rather than waiting for her to have foals old enough to perform.

If a mare does not have foals old enough to perform, use her performance record for selection.

For mares to produce top-selling foals, they must have marketable pedigrees. Owners often place all their emphasis on pedigree selection. The mare may have a wonderful pedigree, but has never performed well in any event or produced a foal that has. She may also have serious conformational defects that she passes on to her foals. Such a mare is not a likely candidate to become a good broodmare. So pedigrees are of less genetic value than a mare's own performance record or that of her foals.

Selection of mares that will produce foals that meet your goals and have a positive impact on the horse industry requires careful thought and time.

###

Peer reviewed by Dr. Bill Backus and Dr. Arnold Saxton.